

MAY 2021

Art Salon Chinatown

## A Conversation about Art & Equality

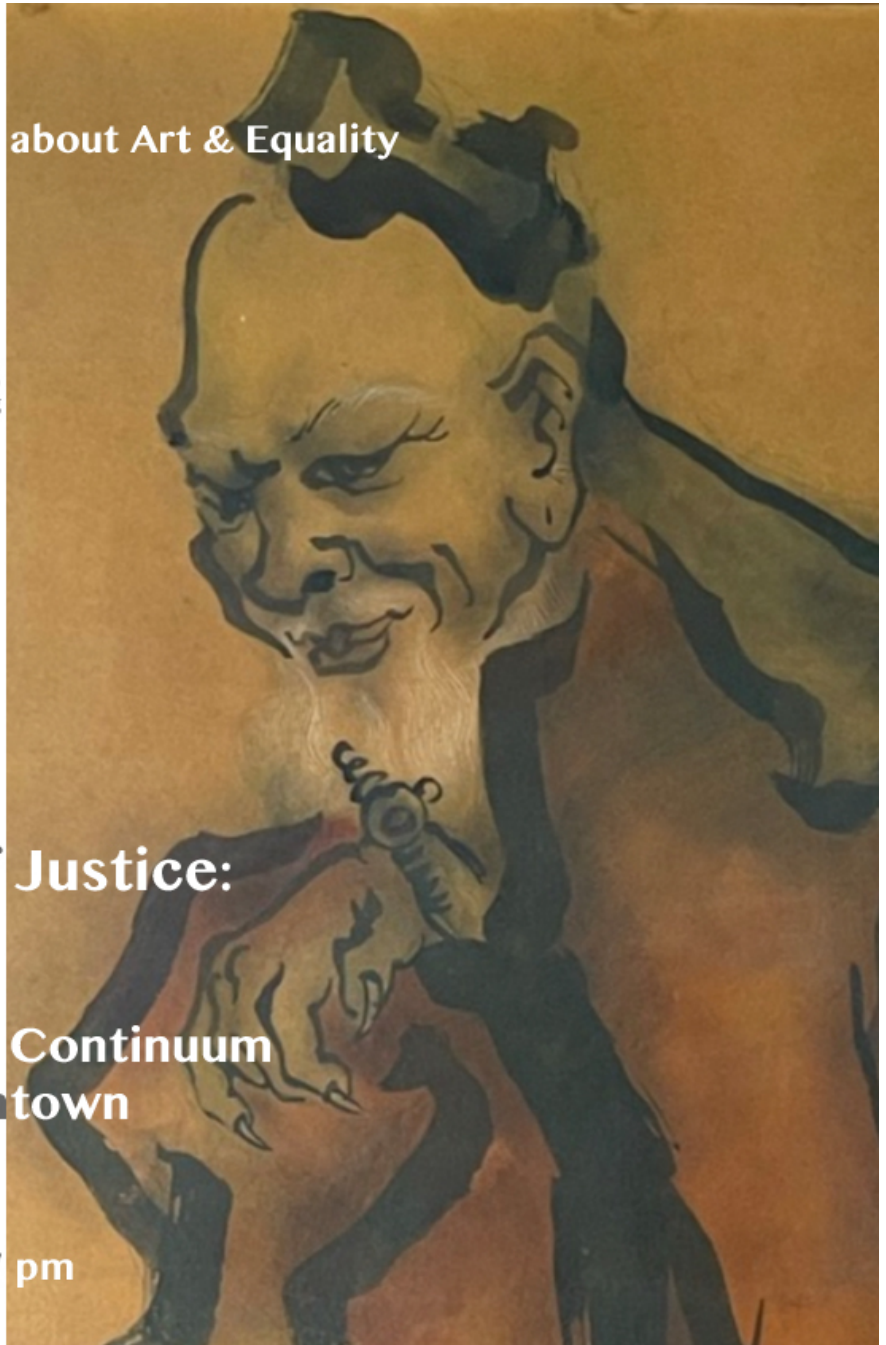


Join us for a conversation with the curator Sonia Mak, as we learn about her discoveries in researching the relationship between Tyrus Wong and the painting's patron, immigration lawyer Y.C. Hong. Special guests, performance artist Kristina Wong and attorney George Yin, will join the curator in considering the legacy of these pioneers against the ongoing struggle for equality.



