

MORTUARY PRACTICES IN SAN FRANCISCO CHINATOWN¹

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The clear, melodic notes of a brass band marching along Chinatown's Stockton Avenue catch the attention of an Asian woman picking over produce at a sidewalk vegetable stand. As the band turns the corner at Clay Street to continue its march north up Grant Avenue, she and the storekeeper pause to look at a large, floral-framed portrait propped up in the back of the vintage black Cadillac convertible that follows the band. Not recognizing the photograph, they cursorily note the length of the procession, then return to their business. Tourists on the street corners quickly pull out their pocket and video cameras to capture moments of a real "Chinese" ritual being performed.

This scene is a typical one in San Francisco Chinatown—the only Chinatown in North America that continues to have extensive funeral processions through its streets with a marching brass band and picture car on a regular and frequent basis.¹ This custom of honoring the dead with pageantry is a residual of a long, progressive commingling of Chinese and European traditions particular to San Francisco Chinatown. Such hybrid funeral rituals illustrate the identity of Chinatown as an American Chinese community forged by the constraints of the American polity, the endurance of Chinese culture, and the demographics

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and political-social mechanisms of Chinatown. As a symbol of what is Chinese in the American context, Chinatown is a cultural performance arena for funerals in which individuals express degrees of "Chineseness," American style.

From a sequestered, nineteenth-century bachelor town organized along the lines of the traditional village social structure prevalent in rural South China, Chinatown burgeoned into a modern, Americanized Chinese community. In 1850 the rapid growth caused by the Gold Rush and the progressive development of the West demanded laborers in large numbers. Thousands of Chinese males from Guangdong Province answered this need and entered the United States through San Francisco, the main port of entry from the Pacific. Escaping the poverty and chaos of wartorn China, these early sojourners came to California, or "Gum San" (Gold Mountain), to find work, build a fortune, and then return to China. The early settlement was called the "Chinese Quarter" by outsiders and "Tong Yan Gai," or "the street of the people of Tang," by insiders. District and family associations formed to assist newcomers with employment, housing, protection, and communication links to China.

In the early twentieth century, the quarter's architectural and cultural profile was dramatically altered by the 1906 earthquake and its subsequent reconstruction into a modern, pseudo-oriental tourist attraction.ⁱⁱ The demise of imperial China and the emergence of the Chinese republic in 1911 stirred both a nostalgia for a bygone era and an optimism for a new

modern China. These events and sentiments captured the pride and imagination of overseas Chinese and influenced the style and tone of Chinatown's development. By then the community became known as "Chinatown." Its demographic profile now included assimilating second- and third-generation Chinese who increasingly voiced their rights and claims as American citizens.

The status of Chinese as Americans continued to gain rightful recognition when China became an ally of the United States in World War II, and when the discriminatory Chinese exclusion laws were repealed in 1943.

By 1965 new immigration laws liberalized the entry of Asian immigrants, and Chinese from many different countries and economic and social backgrounds entered the United States. Chinatowns became havens for some of these various Chinese immigrants, who were no longer predominantly males from rural Guangdong Province. In San Francisco's Chinatown, this demographic change became evident in the diversity of funeral rituals performed. Such individual public displays express the different self-perceptions, beliefs, and identities of Chinatown folk.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FUNERALS AND THE MORTUARY PRACTICES IN EARLY SAN FRANCISCO CHINATOWN

Chinese cultural tradition regards funerals as major life passage rituals that surpass weddings in priority, expense, and significance. Ancestor worship, formalized in Confucianism, is the

cornerstone of Chinese cultural belief, social structure, and religious practice. With death, a family member can be a beneficent ancestor, and funerals are the ritual means of accomplishing this transition. A ritually well-disposed corpse will have a safe, contented spirit that will reward its family with good fortune for many generations to come. Such concern with spirit welfare and familial duty is expressed and judged by the funeral procured, particularly if the funeral is for one's parents: a respectable presentation to show filial duty, respect, and honor is necessary to "save face."ⁱⁱⁱ

Many of the early Chinese sojourners never intended to remain in America and be permanently buried there. Once the immigrant landed in America, he

immediately arranged for his body to be shipped to China for burial in case he should meet with an accident in America; he believed that if his body was buried in a strange land, untended by his family, his soul would never stop wandering in the darkness of the other world.^{iv}

This arrangement was usually made with the person's district association, or *huiguan*. With the rapidly enlarging Chinese population in the 1850s, the increased duty of disinterring bones and shipping them back to China for reburial became delegated to separate organizations known as *shantang*, or "benevolent halls."^v In addition to the *shantang*, "very many remains were sent home by personal friends in America, the expenses being paid by relatives in Guangdong."^{vi}

Some labor contracts covered such arrangements:

In all contracts the Chinese signed with relation to their passage money or their labors were clauses touching the matter of eventualities in case of death. The great passion of every Chinaman, from the wealthiest merchant to the humblest coolie, was to have his bones returned to the tomb of his ancestors.^{vii}

Not just bones, but embalmed corpses as well. Cargo inventory in 1858 for the French ship Asia records carrying 321 embalmed Chinese bodies to China and that of the Flying Cloud included 200 corpses.^{viii} At the close of the 1850s, approximately ten thousand bodies had been shipped back to China.^{ix} These numbers dwindled in the twentieth century and the practice all but discontinued with the Communist takeover in 1949.

Since the 1970s, mortuary directors in the Bay Area have noticed an increase in instances of remains received from China and other areas for permanent repose in the United States. As more Chinese immigrants make their home in America, the remains of loved ones overseas are reunited with the present generation, reversing the previous custom. Such immigrants include many from Hong Kong who feel that the Communist repossession of their island will bring uncertainties regarding cemetery land use.^x

BURIALS AND BONES

District associations have owned their own cemeteries ever since the Chinese were not allowed burial in the other cemeteries

of nineteenth-century San Francisco. The first Chinese cemetery (1851) was at Lone Mountain at the edge of the city. It was moved to a site in the present area of Lincoln Park in 1872^{xi} and then to Colma in the 1890s. Eventually all burials within the city limits of San Francisco were prohibited in 1912.^{xii} The new repository site for the city's dead became Colma, a suburb south of San Francisco.

The Chinese cemeteries there include Look San (land purchased in 1889), the largest cemetery established by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), or Six Companies; Tung Sen (1936), also part of the CCBA; Ning Yung (1898); Hoy Sun (1987), recently added to Ning Yung; and Golden Hill (1994), a private corporation that caters to the Chinese.^{xiii} Committees within the district associations continue to look after cemetery business. Non-Chinese cemeteries in Colma such as Woodlawn and Cypress Lawn also serve a large number of Chinese, and Skylawn Memorial Park in San Mateo has developed *feng shui*-designed sections named Bai Ling, or "one hundred years of longevity," that appeal to many Chinese. These last three cemeteries hold special Buddhist ceremonies during *Qingming*, the spring grave-cleaning memorial festival, to market to Chinese clients.

In the past, association plots were almost free, since burial was not permanent. The body was interred for as brief a period as five months^{xiv} to a maximum of ten years^{xv} until decomposition left only the bones. Because of religious beliefs and the strong ties to China, it was important that bones be exhumed and sent to the deceased's native place as soon as possible. In the mid 1800s,

representatives of each *shantang* under each association would travel to burial sites

checking up deaths, making calculations for decomposition, gathering up the relics of their late members. . . . The procedure in such instances was very meticulous. The first thing to be removed from the coffin was the longest bone. This was measured and a box was made of proper length, two feet wide. Each bone was then dipped in a bucket of brandy and water and polished with a stiff brush until it shone. The polishers were careful never to touch the bones but handled them with great dexterity with two sticks. Great care was taken to see that no bones were missing.^{xvi}

In an interview, longtime Chinatown resident Bobby Gee (1920-1997) recollected his experience as a teenager in the 1930s exhuming bones for shipment back to China. Each exhumation took him about five hours. Bones were collected by sifting them on a screen to remove the dirt and assure that the smallest bones were salvaged. It was imperative to get every piece of bone so that there was a complete body. A bone chart was used to check off the list. The bones for the left hand were placed in one small bag, the right hand in another; the bones for the left foot were placed in a third bag and those for the right foot placed in a fourth. These four bags together with the other bones were placed in a galvanized tin box on which the association wrote the person's name and native village. Gee was paid \$2.50 for each exhumation.^{xvii}

CHINATOWN MORTUARIES

In village China the care and disposition of the corpse was handled by the family. The body lay in state at home in the courtyard or in the street in front of the house, sometimes under a canopy constructed for the purpose. Mourners came to pay their respects, and the proper rituals were performed to help the soul make its transition to the next world.^{xviii} In nineteenth-century Chinatown the large numbers of sojourners living apart from their immediate families depended on relatives, friends, or benevolent societies to perform these rituals and handle the final disposition of the corpse. The need for undertakers developed.

By the late nineteenth century, Chinatown undertakers had been established to prepare the corpse to lie in state in their small, single-parlor mortuaries. According to historian Him Mark Lai, sources such as the directories of Chinese businesses, association histories and interviews with former mortuary owners indicate that there have been seven Chinese mortuaries in business at one time or another during the late 1870s to early twentieth century. The earliest listing is for Main Fook undertakers at 732 Pacific Avenue found in the Wells Fargo and Co.'s Express: 1878 Directory of Chinese Business Houses.^{xix} The 1882 Wells Fargo Express lists Main Fook Undertaker along with the Quon Fook Undertaker on 722 Pacific Avenue, the Wing Chong Undertaker on 819 Clay Street, and the Wing Sung (or Wing Sun) Undertaker on 825 Clay Street.^{xx} One of the former owners of Wing Sun Mortuary recalls four Chinatown mortuaries operating in the early twentieth century: Kwong Tai on

Sacramento Street, run by the Lee family; Kwong Fook Sang (or Quon Fook) on Pacific between Grant and Stockton Streets, owned by the Ng family; Min Fook (or Main Fook)^{xxi} in an alley off Jackson, owned by people from Chungsan or Sam Yup; Wing Chong at 819 Clay Street; and Man Fook On on Clay Street above Waverly Place.^{xxii} By 1913 Quon Fook Sang and Wing Sun (relocated to 31 Brenham Place), were the only ones listed in the Wong Kin International Chinese Business Directory of the World for the Year 1913.^{xxiii} They remained in business into the 1960s.

Quon Fook Sang is listed as being in business by 1882. It was started by a Sam Yup man named Ng who came to America to work on the railroads and became the first Chinese to receive a mortician's license. When the 1906 earthquake destroyed Chinatown and the mortuary, Ng went to Oakland until the situation in San Francisco stabilized and a new Chinatown was rebuilt. He returned to reopen the mortuary on 754 Pacific Avenue in 1908, conducting the entire operation himself. When he was killed in a tong war, his brother assumed the license and took over the business. Later, when state regulations complicated the funeral industry, the brother's son George Ng and his wife Victoria operated and managed the mortuary.

When George passed away in 1956, Victoria continued to manage the business until 1968. By then increased traffic and crowds had created logistical difficulties on Pacific Avenue, a narrow and busy street. Unable to expand the small frontage to accommodate funeral corteges, Quon Fook Sang at 758 Pacific closed in 1968. The following year, Victoria Ng formed a partnership with Martin

and Brown Mortuary on Van Ness Avenue until her retirement in 1993.^{xxiv}

Wing Sun on 21 Brenham Place (now Walter U. Lum Place) at Portsmouth Square was started by Wong Tin Gut, his brother Wong Tin Pang, and a cousin. A Wells Fargo Express: 1882 Directory of Chinese Business Houses^{xxv} lists it on 825 Clay Street, though the business could have started as early as 1878. The Brenham Place enterprise probably began operation in 1890, as claimed in their advertisement, and continued until 1968. In the twentieth century it was owned and operated by Wong Tin Gut's son, Wong Bock Dun (Frank Dun). From 1927 to 1967, Wing Sun received most of the contracts to exhume bones for shipment to China, contracts being renewed after each shipment of bones, which occurred every ten years. The mortuary was sold in 1968 to Nicholas Daphne, who later consolidated it with his other Chinatown mortuary, Cathay Wah Sang on Powell Street, from 1975 to 1981. The Brenham Place location was closed and sold to Chinese for Affirmative Action as their office.^{xxvi}

Cathay was started by Nicholas Daphne in 1946. The building was originally a Baptist church, but when the demographics of its predominantly black congregation shifted, the church sold the property to Daphne. In 1986 the city's parks and recreation commission, and the city planning commission selected the Cathay property as the site for a proposed playground. After a lengthy debate and contest by the Daphne family, the property was sold to the city under the right of eminent domain in 1993.^{xxvii}

For almost forty-seven years, the centrally located Cathay Wah Sang was considered the principal mortuary serving Chinatown. Officers of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and other family associations expressed concern over Cathay's closing and testified before the city commission on behalf of Cathay, saying that the community needed a centrally located mortuary to offer a choice to Chinatown residents.^{xxviii}

With Cathay gone, the only other mortuary in the Chinatown vicinity was the Green Street Mortuary in the Italian sector of North Beach. The business was established at the Green Street site around 1909 by Valente and Marais to serve the Italian community. In 1911 a third partner, Marini, joined the company. Marais dropped out in 1914, and from 1915 the new three-way partnership of Valente, Marini, and Perata remained in business at Green Street until 1969.^{xxix} The property and business were sold in 1969 to attorney and real estate investor Bak Hoy Wong. Wong then leased it to Marquis Jones, who initially listed the business as Estrellita Mortuary DBA Green Street Mortuary. Jones eventually bought the site around 1977 or 1978.^{xxx} After he died without heirs in 1987, Service Corporation International (SCI), the largest mortuary care corporation in the world, purchased the business and property in 1988. SCI's policy allows each of its numerous properties to operate in the manner that best serves the local community. Under this policy the first manager to be hired was Clifford Yee, a fourth-generation bilingual Chinese who lives in Chinatown and is knowledgeable about the community and its customs.

Today Green Street Mortuary services the largest number of Chinese in the United States. In San Francisco, it is the only full-service mortuary serving the Chinatown-North Beach area. It caters particularly to the ethnic Chinese, who make up 95 percent of its clientele. Each of the chapels is outfitted with a burning facility and vent system for the burning of paper items to accompany the dead to the spirit world. The mortuary supplies items such as casket blankets, colored yarn bows, spirit money, and food offerings for the typical Chinese customs practiced in San Francisco Chinatown. Most of the staff are bilingual, each speaking at least one Chinese language. Green Street Mortuary is also the single producer of all the funeral processions that presently march through Chinatown. Of the roughly seven hundred Chinese funerals conducted each year, approximately 30 percent include the band with picture car and procession through Chinatown. Green Street contracts its own marching band to meet this high demand.^{xxxii}

Other mortuaries known to serve the Chinese population in San Francisco today include Halsted's, owned by Halsted N. Gray-Carew and English on Sutter Street; and Ashley and McMullens owned by the Daphne family in the Richmond district. Both also hire bilingual Chinese counselors and cater to Chinese traditional customs. Their Chinese funerals occasionally include a marching brass band, but this occurrence is not as frequent as in Chinatown, nor is the procession route (outside of Chinatown) as extensive.^{xxxiii}

PAST CHINATOWN FUNERAL PROCESSIONS

Public displays of funeral processions create opportunities to show honor, respect, status, and prestige. For the Chinese, funerals are more significant than birthdays or weddings, and the funeral procession is the most celebrated aspect of the funeral. According to the prominent historian and intellectual Ku Chieh-Kang,

A marriage celebration may be embellished to impress people, but its lavishness can never compare with a funeral. . . . The most elaborate part of a funeral is the procession because it passes through city streets and avenues where spectators gather.^{xxxiii}

Eve Armentrout-Ma writes that "the rites and practices associated with death and burial are of special importance in China." She notes: "Perhaps the most important of these public rites is the funeral procession. . . . If finances permit, the funeral procession will be quite elaborate."^{xxxiv} At the 1964 funeral of Dai Wah Low in San Francisco, Joseph Quan, a Four Family (Lung Kong Tin Yee Association) leader, is quoted in the San Francisco Chronicle as saying,

Everyone is here [at the funeral] because we Chinese consider that a departure is more important than a birth or birthday. . . . It is an occasion when we tell the young about the accomplishments of the elders.^{xxxv}

It is this emphasis on the achievements of a lifetime, of living a full life and then becoming an ancestor, that renders funerals more

significant than weddings or birthdays, echoed Steven J. Lee, National Grand President of the Lee Family Association of the U.S.A.^{xxxvi}

In village China, processions were necessary simply to convey the corpse from the home to the burial grounds. The minimum procession would include the coffin followed by mourners who traveled on foot. If affordable, the way was paved with spirit money, firecrackers, chanting Daoist and/or Buddhist priests, and Chinese music bands to appease evil spirits and comfort the soul of the deceased.^{xxxvii} In the cities of imperial China, these processions became opportunities for opulent displays of status, honor, and prestige. High-ranking or prosperous personages had lengthy processions that included lanterns, banners, and military brass bands, as well as traditional Chinese music bands, floats, umbrellas, name and rank placards, sedan chairs carrying both the soul tablet and female mourners, paper effigies of spirit deities, and so on.^{xxxviii}

Like the funerals in village China, those of the early Chinese poor in San Francisco were simple affairs,

confined to the beating of gongs, the firing of a few strings of crackers, and the scattering of fluttering bits of red paper as the hearse and carriages dragged their way over the sand dunes to the dead man's temporary resting place. But, presently, there came a time when one of the wealthy merchants of the quarter died and the residents of the town were treated to a Chinese funeral

in the grand manner.^{xxxix}

Though not as extensive as those witnessed by Ku in the cities of late imperial China, the grand and elaborate "big shot" funerals of San Francisco Chinatown were pageants that caught the attention of writers such as Charles Keeler in 1902:

A Chinese funeral is an event that forces itself upon the attention of every wayfarer. The beating of tom-toms, scattering of imitation paper money to the devil, the express-wagon full of baked hogs and other food, are all matters of note. And then there are the antiquated hacks drawn by raw-boned horses that eminently suit them, the professional mourners, the sallow-visaged friends of the deceased. The train proceeds to the cemetery keeping up its infernal din the while. When the body is interred, a portion of the baked meats and confections are placed over it together with some lighted punks. The remaining viands are then taken back to Chinatown where the whole party unite in a feast in honor of the dead. At a later period the body is exhumed, the bones are scraped, and all that remains of the departed is shipped to his beloved resting place--the Flowery Kingdom.^{x1}

The deceased was almost always a businessman and a community, association, or tong leader. One of the best recorded and memorable funerals of the nineteenth century was for the notorious gangster Fong Ching, better known as Little Pete:

In true gangster tradition, Little Pete's cohorts

attempted to give him a magnificent funeral. After two hours of intricate last rites, performed by four priests from his favorite joss house, his casket was placed in a resplendent hearse drawn by six black-draped white horses. Hired mourners preceded the hearse, burning joss sticks and wildly beating the air with uplifted arms. From a carriage, four Chinese busily tossed out bits of paper punched with square holes--to confuse the devils seeking to make off with the spirit of the departed. The fantastic cortege, led by a popular orchestra playing the funeral march from Saul, proceeded through streets lined with spectators to the Chinese Cemetery down the Peninsula. Here a mob of onlookers--not hoodlums, but respectable San Franciscans indignant over losing bets on race horses doped by Pete's henchmen--greeted priests and mourners with hoots and clods of earth. The Chinese were compelled to haul the coffin back to the city where, at the old Chinese cemetery, Little Pete's remains were interred pending arrangements for shipment to China. The wagonloads of roast pig, duck, cakes, tea, and gin left beside the grave were guzzled by the crowd of white onlookers.^{xli}

Henceforth, all other grand funerals before and within memory were compared to Little Pete's.^{xlii}

The nineteenth century funerals held in San Francisco Chinatown typically included--to varying degrees of elaboration or

inclusion--funeral elements characteristic of Qing dynasty China: walking mourners, professional wailers, family members dressed in sackcloth mourning garb with bare feet, Daoist and Buddhist priests, a picture of the deceased or a name tablet, the scattering of red paper spirit money, paper goods for burning, firecrackers, banners, Chinese funeral bands, Western bands, whole cooked animals, meat and other food offerings, liquor and tea, incense and candles, and *li shi* (lucky money wrapped in red paper). Canopied platforms were often constructed to lay the body in state and display the rich funeral offerings.^{xliii}

In the first half of the twentieth century, influential and respectable Chinatown notables continued to have spectacular funeral processions. Journalists and historians along with the mainstream press recorded the funerals of prominent citizens as public events: Mrs. Yick Jung Shee Ghee in a 1937 Chronicle article, where in a half-page photo, the picture truck, carrying her portrait, looked like a float covered with greenery;^{xliiv} Mr. Chin Lain in 1938, for whom

the walking procession, at two abreast, stretched for more than four blocks. . . . followed by 222 automobiles, interspersed with several bands and a Chinese orchestra followed by a troupe of actors in symbolic roles;^{xliv}

Mr. Bing Shun Fong in 1947, about whom the Chronicle said, Chinatown in years past has seen many colorful funeral processions but old-timers said yesterday's memorial for the 52-year-old 'unofficial' mayor of Chinatown was one

of the most impressive;^{xlvi}

Mr. Goon Dick Wong, whose 1941 front-page funeral account sported the banner title "Blast of Firecrackers, Blare of Brass Horns-- Chinatown's Largest Funeral: Wong Goon Dick Goes to Sit with His Ancestors at the Councils of Confucius";^{xlvii} and Mr. Dai Wah Low, whose funeral ceremony in 1964 proved that

East and West do meet in San Francisco. The two services for Dai Wah Low were Chinese and American, Buddhist and Christian, with some of the traditions of the centuries as well as the glint of gleaming Cadillacs almost fresh off the assembly line. . . . A 43-car cortege was led by a 12-man Musicians Union band and then by a Cadillac convertible bearing his large, flower-wreathed portrait. ("So those who do not know his name will know who he was," a friend said).^{xlviii}

In all these funeral accounts, the funeral procession is always mentioned. Being public, such processions are observable and salient, offering up something special for the eye to behold. Always notable are the colorful and exotic traditional Chinese elements and their striking contrast with Western customs of mourning. These funeral accounts reveal the admixture of East and West in Chinatown funeral rituals and show the gradual inclusion and adaptation of Western elements into the San Francisco Chinatown funeral. In 1937 Pardee Lowe's observation of Chinatown life noted:

Funerals in Chinatown are distinctly eclectic by nature.

It is by no means unusual to witness *corteges* with Chinese orchestras and American brass bands, Christian ministers and Taoist devotees scattering ghost money to purchase the right of way for the dead, several hundred motor cars, and the immediate family of the deceased clad in white sackcloth and straw sandals followed by the leaders of the Chinese community flawlessly groomed in frock coat, striped trousers and silk top hat.^{xlix}

Less seen now than in the nineteenth century are the off-white sackcloth mourning garb, walking barefoot, and platforms to display offerings. Western brass bands are more common and Chinese music less so. Vehicles, Christian elements, and black Western mourning clothes have become typical.¹ Mourners continue to walk; the picture of the deceased has its own vehicle. Offerings, candles, and incense are displayed less publicly, the coarse spirit money is now off-white instead of red, and firecrackers appear less regularly.

By World War II, funeral processions became less frequent and ostentatious. Chinatown historians and observers speculate that wartime frugality and changing tastes minimized the importance of public displays. The resurgence in traditional customs and the increased frequency of funeral processions did not occur until the influx of new Chinese immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s revitalized San Francisco Chinatown.

THE CHINATOWN FUNERAL TODAY

With the 1965 Immigration Act came an incursion of Chinese immigrants into the United States from Southeast Asia, Hong Kong and Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China. No longer mainly male Cantonese peasants, these new Chinese immigrants also include urbanites, hail from dissimilar regions, and have different levels of education.¹¹ With them they bring a wider variety of funeral rituals to Chinatown. That such a broad range of practices exists reflects the tolerance of Chinatown, and the inclusive nature of Chinese religious and cultural practice, in accommodating the diverse ethnic Chinese who have settled in Chinatown. Many practices brought to the United States have been modified to conform to the tastes and legalities of American society. The resulting variations--still distinctly different from the practices of second- or third-generation Chinese Americans--have made recognizable a typical modern Chinese funeral different from those of the past.

Within the broad range of rituals practiced in San Francisco's Chinatown there is such a thing as a typical or usual Chinese funeral with slight modifications for Christian or Buddhist services. The sequence consists of (1) the visit, (2) the funeral service proper, (3) the procession, (4) the burial, and (5) the traditional supper or longevity meal. The visit and traditional meal tend to be more informal and intimate in tone and structure than the funeral proper, which has a presentational, formal style.

The procession through the crowded public areas of Chinatown is highly presentational with a sense of pomp. The burial in outlying

cemeteries, by contrast, is sequestered from the curious eyes of a general spectatorship and takes on an intimacy and solemnity occasioned by the limited attendance of family and close friends.

The visit is comparable to a one-hour wake. It typically occurs the day before the funeral and is the occasion when the family accepts visitors informally. Guests approach the casket to pay their respects by bowing three times to the deceased (some Christians and non-Chinese will stand at the casket and observe a moment of silence) and then turn to the family seated on the side to either bow once to them or shake their hands to offer condolences. The guests then sit in the chapel for the remainder of the time to keep company with the family and the deceased. There is generally no speaker or program addressing an audience.

The chapel or parlor holds a portrait wreath plus all the bouquets and wreaths already sent to the mortuary. The portrait wreath is usually rectangular, with flowers framing a large photograph of the deceased, and is set on a stand. For viewing, the body often lies in state with an incense burner and a narrow table placed before it. On this table is a pig's head, a whole boiled chicken, a plate of vegetarian stew or *zhai*, three cups each of tea and whiskey, three pairs of chopsticks, and a bowl of rice. Sometimes paper money is burned by the staff or by family members.

Halfway through the visit the blanket ceremony, considered the last act of caring for the deceased, is performed by members of the family. The first blanket is white for death and the second is red for life. These are laid by the eldest son and his wife. The

subsequent blankets can be any color or print.¹¹¹

Before leaving guests again go forward to pay their respects.

They are given *li shi* and candy by family assistants who station themselves at the chapel door. Often two envelopes are handed out together--a white one with candy and coin, plus a red one with just a coin. The red color of the envelope serves to ward off death's bad luck and make a restatement of life, and the candy is to remove the bitter taste of death signified by the white envelope. The coins are "good luck" money to be spent right away, preferably on something sweet.

Open caskets are the usual custom at both the wake and the funeral services. In the coffin is usually placed printed "devil money" or "Hell notes" for the deceased to spend. A silver coin, such as a pre-1964 dime, is sometimes placed on the lips of the deceased as the toll to pay the guardian of the underworld. Personal effects such as clothes, jewelry, money, and cherished items are often placed in the coffin by the family during the visit. Paper models of goods and effigies (houses, cars, servants, gold and silver mountains, treasure chests containing paper clothes) to be burned at the grave during the burial are set up for display.