## A Vision of Justice: Tyrus Wong & The Cultural Continuum of New Chinatown

May 5, 2021 @ 7 pm



**CHSSC Meeting will be online on Zoom:**  
Program: Wednesday, May 5, 2021 at 7:00 PM  
To register, go to [chssc.org](http://chssc.org).



# Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

MAY 2021

## CHSSC Receives Grant from the Cathay Bank Foundation

The Cathay Bank Foundation, which was set up in 2002, supports underserved community organizations. For more than 40 years CHSSC has been collecting Chinese American artifacts. The generous \$5,000 grant will help us hire an archivist/collections manager, and document manager and an intern to continue our efforts to organize and digitize our significant collections. Our ultimate goal is to make the archives available to the public. Scholars and individuals can study our archival materials to develop a better understanding of the history of Chinese Americans.

## Major Donors

Cathay Bank Foundation \$5000

George and Edith Sheu \$3,000

Tennyson Kwok

Calvin Lee

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## MISSION STATEMENT

The Chinese Historical Society of Southern California was organized in November 1975. The purposes of the Society are:

1. to bring together people with a mutual interest in the important history and historical role of Chinese and Chinese Americans in southern California;
2. to pursue, preserve, and communicate knowledge of this history; and
3. to promote the heritage of the Chinese and Chinese American community in support of a better appreciation of the rich, multicultural society of the United States.



## A Vision of Justice: Tyrus Wong & The Cultural Continuum of New Chinatown

Join us for a conversation with the curator of *A Vision of Justice: Tyrus Wong & The Cultural Continuum of New Chinatown*, Sonia Mak, as we learn about her discoveries in researching the relationship between Tyrus Wong and the painting's patron, immigration lawyer Y.C. Hong. Special guests, performance artist Kristina Wong and attorney George Yin, will join the curator in considering the legacy of these pioneers against the ongoing struggle for equality.

### Speakers:

**Sonia Mak**, curator of *A Vision of Justice*, is a curator, writer, and arts administrator. Ms. Mak was one of two founding curators at the Chinese American Museum and an NEH Summer Institute Fellow to advance Asian American Art History. She is co-founder and co-curator of Art Salon Chinatown, a showcase for contemporary Asian diasporic artists. She holds a BA in Art History from San Francisco State University and an MA from University of California, Riverside. Ms. Mak curated *'Round the Clock: Chinese American Artists Working in Los Angeles*, as part of the Getty Foundation's initiative, Pacific Standard Time: Art in LA, 1945-1980. She has worked at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Department of Arts & Culture, Morono Kiang Gallery, Craft Contemporary, and Vincent Price Art Museum and currently serves as Advancement Officer at the Institute of Contemporary Art Los Angeles.

**Kristina Wong** is a performance artist, comedian, writer, and elected representative of Koreatown Los Angeles whose work has been recognized through many grants, including Creative Capital, COLA Master Artist Fellowship from the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, and eight Los Angeles Artist-in-Residence awards. Her long-running show, *Wong Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, looked at the high rates of depression and suicide among Asian American women and is now a concert film. Her recent piece, *Kristina Wong for Public Office*, is a simultaneous real-life stint as the elected representative in Koreatown Los Angeles and campaign rally show. During the pandemic, she founded the Auntie Sewing Squad, a collective of volunteers sewing facemasks for vulnerable communities.

**George Yin** is an attorney, arts advocate, and Board Member of the Vincent Price Art Museum Foundation. As an attorney with Kaufman Legal Group, he advises candidates, elected officials, political committees, ballot measure committees, non-profit organizations, and public agencies on local, state, and federal laws. He has over a decade of experience representing public agencies in public, municipal, education, water, and administrative law. He has served on the boards of the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, the Organization of Chinese Americans (Greater LA Chapter), the Asian Professional Exchange (APEX), and the Pacific Asia Museum Chinese Arts Council. He holds a J.D. from UCLA Law School, an M.A. in Urban Planning from the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, an M.Sc. in Public Administration/Public Policy from the London School of Economics, and a B.A. in Government from Cornell University.



## April Meeting

BY SUSAN DICKSON

Karen Fang, writer, film scholar and cultural critic, teaches film at the University of Houston. Her presentation focused on the career of America's foremost greeting card designer: Tyrus Wong. Tyrus Wong's long and varied career used many different media across both fine and commercial arts.

Tyrus designed greeting cards during the height of the Christmas card industry from 1952-76 with 4 different companies. Tyrus was repeatedly the highest seller for the company. In 1954 Tyrus designed the most popular Christmas card ever, a card that sold 1,000,000 copies. Since Tyrus was in the upper echelon of card artists with Hallmark in the mid-60s, they referred to him as "America's favorite card designer."