Bereaved families typically wear black suits, dresses, or pant suits with black armbands. In addition, sons wear a black waist band, and female relatives wear a square black net veil on their heads along with colored yarn bows in their hair. The color indicates a woman's or girl's relationship to the deceased: white

bows are worn by wives, daughters, and daughters-in-law during the funeral. The white bows are tossed into the grave at the burial and immediately replaced with a blue one that is worn for three days, discarded, and replaced with a red one that is worn for at least a month. Granddaughters wear green bows at the funeral that are later tossed into the grave and replaced by red ones that are discarded after the longevity dinner. The symbolic color scheme designates white for death, blue for mourning, red for life and good luck, and green for fertility and perpetuity. Variations are numerous, with individuals having their own particular interpretations and customs.^{liii} The mortuary provides the bows, arm and waist bands, and veils.

The formal funeral service is usually scheduled for the next day in the same chapel, set up as it was at the end of the visit. Guests arrive, sign the register, and seat themselves. Church organ music is piped in. The last to be seated are the six to eight pallbearers who wear white gloves, boutonnieres, and black bow ties. The body remains on view in the open casket at the front of the chapel, which is like an alcove to stage and frame the casket. The family sits perpendicular to the coffin out of view of the congregation.

The minister or speaker opens the service by welcoming the guests and eulogizing the deceased. A brief, often nonsectarian sermon is delivered to comfort the mourners, after which everyone is invited to pay last respects. The funeral director instructs those assigned to hand out the *li shi* to pay their respects first,

then the pallbearers. The director then signals the last row of the congregation to pay their last respects, working forward until all have done so. Finally the two designated picture wreath bearers pay their respects and carry the wreath into position for the march out of the chapel. On leaving the chapel, the guests, staff, helpers and family are handed *li shi* and candy.

In the meantime the pallbearers are stationed at the entry to receive the casket, which is rolled out on a wheeled bier. They carry the casket to the hearse, following the portrait wreath which is placed nearby. The family, led by the eldest son carrying a giant incense stick, follows the casket. The purpose of the incense is to generate fragrance for mourners to follow to the cemetery. The hierarchy in traditional Chinese families is established by the males: father, then sons in order of age with their wives, then the wife, and then daughters in order of age with their spouses. The family watches the coffin being placed onto the hearse before they enter their limousines. Sometimes, the family will kneel down before the hearse to show respect. The other mourners then go to their cars.

Occasionally the funeral service is held elsewhere than at the mortuary. Members of Buddha's Universal Church in Chinatown traditionally hold their funerals at the church. For esteemed and high-ranking members of associations, the funeral is held at Victory Hall, a large auditorium belonging to the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. Such a funeral is most likely if the member had served prominently for the Kuomintang government

of Taiwan and held national and international office in the associations. The flag of the Republic of China is often placed atop the casket. Funeral services for such persons are long, logistically complex, and elaborate affairs. Representatives from the numerous related associations come to pay their respects formally by presenting flowers and bowing three times in unison before the corpse. Many eulogies are spoken, numerous couplet banners are hung on the walls to eulogize the deeds of the deceased and wish his or her spirit well; floral wreaths abound, and the attending crowd is enormous. Police are usually on hand to control traffic for the long cortege that often includes multiple bands. There is no doubt that a dignitary is being honored.

THE PROCESSION

If a band has been hired to lead the procession through Chinatown, they will have been waiting outdoors at one side of the entrance for the casket to exit. Guests exiting the building wait on the other side of the entrance. The appearance of the picture wreath at the top of the mortuary stairs signals the beginning of a drum roll and gong that continues while the picture is brought down and until the casket appears. When the casket begins its descent down the stairs, the drum roll is joined by the solemn beatings of the bass drum, and the band begins to play its signature opening tune, "Amazing Grace." The pallbearers carry the casket down to the street, place it in the hearse, and remain in position at the back of the hearse until the tune is finished.

At the conclusion of "Amazing Grace," which is signified by a gong, the family is led to their limousines and the guests to their cars. The band positions itself in the street in front of the mortuary, parallel to the family limousine. There they play either a Chinese folk song or a Christian hymn while the mourners and staff organize themselves for the procession. The band then moves to the end of the block to lead off the procession. The picture wreath is placed in the back seat of the picture car--a vintage 1960s Cadillac convertible--which is then positioned in the center of the street behind the band. The hearse follows, then the family limousines, and then the guest cars.

At eight out of ten Chinese funerals produced at the Green Street Mortuary, the hearse makes a stop at the deceased's home, business, or association for the deceased's spirit to make a final visit. This is done regardless of whether a band has been contracted or the stop is outside of Chinatown. In a typical stop at a home in Chinatown, the hearse stops and the funeral director opens its back door. He goes to the front of the house to take down a hanging black wreath (Western style, provided by the mortuary) and places it at the casket in the hearse. The picture wreath is brought out of the picture car and set up adjacent to the back of the hearse facing the house. The funeral director and limo drivers then stand at respectful attention in a line next to the picture. In unison they bow three times in the direction of the home and toss spirit money into the air. If the band is present, they play a tune at this stop, and at its conclusion the staff

performs the bowing ritual. Sometimes the family will get out of their limousines and kneel down in the street before the casket while the staff does the bowing ritual. Ritual performed, the hearse is then closed, the picture replaced in the car, and the procession regroups to proceed through Chinatown with the band playing. In some cases, family and friends of the deceased are waiting at the home to greet the spirit with offerings of incense, candles, food, and paper money for burning.

Intermittently throughout the procession within the boundaries of Chinatown, the hearse driver throws out spirit money.^{1iv} This is plain, unbleached coarse off-white paper in the shape of bills with curved slits cut in it to divert malevolent spirits. When this money is tossed into the air, it is commonly believed that mischievous spirits lingering about will chase after it, pass through the curved holes, and become disoriented. Since spirits are believed to travel only in straight lines, these spirits will be confused and kept from causing havoc with the corpse. Another prevalent interpretation views this cheap money as a payoff to poor, lowly ghosts in the same way that tossing out a few copper coins to pestering beggars would clear the roadway of distraction in imperial China.

During the procession the band plays between ten and twelve tunes, depending on the route, the number of stops, and the number of cars in the procession. The usual route is about fourteen blocks through the heart of Chinatown and concludes on a street corner as the cortege continues on to one of the cemeteries outside

the city proper. As the hearse and family limousine pass, the band leader bows reverently to the deceased and to the family. The band plays on this corner until all the cars in the cortege have passed.

On occasion a prominent person's funeral may include two or even three bands. On very rare occasions there is a Chinese band in the procession playing Chinese funeral music with traditional instruments either alone or at the same time the Western band plays. Instead of marching, the five Chinese musicians ride in the back of a pickup truck.

In a variation of the procession the mourners walk through Chinatown. This is usually done by Ethnic Chinese who have recently emigrated from mainland Southeast Asia. Instead of riding in limousines, the mourners are led on foot by the eldest son or chief mourner, who may carry an ancestral tablet on a tray with offerings of incense, candles, and three cups of tea. An evergreen branch symbolizing longevity and family continuity, and a thin bamboo staff symbolizing the walking cane used to support one weak with grief are often carried as well. The family wears a version of the traditional Chinese mourning clothes of neutral-colored sackcloth. Walking and wearing rough, colorless cloth are signs of respect, grief, and distraction. Often accompanying the family and mourners are Daoist and/or Buddhist priests in traditional garb playing cymbals and gongs. Most of the longtime residents of Chinatown regard this form of ritual as an "old style" village type of custom and view it as something that a modern, Americanized Chinese would not do. Such sentiments often form a kind of

community consensus that discourages if not constrains particular cultural expressions.

In one walking funeral procession for a Chinese family from Southeast Asia, there was the usual Western brass band and picture car followed by the hearse. Behind the hearse marched the family, dressed in traditional Chinese mourning outfits, walking barefoot, and accompanied by Daoist/Buddhist priests wearing ceremonial robes and playing gongs and cymbals. An assistant followed--dragging a live chicken on a string.

The funeral director had not been informed about the chicken. Soon after, he received a call from animal rights activists, who complained about the chicken's mistreatment. Members of the Chinatown community also called the mortuary, expressing their displeasure that the mourners were walking barefooted: this made Chinatown look "shabby." The implication was that they were embarrassed by behavior they considered backward and bad for the image of Chinatown.^{1v} Though the use of animals in religious rituals is permitted in San Francisco and being barefooted is not unheard of, the complaints received by the mortuary are expressive of community sensibilities and tastes rather than insistence on enforcing legalities. In the interest of community relations, the funeral home might discourage mourners from such practices in the future, but its influence is limited. A more persuasive source would be the mourners' district or family association, which might be prevailed on to curtail its members' ritual practice in the interest of social harmony.

Bounded by community consensus and American regulatory laws, ritual variations seldom depart radically from the typical funeral described. The typical range of practice comprises those modern and traditional elements that more often than not reinforce American urban middle-class values rather than Chinese village, or rural ones.