After graduating from art school, Tyrus was a favorite with *LA Times* art critics due to his blend of Eastern and Occidental themes and techniques. The style of his work remained consistent, but the world changed. Tyrus benefitted during WWII as a professional artist due to an increased appreciation of Chinese art. After WWII, Chinese who had been excluded were now seen more favorably.

Art is seen as a bridge in global geopolitics. Asian art became commodifiable. Fusion of the Asian and Western aesthetics was popular in mass culture in both fine arts and commercial arts so Tyrus did illustrations for books and magazines as well as designs for Winfield dinnerware. A 1957 article in *The Christian Science Monitor* featured Tyrus and his family as representatives of the perfect fusion of Asian and American in a family.

Identity was important in marketing Tyrus Wong's albums of cards. At this time people chose a card from an album of designs and had it personalized. The cards were always marketed with his name. His bio page was on the first page and his signature was readily visible.

Karen Fang discussed possible reasons for Tyrus Wong's appeal. His work was a blend of Eastern and Western aesthetics. Tyrus used a brushy, expressionist style using his favorite medium, watercolor. His designs often represented something small in nature which is dwarfed by all of nature. For example, he used the Asian style of the bird and branch in several card designs. Many of these designs incorporated a lot of negative space. Other designs were of inspirational images. Some of the designs reflected his sense of humor. In his later years his film studio work with Warner Brothers influenced the designs. Tyrus started to compose images as a filmmaker would rather than as a landscape artist.

People who bought Tyrus Wong's cards were buying prestige cards which were larger or embossed or had gold edges. The royalties Tyrus received were 10% instead of the regular 5%. At end of his career Tyrus received a guaranteed minimum income and the contracts always guaranteed that his name would be used in the design. If the card was modified, his name would still be there. Tyrus was bound to a company for that year so other companies would have to commission others to do that style.

Karen Fang speculated on what the success meant to Tyrus personally. On the one hand, money was important since he had lived through the Great Depression. Personally, the cards represented a bicultural image: merging Asian with Christian aesthetics which reflected some of the influence of his wife, Ruth Kim Wong. The cards went further in advancing his name in his career. They made him visible to the most elite households. That he was celebrated was a personal triumph for a Chinese American immigrant artist





## East Adams Project Intern Symposium

BY JILLIAN SURDZIAL

On Thursday March 18, 2021, CHSSC hosted a presentation of research conducted by the six undergraduate interns working on the East Adams project. These interns, all a part of Dr. Cathy Gudis' public history practicum course at the University of California, Riverside, worked with Linda Bentz and Jillian Surdzial from January through March 2021 to collect data on East Adams Chinatown in Los Angeles.

At the final count, together all of the interns were able to log data for 541 Works Progress Administration census files, 48 Chinese Exclusion Act case files from the National Archives and Records Administration, 73 oral histories associated with the Duty and Honor and Southern California Chinese American Oral History projects, 442 individuals from the 1920, 1930, and 1940 censuses.

Each of the interns presented research that incorporated the data they collected over the course of the quarter.

**Connor Green**, a fourth year History Major at UC Riverside, discussed the story of East Adams' CFO service station, using the oral histories of the Chin family to discuss the cultural and social changes felt in the Chinese community as they shifted from a largely homogeneous community in Old Chinatown to the particularly diverse East Adams neighborhood.

**Shawna Ho**, a fourth year Psychology student at UC Riverside with an interest in Asian American History and Chinese linguistics, translated the letters of Lem Kay, brother of notable Los Angeles Chinatown resident George Lem. Her ability to translate historical letters written in Chinese and traditional script is a rare skill. Her social media posts will make some of these translations accessible to the public for the first time.

**Brianna Vasquez**, a fourth year US history major, provided a statistical analysis of the 1939 neighborhood census conducted by the Works Progress Administration. From this work, she discovered that the majority of residents of East Adams rented their property, the neighborhood was multiethnic, and rent prices varied according to ethnicity.

**Marivel Palone**, an aspiring law student who is currently in her fourth year at UC Riverside studying History and Law & Society, created a video presentation about the power of oral histories to flesh out lived experiences. These stories make statistical information come to life.

**Samantha Vela**, a fourth year History and Law & Society major concentrating in Southeast Asian history, created an ArcGIS story map detailing notable Chinese careers in Los Angeles. Samantha's map incorporated historical images from Los Angeles Chinatowns.