BURIAL

At the cemetery the portrait wreath and all the other bouquets and wreaths brought from the mortuary are arranged upright and placed at the head of the grave. The pallbearers carry the casket to the grave and remain lined up on each side. The minister says a few words and a prayer, after which the pallbearers lower the casket into the grave. The pallbearers bow three times to the grave, remove their bow ties, boutonnières, and gloves and toss them into the grave, sometimes with a clump of dirt. The funeral assistants pick flowers from the wreaths and hand each person a flower to toss into the grave as he or she pays last respects. If there are paper goods for burning, they are burned at this time. The eldest son plants the giant incense stick in the ground at the head of the grave. He and his wife bow three times and toss in their flowers and armbands. Occasionally tossed in are rice, coins, and a clump of dirt.^{1vi} The other family members follow suit in the order of males by seniority first, then females by seniority, and then the mourners.

When everyone is done, the funeral director removes the

portrait from the picture wreath and gives it to the eldest son, with the portrait facing out, to be taken home. Occasionally banners with memorial sayings that have been hung in the chapel for the visit and the funeral will be brought to the grave, laid atop the casket, and buried; or they will be burned or taken home.

A typical Chinese Buddhist funeral is very similar with the following modifications: if the deceased was a vegetarian, the table offering would include fruit and vegetable dishes instead of the pig's head and the chicken. During the wake or the funeral, nuns or monks lead family members and mourners in chants and prayers while circling the casket or aisle in multiples of three. At the grave, instead of or in addition to flowers, small lit incense sticks (either one or three) are distributed to the mourners to be placed at the foot of the grave in a mound of soil.

Additional prayers and chants are said by the officiant, and paper goods, money, and incense are burned. Burning tends to be associated with Buddhist ceremonies, but it is done in combination with Christian elements and contexts as well. This kind of synthesis is characteristic of most Chinese religious ritual practice.

THE TRADITIONAL SUPPER

Following the burial at the cemetery, the family and friends typically return to Chinatown to have a meal at a restaurant. This practice is prevalent enough that many restaurants have special set menus appropriate for this occasion. A communal meal at the end of

the funeral day is both practical and symbolic. Since the funeral and burial may involve a few hours and a missed meal, mourners are ready to eat. The traditional supper is also a way for the family to thank friends for their attendance. It provides closure, sustenance, support, and reintegration into social life with a shared meal. The Chinese name for the traditional supper, *gai wai jau* (Cantonese) or *jie huai jiu* (Mandarin), means "to wash away sorrow."^{lvii}

The seven-course menus usually consist of pork, chicken, soup, seafood, and vegetable dishes. Though most people would find the food appetizing and impressive,^{lviii} the traditional supper is considered simple fare compared to what is expected at most Chinese banquets. The idea is that a funeral is not a joyous occasion to be celebrated with elaborate dishes. Eating is done out of necessity since feelings of sadness curb the appetite.

The traditional supper is occasionally referred to as a "longevity banquet," or *sauh tsaan* by some people from China. "Longevity" in this context refers to the wish for a long *next* life after death due an elderly person (usually over seventy) who has lived a full, prosperous life and left descendants to continue the lineage (another form of longevity). Longevity symbols are commonly seen at funerals as stylized calligraphic emblems on caskets and as embroidered designs on the burial clothes, which are also referred to as "longevity clothes." However, most of the local (second- and third-generation) people in San Francisco Chinatown know the meal as *sou tsaan*, or "plain meal." This

concept has a vague and distant association with the Buddhist tradition of serving vegetarian dishes at ritual meals to memorialize the dead. "Plain" refers to the meatless dishes served on such occasions. Now it just refers to the simple, modest food served after the funeral.^{lix}

There are always seven courses served and odd numbers of tables ordered. Seven is the number for death, and odd numbers signify incompleteness and are also associated with death and spirits. A token single cup of white rice liquor is placed in the center of each table in honor of the deceased. If more people attend than there are seats at tables, then people just make a place at the available tables--no further tables are added. Some food items associated with longevity in the celebratory sense are deliberately avoided, such as noodles for long life or fish served whole--head and tail representing the beginning and end of a lifetime that has already been completed and is not to be relived.

This sense of completeness would also signify that everyone is together. At a funeral, someone--the decease--is missing. Thus, a whole fish would be inappropriate.^{lx}

THE CATHAY BAND TRADITION IN CHINATOWN FUNERALS

Of all the major Chinatowns in North America, San Francisco's is the only one in which the tradition of a funeral procession with marching band flourishes. The perpetuity of this tradition is strongly linked to the historic formation of a Chinatown Western-style marching band. Its story illustrates how a fusion of

multicultural elements creates a unique entity with new characteristics that give it an identity of its own. Because of this particular history and because the band is the most salient element of today's funeral procession, I will give an in-depth description of its development.

Along with Chinese funeral bands, Western marching bands have been a part of the Chinatown ritual scene since as early as 1897, when a popular orchestra played the funeral march from the opera Saul for the fanciful funeral procession of infamous Chinatown gang leader "Little Pete."^{1xi} However, Western funeral bands became a Chinatown cultural fixture when a group of Chinese boys, endorsed by the Six Companies, formed the first Chinese Western-style marching band in America.

This tradition begins in 1911 with "the first organized social interaction between American and Chinese youths":

On a Saturday afternoon the American boys arrived [in Chinatown] in a large bus. . . . When they got out of the bus . . . the Columbia Park boys lined up and started serenading their peers with "America" and other tunes. After a few numbers, Evans [the headmaster of the Columbia Park School] asked the Chinese boys to join them in a march, and so, with the band playing, [the Chinese boys] fell into line . . . to the applause of a large crowd that gathered to watch them marching to and fro along Stockton Street. . . . Never before had young Chinese and American groups even mingled to talk, let alone develop friendships and exchange

ideas with each other.^{1xii}

This encounter was the inspiration for the Chinese Boys Band. The thirteen Chinese boys who participated in this meeting approached the Chinese Six Companies Association for sponsorship. The Six Companies, then holding the leadership role in Chinatown, felt that such a band playing Western music would be a positive activity for the youths and a benefit to their community, which was acquainted mainly with the music of Chinese opera. The director solicited funds from the community and in a few days raised two thousand dollars for the purchase of instruments and the hiring of a band teacher, and provided a practice room in the association building. Thomas Kennedy, a retired U.S. Navy concertmaster, was the band's first musical director. When he retired a couple of years later, one of the original band members, Thomas Lym, succeeded him and led the band for the next fifty years, until it stopped playing in 1962.^{1xiii}

As the band grew it changed its name several times. In 1914 when it merged with the Chinese Boys Band of Oakland it was renamed The New Cathay Boys Band and later modified to just the Cathay Boys Band. When its growth included the addition of junior bands, the band changed its charter in 1916 to create a club called The Cathay Musical Society. By 1928 the society's development included sports and community service and social activities. A rewriting of the Society's charter created a parent organization, The Cathay Club, Limited in 1930. Its main band became the Cathay Club Band or, as it was commonly called, the Cathay Band.^{1xiv}

The Cathay Club Band became a prize winning band. Their bookings ranged from the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition, to the Orpheum Theater circuit, to free concerts for the Chinatown community. At their peak they had over a hundred members with as many as sixty musicians playing at once. They were in demand at Chinese New Year dances, parades, parties, charitable events, and funeral processions:^{1xv}

In our Chinatown, participation of bands in funeral processions are a tradition and form an important adjunct in prominent ceremonies. Heretofore, the band had usually been composed of American musicians but with the advent of the Chinese band the latter was favored. They became firmly established as part nearly of every funeral with the exception of week-day burials. Income from this source formed a valuable asset to the finances of the band. Others soon became aware of this fact, and during 1913, two other rival bands were organized. But either due to poor management or discouragement, these rival bands were soon forced to withdraw from the field of competition.^{1xvi}

Band member Wilson Wong remembers the funeral processions taking about an hour (double the present length) and going through all the streets of Chinatown, alleyways and all. For funerals the band wore maroon military-style uniforms with black belts. Their signature song when the casket came out of the funeral home was "Nearer My God to Thee." The funeral repertoire of twelve pieces

comprised elegies and Christian hymns. "It didn't matter to the Chinese as long as it sounded good!" Wong claims. The Cathay Band was always first in the procession. In the 1930s and 1940s they had twenty-five to thirty members in each band. When a "big shot" died and needed three bands, they would assemble three groups of fifteen or twenty, depending on the availability of players. At any given time there were sixty musicians capable of playing.^{lxvii}

It is unclear when the band began playing for funerals but they eventually played in nearly every funeral procession until the mid-fifties. Author Haim implies that the Chinese Boy's Band played for funerals as early as 1913 (see note 62) and Wilson Wong remembers seeing the Cathay Musical Society band marching in funeral processions in the late 1920s. The band was a hobby for the amateur players, and they played for funerals almost only on Sundays, when most of the funerals took place. In the 1950s, the demand for this mortuary practice was frequent enough to attract the attention of the Musicians' Union, which required that only unionized bands play for funerals. The Cathay Band could perform as an auxiliary band if a union one was hired, but otherwise the Cathay Club Band had to join the union or it would be picketed. Since union dues far exceeded the good luck *li shi* or the token fee given to the club, the band ceased playing for funerals, and by 1964 it stopped public performances altogether.^{lxviii}

The Cathay Club and its band was a Chinatown institution that maintained a visible presence at every social and seasonal occasion for over fifty years. It was a modern, American Chinese

development that emerged from within Chinatown as an assimilative result of contact with the larger society. The club carried on the funeral band tradition in its own fashion, establishing a Chinatown custom that was transferred to the union bands. The legacy of the Cathay Club Band remains evident in the unionized funeral band today. Some of the pieces played are taken directly from the funeral music folio used by the Cathay Club, and one of its former members serves as an occasional advisor to the mortuary band. The Cathay Club Band is one of the distinguishing features in San Francisco absent in the histories of other American Chinatowns. That it was an active Chinatown institution for two generations may partially explain the continued popularity of the funeral band and procession in San Francisco.

THE GREEN STREET BRASS BAND

The current band is the Green Street Brass Band, managed and led by a female jazz saxophonist, Lisa Pollard. Under exclusive contract with Green Street Mortuary, they are the sole band that plays for Chinatown funerals. Composed of ten first-rate unionized musicians, none of whom are of Chinese descent, they play a combination of military funeral marches, European elegies, Christian hymns, and an occasional Chinese folk song. Pollard works with Clifford Yee, the Green Street Mortuary manager, to develop dramatic yet decorous presentations to show respect and honor. Continually seeking out and arranging appropriate music, she is conscious of her role in the Chinatown funeral tradition.

She has consulted with Wilson Wong on the music used by the Cathay Band and has adapted some selections for her band. Pollard is a world-class musician who has toured with Duke Ellington and played at presidential inaugurations; her band has also played for many of the celebrity non-Chinese funerals in the San Francisco area, such as those for Jessica Mitford and Herb Caen.^{lxi}

The band's success is noted by the continued demand for its services and the attention paid them by the press and other media.

In mid-October of 1996, a big splashy article on the band and Chinatown tradition appeared in the Sunday edition of the San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle.^{lxx} This article generated interest in the television media, and in late October for their seasonal Halloween and death theme stories, local channels 2 and 5 and national CNN featured the funeral band and this unique Chinatown way of celebrating the dead.

As a tourist attraction, the funeral procession with band stands out in any visitor's tour of Chinatown, and travel magazines are quick to point this out. A U.S. Airways inflight magazine mentioned watching for a funeral procession when visiting San Francisco Chinatown, and in the January 1997 issue of Travel and Leisure Magazine, an article on San Francisco's Asian neighborhoods and Chinatown quotes novelist Amy Tan's recommendation "for an offbeat, quintessential tour of Chinatown . . . to follow the brass marching band that plays for Chinese funerals."^{lxxi}

SUMMARY

The conventions and traditions brought to America by the early southern Chinese were Chinese in general and regional in particular to the different rural villages from which they came. Generally speaking, their funeral and burial practices are characterized by the southern Chinese custom of secondary burials, an emphasis on patrilineage, the fear and placation of evil spirits, the solicitation of good luck, and the view that the afterlife parallels the earthly one, meaning that the deceased would have similar material needs in the spirit world.

Up until the twentieth century, the funeral customs in San Francisco were similar to what would have been practiced in the native village. District and clan associations may have contributed to a standardization of practices distinctive to their group.

With the birth of the Republic of China in 1911, the Chinese in America became conscious of being modern Chinese while harboring nostalgia for the fading traditions of imperial China. This mixture of sentiments became evident in funeral rituals, especially as San Francisco rebuilt itself into a modern city after the 1906 earthquake. Up until World War II, a mixture of immigration restrictions, urban growth, limited assimilation of second- and third-generation American Chinese, and racial biases that continued to restrict many Chinese and their culture to Chinatown, all contributed to a Chinatown-style, Americanized version of Chinese cultural expression and funerary rites.

This cultural expression continues to change with the

different traditions introduced by the numerous and diverse ethnic Chinese who have immigrated to America after 1965. Within the American cultural framework, their customs and practices are modified by community consensus and governmental regulations. In San Francisco Chinatown, the tolerance for cultural tradition allows for traditions most reminiscent of those of the nineteenth century: sackcloth mourning clothes, walking processions sometimes in bare feet, the presence of Daoist or Buddhist priests, picture car and band, incense, spirit money, and the occasional presence of sacrificial animals. At the other extreme are Western-style Christian funerals with only scant traits relating to Chinatown custom: the picture car and band.

CONCLUSION: ENDURANCE AND PERPETUATION

Several factors may explain why funeral processions with marching bands persist in San Francisco's Chinatown when they have diminished in other major North American Chinatowns such as New York and Vancouver. In many ways San Francisco Chinatown remains the cultural symbol for the Chinese in America. As the oldest American port of entry and settlement for the Chinese, it became the official seat of the Chinese government in America and the regional and national headquarters for many of the district, family, and name associations. Rebuilt in the image of a stereotypical Chinese town after the 1906 earthquake, it is visually the most "Chinese" and colorful of all the Chinatowns,^{lxxii} and a major tourist attraction.^{lxxiii} Having been rebuilt, it also

became one of the newer and more modern Chinatowns that fit in with the progressive spirit of the early twentieth century. This spirit is evident in the formation of the Cathay Club Band, a uniquely San Francisco Chinatown tradition that became an integral part of the local funeral scene. It made the inclusion of a marching band a common and typical part of Chinatown mortuary rites.

The influence of the associations is not to be dismissed. As the backbone of Chinatown's social structure, they were a conservative element that valued the Chinese tradition of honoring an esteemed member with pomp and ceremony. Their funeral rituals for prominent members set the standard of what was due a revered person whose life fulfilled Confucian ideals.

The continued increase in Chinese immigrants to the United States is a major factor in revitalizing and perpetuating cultural traditions in Chinatown. First-generation immigrants commonly cling to the familiar traditions of their homeland to maintain emotional comfort and because they are unfamiliar with the customs of their host culture. Many of the recent immigrants are more economically solvent than were their nineteenth-century predecessors and can afford to realize fully the ceremonial ideals of their traditions. In addition, their demographic diversity is accompanied by a diversity in mortuary ritual practices, many of which are best tolerated in Chinatown.

The liberality of Chinatown has manifold causes. Historically it has always been left somewhat alone to contend with its lifeways as an ethnic enclave. In this regard, Chinatown has always

expressed itself publicly in ways not permitted in other neighborhoods. Sidewalk vending, use of firecrackers, throwing of spirit money, blocking of traffic to accommodate custom, and sale of live animals for food are practices not easily accepted elsewhere.

As a cultural symbol, Chinatown through its district associations and Chamber of Commerce exercises a political clout that has as its foundation the expanding Chinese and Asian voting population in the Bay Area. How Chinatown is treated politically by the city of San Francisco is indicative of the city's attitude toward Asians. This electoral clout empowers the leaders of Chinatown, who exercise influence if not control over the permissiveness and restraint of public cultural practice such as funeral processions.

Chinese cultural practices thrive as sanctioned lifeways in public Chinatown. The community remains physically and culturally sequestered within the city, offering Chinatown residents the opportunities, cultural conveniences, and familiarity of an ethnic enclave. In varying stages of assimilation, residents continue proudly to exercise Chinese traditions which also attract tourists as something exotic and novel.^{lxxiv} Tourism is a major source of income to Chinatown and the city of San Francisco. To this end the image of Chinatown is self-consciously cultivated by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce as being a safe, colorfully traditional "oriental" place, not only to draw tourists, but to lure corporate sponsors (for community projects), whose market interests and

surveys perceive a cultural link between Chinatown and the Asian consumer population in the Bay Area.^{lxxv}

Last but not least, the endurance and perpetuation of Chinese mortuary customs is credited to the mortuary that handles the Chinatown funeral processions. The manager's personal concern and respect for his community and its cultural practices encourages a variety of ritual expression. In many respects this attitude is attributable to SCI's corporate policy of allowing local management to do business in a manner sensitive to Chinatown needs.

As an ethnic enclave carved out of racism, economic opportunity, and a deeply ingrained Chinese cultural tradition, Chinatown has become a defining patch in the increasingly multicultural American quilt. In the process of its development it has synthesized American as well as various types of Chinese cultural characteristics to form a modified version of Chinese culture in America. City politics, global marketing and capital, immigration, tourism, and special interest groups inside and outside of Chinatown are additional factors that influence decisions regarding how people in Chinatown express themselves as being Chinese in America.

NOTES

This article would not have been possible without the help and support of Clifford Yee, manager of the Green Street Mortuary, and his staff. In addition, historian Him Mark Lai, Lisa Pollard of the Green Street Brass Band, Wilson Wong, formerly of the Cathay

Club Band, and Larry Chan of the Nam Hoy Association have provided invaluable assistance and data. I thank all my informants and friends for their patience and trust. In particular I would like to acknowledge Lily Tsui, Bill Steiner, and Dr. Bernard Wong.