**Aaijah Love**, a third year History major, researched marriage in the Chinese American community. Focusing on oral histories from Nellie Yee Chung, census data, and photographs from the El Pueblo archive, she provided a look into how interracial marriage and interactions with Western faith traditions, including Judaism, functioned for Chinese Americans in Los Angeles.

The interns' work will help CHSSC move forward with their effort to document the five Chinatowns of Los Angeles. Much of the data is mappable, and may also be converted into an ArcGIS story map. A recording of the presentations is available on CHSSC's YouTube page. Those interested in the raw data for the East Adams project may contact the project managers, Linda Bentz and Jillian Surdzial, for more information at [jsurd001@ucr.edu](mailto:jsurd001@ucr.edu).



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## Archives Spotlight

The Archives Committee is very pleased to announce that we have received several donations to advance our on-going efforts to preserve, organize and share our vast library and archival collections. We want to thank Cathay Bank Foundation and Hoover and Ruby Ling Louie for funding a Collections Manager position. The responsibilities of this job include:

- Standardize care of physical and digital assets by creating standard operating procedures
- Conduct inventory of physical and digital assets
- Establish the following:
  1. New general procedures for archives and digital assets
  2. General policies and procedures for digitization
  3. Metadata creation and digital asset workflow
- Prioritize collection processing and manage interns who will create finding aids using ArchivesSpace, create metadata and assist with inventory
- Implement content management system using Omeka
- Train interns, volunteers, and board members on general procedures and workflows

If you, or anyone you know, are interested in this position please contact [info@chssc.org](mailto:info@chssc.org).





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## Yosemite Pilgrimage Update

BY JACK SHU

Last year the Pilgrimage to Yosemite to commemorate the contributions of Chinese Americans in Yosemite National Park and the Sierra Nevada Mountains was canceled due to the pandemic. We did however have a wonderful Webinar thanks to the National Parks and Conservation Association and the National Park Service.

Link to webinar: [https://vimeo.com/438262978/98ddbe7073?fbclid=IwAR0rxPCPkb2HnJsWD-ix3ned9MbDOn-IbnuCo7MO8KhrZqq66F\\_3tVLvykQ](https://vimeo.com/438262978/98ddbe7073?fbclid=IwAR0rxPCPkb2HnJsWD-ix3ned9MbDOn-IbnuCo7MO8KhrZqq66F_3tVLvykQ)

Also, if you did not see the article in Westways, the magazine for the Auto Club, here is the link to that: <https://www.ace.aaa.com/publications/travel/us-destinations/national-parks/yosemite-chinese-american-history.html>

A small group, practicing COVID-19 safety measures, did climb to the top of Sing Peak on Aug 4<sup>th</sup>. This makes the eight year in a row that Tie Sing, the famous backcountry chef for the Mather Mountain Party, was remembered in this way. There are plans for a group to hike up this 10,552' peak this coming August.

We have some exciting news for this year. The laundry building in Wawona will be opening for public view sometime this Summer with informative exhibits about Chinese history in the Park. Preliminary plans are underway for some type of event celebrating the opening of this new facility in September or October. This will not be a multi-day event like the Pilgrimages we have had in previous years, but a special opening at which Yosemite Park officials, the press, and interested visitors will be invited. Watch for an upcoming notice!



## Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

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### Community Calendar

#### UPCOMING CHINESE AMERICAN MUSEUM PROGRAMS:

(for reservations see <http://camla.org/upcomingevents> )

##### **May 4, 2021 5-6 pm PDT**

REVISITING VINCENT CHIN AND HIS HISTORIC IMPACT ON THE ASIAN AMERICAN MOVEMENT

Paula Yoo and Pam Ng discuss Yoo's new book: *From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry: The Killing of Vincent Chin and the Trial that Galvanized the Asian American Movement*. (The CHSSC is a community sponsor)

##### **MAY 11, 2021 6:00-7:30 pm PDT**

EXPLORING THE HISTORY AND DIVERSITY OF INDIAN TEAS

A Tea Talk with Husna-Tara Prakash and Shalini Prakash Agarwal. Moderated by Lan Ong.

#### China Society of Southern California:

##### **May 10, 2021 6:00 PM PDT**

Pierre Odier, will share his latest volume of his *A Pebble the Sand* series, *Burma/Myanmar*. His past programs have taken us to Tibet, the Orient Express, Mongolia, some minority tribes in China.

**Register at Eventbrite:** <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/a-pebble-in-the-sand-burmamyanmar-by-pierre-odier-tickets-152423399491>