This article is dedicated to the memory of Bobby Gee.

i. The major Chinatowns in North America included in my research were New York, Los Angeles, and Vancouver. In New York Chinatown the ten-piece Italian band plays at the mortuary, then waits to play at the corner of Mott Street (the main street of Chinatown) while the motor procession passes by. The musicianship is very simple. Walking processions by mourners or the band are discouraged because the slower pace holds up traffic (Martha Yick, owner, and staff of Wah Wing Sang Mortuary, interviews with author, June and September 1998). In Los Angeles the custom was revived by new Chinese immigrants from Southeast Asia, but the route is shorter and processions occur much less frequently. Band members wear blue plastic pith helmets instead of the military-style caps worn in San Francisco (Kevin Porter, musician, interview with author, April 1998). Marching funeral processions in Vancouver, Canada, stopped in the late 1980s owing to the unavailability of musicians on weekdays, when most funerals take place, since the cemeteries do not permit burials during the weekend (Jim Kelly, manager, and staff of Armstrong Mortuary, interview with author, July 1998).

The "new Chinatown" in the Richmond-Sunset districts of San Francisco has the processions also, but infrequently (one out of every twenty funerals as opposed to the four out of ten in Chinatown) and with a route of only a few blocks. People from Vietnam tend to hire the bands (Daphne Daphne, owner of Ashley and McMullen Mortuary, interview with author, January 1998). In the "suburban Chinatown" of Monterey Park near Los Angeles, the majority of the Chinese are from Taiwan, and they do not tend to hire bands. When the community became predominantly Chinese in the late 1970s, the custom was observed occasionally, but pressures from the city discouraged its practice (Henry Kwong, owner, Universal Chung Wah Funeral Homes, interview with author, April 1998).

ii. Philip P. Choy, "The Architecture of San Francisco Chinatown," Chinese America: History and Perspectives 6 (1992): 37-66.

iii. C. K. Yang, Religion in Chinese Society (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, Inc., 1961), 38, 44-53.

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- iv. Henry Tsai, The Chinese Experience in America (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 10.
- v. Him Mark Lai, "Historical Development of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association/Huiguan System," Chinese America: History and Perspectives 1 (1987): 33.
- vi. Tsai, Chinese Experience, 49, citing A. W. Loomis, "The Six Chinese Companies," Overland Monthly 1 (Sept. 18, 1868): 224.
- vii. C. C. Dobie, San Francisco's Chinatown (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, 1936), 67.
- viii. R. H. Dillon, The Hatchet Men (New York: Coward-McCann, 1962), 16.
- ix. Dobie, Chinatown, 68.
- x. However, the San Francisco Nam Hoy district association sent a delegation to China in late 1997 on a mission to reclaim their cemetery and assure that remains sent to China in the future would have a burial place. The reason for sending the delegation was that the association cemeteries in Colma are reaching their capacity and the cost of acquiring the additional needed land is prohibitive. As it turned out, the cemeteries in the Nam Hoy district had already been filled almost to capacity, eliminating the prospect of returning bodies to China for burial. Since then the Look San cemetery committee has voted to construct a brick wall around its cemetery in Colma that would be based on a design resembling the Great Wall of China. It would house only cremated remains and thus provide space to accommodate its members for many years into the twenty-first century (Larry Chan, member of Look San cemetery committee, interviews with author, October 1997 and April 1998).
- While there are no bone houses at Look San, bodies in the old, lower section, where burials were supposed to be temporary, are periodically exhumed (perhaps after twenty-five years) and reburied closer together on the upper part of the slope. The Kong Chow Association part of Look San is said to have a small plot set aside for burying ashes. There also used to be a plot in Look San set aside for prostitutes, paupers, and others whose ancestral county may be unknown (Horatio Jung, cemetery committee member, interview with Him Mark Lai, April 1998).
- xi. When buildings in the Lincoln Park area were being retrofitted for earthquake safety in the early 1990s, thirty-two Chinese graves with remains were uncovered and relocated to Golden Hill Cemetery (George Lee, Golden Hill Cemetery staff, interview with author, June 1998).

xii. Lone Mountain was such a popular cemetery that when the Board of Supervisors ordered all the city's cemeteries to close in 1912, there was such a public outcry to save Lone Mountain (renamed Laurel Hill in 1867) that its closing was deferred until 1937 (Oscar Lewis, San Francisco: Mission to Metropolis [San Diego: Howell-North Books, 1980], 76).

xiii. The establishment dates of the Chinese cemeteries in Colma are from San Francisco Chinese American historian Him Mark Lai's research of district association documents.

xiv. Dobie, Chinatown, 68.

xv. Bobby Gee, interview with author, January 1997.

xvi. Dobie, Chinatown, 68.

xvii. Bobby Gee, interview, January 1997.

xviii. Wu Ting-Fang, the Chinese minister to the United States, wrote an article titled "China and the Chinese People" for Collier's Weekly that was reprinted in the Los Angeles Times of July 15, 1900. In it he compares the social customs of the Chinese to those of Americans and describes funeral practices in some detail. In a 1997 interview Bobby Gee recalls his parents' description and his own observations of handling the dead in village China. Gee's recollection is similar to what is described by Wu.

xix. Wells Fargo and Company's Express: 1878 Directory of Chinese Business Houses (San Francisco: Britton and Rey, 1878), 20. It is the only Chinese undertaker listed in the 1878 directory but is not mentioned in the 1877 issue. Main Fook is also mentioned as a Nanhai Sanyi business in A History of the Sam Yup Benevolent Association in the United States, 1850-1974 (San Francisco: Sam Yup Association, 1975).

xx. Wells Fargo and Company's Express: 1882 Directory of Chinese Business Houses (San Francisco: Britton and Rey, 1882), 31, 38, 62, 65. The spelling of listings as well as the listings themselves were often inconsistent from year to year in nineteenth century directories. In the 1883 Express only Wing Chong and Main Fook (sometimes spelled Min Fook) Undertakers are mentioned though the Wing Sun (sometimes spelled Wing Sung) and the Quon Fook (sometimes spelled Quong Fook or Kwong Fook) continued to be in business into the twentieth century. Address numbers shift over time as well. Quon Fook's number changes from 754 Pacific Avenue to 758 Pacific Avenue and Wing Sun changes from 31 Brenham Place to 21 Brenham Place.

xxi. *Min* is the Cantonese pronunciation for *main* so it is

possible that Min Fook and Main Fook mortuaries are the same.

xxii. Frank Dunn, interview with Him Mark Lai, 1975.

xxiii. International Chinese Business Directory 1913 (San Francisco: International Chinese Business Directory, Inc., 1913), 1452, 1459.

xxiv. Ng, John [pseud.], interview with author, February 1998.

xxv. Wells Fargo, 1882 Express, 65.

xxvi. Frank Dun, interview with Him Mark Lai, 1975; Daphne Daphne, interview with author, January 1998; San Francisco telephone directories 1968, 1975 and 1981.

xxvii. Daphne, interview with author, January 1998.

xxviii. Harry Jupiter, "Mortuary Fighting Park Plan; Property Not for Sale, Chinatown Panel Told," San Francisco Examiner, May 29, 1986; Jupiter, "Mortuary Loses in Votes on Chinatown Park," San Francisco Examiner, June 13, 1986; Jimmy Wong and Steven Lee, association members, interview with author, 1996. Wong and Lee expressed apprehension over having just a single mortuary serving Chinatown. Concerns included the unfairness of a monopoly, increased prices, the difficulty of one mortuary handling the demand for funerals to be held on weekends, and the problem of parking logistics resulting from multiple funerals being held in a single day at one place.

xxix. San Francisco city directories and telephone directories, 1904-1970.

xxx. Bill Steiner, interview with author, February 1996. Steiner, presently assistant manager of Green Street Mortuary, worked for Marcus Jones from the 1970s.

xxxi. Bill Steiner, Clifford Yee, of Green Street Mortuary, and Lisa Pollard (leader of the Green Street Brass Band), interviews with author, 1996 through 1998.

xxxii. Daphne, Pollard, and Green Street Mortuary staff, interviews with author, 1998.

xxxiii. Chieh-Kang Ku, "Funeral Processions" (1924), in Chinese Civilization and Society-A Source Book, ed. Patricia Ebrey (New York: the Free Press Division of Macmillan Co., 1981), 289-93.

xxxiv. L. Eve Armentrout Ma, "Chinese Traditional Religion in

North America and Hawaii," Chinese America: History and Perspectives 2 (1988): 131.

xxxv. Ralph Craib, "Two Worlds at a Funeral," San Francisco Chronicle, Apr. 24, 1964, 3.

xxxvi. Steven Lee, interview with author, April 1996.

xxxvii. Yang, Religion, 31-32.

xxxviii. Ku, "Funeral Processions," 289.

xxxix. Dobie, Chinatown, 63-64.

xl. Charles Keeler, San Francisco and Thereabout (San Francisco: The California Promotion Committee of San Francisco, 1902), 67.

xli. City and County of San Francisco, San Francisco, the Bay and Its Cities (New York: Hasting House [American Guide Series], 1940), 225-226. An extensive description of Little Pete's funeral is also given by R. H. Dillon in The Hatchet Men (New York: Coward-McCann, 1962), 335-39. Dillon quotes a lengthy excerpt from Frank Norris's firsthand account of the event published in the literary magazine The Wave.

xlii. See, for example, R. H. Dillon, The Hatchet Men, 175-177. Dillon describes the funeral of Low Yet, founder of the Chee Kong Tong, and compares it to that of Little Pete. See also Neil Hitt, "Blast of Firecrackers, Blare of Brass Horns--Chinatown's Largest Funeral: Wong Goon Dick Goes to Sit with His Ancestors at the Councils of Confucius," San Francisco Chronicle, Feb. 17, 1941, 1. In this extensive news article, Hitt writes:

Some of the old-timers thought perhaps the funeral of Little Pete might have been as large in the horse and carriage days before the fire, but later admitted themselves mistaken when they saw the procession of 1600 in the Wong cortege, with 400 automobiles, five bands and three huge truck loads of flowers. Too, Little Pete's funeral was an old-fashioned affair, with women paid to mourn and scream, priests hired to exorcise and pay heavy tribute to the evil spirits, and a special guard to stand and keep the sun out of Pete's eyes. Little Pete, leader of the Sam Yups at a time when pistols were supplanting lathing hatchets, had been killed in a Washington St. barber shop when he committed the indiscretion of sending his body guard out for results of the old Bay District horse track. With a few minor exceptions, the funeral of Wong Goon Dick yesterday was a modern affair, and in keeping with this, the 30th year of the great Republic of China.

xliii. Dobie, Chinatown, 63-69; Dillon, Hatchet, 175-177, 336-339; Ku, "Funeral Processions", 289-293; Wu, "China and the Chinese People", 6.

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- xliv. San Francisco Chronicle, Jan. 18, 1937, 4.
- xlv. Thomas W. Chinn, Bridging the Pacific (San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1989), 178.
- xlvi. San Francisco Chronicle, Oct. 26, 1947, 3.
- xlvii. San Francisco Chronicle Feb. 17, 1941, 1. See also note 37.
- xlviii. Ralph Craib, "Two Worlds at a Funeral," San Francisco Chronicle, Apr. 24, 1964, 3.
- xlix. Pardee Lowe, "Good Life in Chinatown," Journal of the American Asiatic Association, Feb. 1937, 127-131.
- l. See Hitt, "Blast of Firecrackers."
- li. The 1965 Immigration Act ended the discriminatory national origins quota system and instituted the eight-category preference system to reunite families with close relatives and admit aliens with specially needed skills and talents on a "first come, first served" basis in each category. The act also provided an annual limitation of 170,000 immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere with a limitation of 20,000 from each country. The Western Hemisphere had a limit of 120,000, with no limit as to country and no preference system. Spouses and children of U.S. citizens and parents of children over twenty-one were exempt from numerical ceilings. To control the admission of skilled or unskilled foreign workers, the act instituted requirements for labor certification. It authorized the annual admission of 10,000 refugees. This legislation resulted in an increase in a new type of Chinese immigrant: men and women with high skills and intellectual attainments, of middle-class and usually affluent families from Shanghai, Tianjin, and other parts of China coming via Hongkong or Taiwan, speaking Mandarin rather than the Cantonese dialects and usually fluent in English. Such immigrants often felt more at home in entirely American surroundings than in the Cantonese dominated Chinatowns.
- Jack Chen, The Chinese of America (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 216-217.
- lii. As practiced in San Francisco Chinatown, the white and red blankets are given by the chief mourner; additional blankets may be given by the deceased's children or other relatives as an

option. If the family decides on the blanket ritual, the minimum requirement is usually the white and red. Variations exist in different areas. In Vancouver Chinatown, blankets with prints are given by the daughters only. At one Chinese mortuary in New York's Chinatown, the caskets come with the first blanket: white or creamy beige for men and pink for women. The second blanket is always red and the subsequent blankets can be of any color. At another Chinese mortuary on the same street in New York, the first blanket is always red if the deceased is over sixteen years of age. The subsequent blankets can be of any color. If the deceased is younger than sixteen years old, then red is not used but other colors or prints are acceptable. The director at this mortuary commented that San Francisco, by using white, is more traditional in their practices. Some Buddhists use a special gold colored blanket printed with red charms and symbols in lieu of the white and red blankets.

liii. The variations in practice remain consistent within the larger logic system of lineage continuity. For instance, some families insist the in-laws wear green while others insist that it should be the grandchildren. In the Chinese patrilineage system, the male line is perpetuated through the fertility of the son's wife, the daughter-in-law, and her issue, the grandchildren who will continue their father's line. Whether it is the daughter-in-law or the descendant grandchildren who wear green, the general concept applies. For additional information and academic analysis of color symbolism, fertility, and death in funeral rituals, see James L. Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones: The Management of Death Pollution in Cantonese Society," in Death and the Regeneration of Life, ed. Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 155-186; Stuart E. Thompson, "Death, Food, and Fertility," in Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China, ed. James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 71-108.

liv. Spirit money is thrown within the borders of Chinatown, specifically between Powell and Kearney, and Broadway and Bush. Beyond these streets, the mortuary runs the risk of littering (Clifford Yee, interview, 1997). Hence a ritual boundary is established based on the tolerance and consensus of Chinatown, and the intolerance of Chinese ritual tradition by the non-Chinese community. This consensus may change in the future if there are increasing complaints by community leaders of the mess made by the tossed spirit money. One suggestion has been to charge the mortuary for clean up services (Wei Teng, "Keeping the Public Clean Is Beneficial to You and Others," Chinese Express, May 1, 1996, 3).

lv. Bill Steiner, interview with author, March 1996.

lvi. Rice is thrown into the grave for good luck and fertility for the lineage. Coins are also for good luck and as passage money for the soul. Handfuls of dirt are thrown in by family and friends as a gesture of closure, of saying goodbye, and as a way of participating in the burial (Green Street Mortuary staff, interview with author, July 1996).

lvii. Bernard Wong, interview with author, January 1997.

lviii. The traditional meal always includes roast pork, boiled chicken, a vegetarian stew, soup, and rice. The other dishes may be shrimp and greens, Peking ribs, bean cakes, chicken with cashews, barbecued duck, stir-fried scallops, or honey walnut prawns. One restaurant said that beef traditionally is not served, while another restaurant included it in their suggested menu.

lix. Rev. Tim Tam, interview with author, April 1998. Rev. Tam is a Methodist minister from Canton who has served the Chinatown community for over thirty years and has presided over numerous funerals; Green Street Mortuary staff, interviews with author, April 1998; Larry Chan, interview with author, April 1998; Chi Lai Sun, owner of Great Eastern Restaurant, interview with author, April 1998; Wilson Wong and Leonard Wong, interview with author, April 1998. The people who used the term "longevity meal" did not find it inconsistent with the term "plain meal"; they recognized it as being the same thing. Those that used the term "plain meal" found the term "longevity meal" to be inappropriate and did not associate the two. That *sauh* and *sou* are of similar sound and are used to refer to the same thing is consistent with the Chinese love of homophones to make puns and confer double meanings.

lx. Camie Lau, interview with author, 1996; Bernard Wong, interview with author, 1997; Steven Lee, interview with author, 1996; Lychee Garden Restaurant staff, interviews with author, 1997; Great Eastern Restaurant staff, interviews with author, 1997.

lxi. Dillon, Hatchet Men, 336-339; Muscatine, Old San Francisco, 406.

lxii. Chinn, Bridging, 202.

lxiii. Sally Swope, "Cathay Club--Chinatown's First Marching Band Celebrates 75th Year," East-West, Sept. 11, 1986, 10-11; Chinn, Bridging, 55-59, 201-202; Wilson Wong, interview with author, 1996.

lxiv. In 1914 the Chinese Boys Band of Oakland (formed in 1912) merged with the San Francisco Chinese Boys Band to become fifty-eight pieces strong. It changed its name to the New Cathay Boys Band. The bands were indirectly affiliated with each other since they were both supported by the Six Companies. Herbert J. Haim, "Cathay Club of San Francisco" (Cathay Club Band scrapbook, 1934), 2-3. Between 1919 and 1943 thirteen auxiliary bands were formed such as a jazz band, a dance orchestra, and girl's bands. Swope, "Cathay Club", 10-11.

lxv. Swope, "Cathay Club"; Chinn, Bridging, 55-59; Wilson Wong, interview with author, 1996.

lxvi. Haim, "Cathay Club of San Francisco", 2.

lxvii. Wilson Wong, interviews with author, 1996 and 1997.

lxviii. Swope, "Cathay Club", 10-11; Chinn, Bridging, 55-59; Wilson Wong, interview with author, 1996 and 1997.

lxix. Lisa Pollard, interviews with author, 1996 and 1997.

lxx. Carl Nolte, "How Sweet the Sound," San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle, Oct. 13, 1996, zone 6, 1.

lxxi. Alan Brown, "Asia Minor--Wayne Wang, Amy Tan, and Others Lead an Insider's Tour through the Far East--in San Francisco," Travel and Leisure Magazine, Jan. 1997, 88-97, 118-120.

lxxii. Christopher L. Salter, San Francisco's Chinatown: How Chinese A Town? (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, Inc., 1978); Philip P. Choy, "The Architecture of San Francisco Chinatown," Chinese America: History and Perspectives 6 (1992): 37-66.

lxxiii. Calvin Lee, Chinatown, USA (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 88-101.

lxxiv. Chinese Express, May 1, 1996, 9-11.

lxxv. Promotional materials from the Chinese New Year's Parade Office.