

APRIL 2024

## Olvera Street, China City: Chinese and Mexican Girlhood and the Creation of LA's Modern Past

Wednesday, April 3, 2024, 7 PM



Photo courtesy of the UCLA Charles E. Young Research Library Department of Special Collections

In the 1930s-40s, Mexican American and Chinese American young women and girls figured prominently in Los Angeles's new tourist zone at Olvera Street and China City. The two tourist centers told a story of how LA became an exciting and modern city, the triumphant result of manifest destiny and progress.

Join Isabela Seong Leong Quintana,, community historian and Assistant Professor of Asian American Studies at UC Irvine, as she explores what it meant to be modern and a girl for Mexican Americans and Chinese Americans during the tumultuous 1930s, a time when deportation raids, repatriation campaigns, ongoing anti-Chinese exclusion policies, and economic downturn permeated the world of Mexican and Chinese Angelenos.

**Free to attend. RSVP via Eventbrite on  
CHSSC website: <https://chssc.org>**



Chinese Historical Society  
of Southern California

南加州華人歷史學會



Isabela Seong Leong Quintana



# Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

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## President's message

My wife, Grace, and I recently returned home from New Orleans after attending Congressional Gold Medal (CGM) ceremonies for our Chinese American WWII veterans. Grace was there to accept the medal on behalf of her uncle, Goon Lew. Six living veterans were honored at the ceremony on Saturday, March 9. It was truly an honor to meet these men, the last of the "Greatest Generation". After requesting a set of replacement medals for my father, Lui Gain Thyn ("Sonny Leo"), in 2020, they unexpectedly arrived just before our trip to New Orleans. I was surprised to discover that the medals included a Bronze Star which was not listed on my father's discharge paper. I was fortunate to have Major General K.K. Chinn present me with my father's Bronze Star at a private ceremony attended by our family and friends.

Grace and I had the privilege of attending a tour of the National WWII Museum with a group of military officials that is not available to the general public. We were taken to the vaults where the museum stores their most precious WWII articles. These include military uniforms, medals, and the Congressional Gold Medal for Chinese American WWII Veterans. I learned that they receive many donations of WWII related items, but they only accept the ones that have a personal story associated with it. Their most treasured collections are the oral interviews of those that were actually in the war. They provide an invaluable firsthand account of their experiences. I think about the oral histories that CHSSC has conducted and now have a deeper appreciation for them. You can read more about the CGM Ceremony and view photos from the event on Pages 4 & 5.

We are finishing up the first phase of our Los Angeles Chinatown Associations project which has been funded by the David and Pearl Louie Family Foundation. Chinatown associations are an important part of our history, originally formed to provide mutual aid for immigrants who share the same clan (family) surname, regional origin or business ties. The project includes oral interviews of association leaders who provide firsthand accounts of their long and sometimes multi-generational involvement with their own association. Be on the outlook for its online premiere.

If you are interested in Chinese American history, enjoy reading our newsletter, visiting our website or our Chinatown Heritage Center, please support us by signing up for a new membership or renewing your expired membership at <https://chssc.org/membership/>. You can also make a donation at <https://chssc.org/donate/>

Ricky Leo

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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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.



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## Olvera Street, China City: Chinese and Mexican Girlhood and the Creation of LA's Modern Past

In the 1930s-40s, Mexican American and Chinese American young women and girls figured prominently in Los Angeles's new tourist zone at Olvera Street and China City. The two tourist centers told a story of how LA became an exciting and modern city, the triumphant result of manifest destiny and progress. White women played a central role as creators and consumers of this narrative, allowing them to claim a spot in a story of the modern frontier.

As workers and children of shopkeepers, Mexican and Chinese girls' presence contributed to a sense of embodied authenticity for visitors who arrived to experience LA's past in contrast to its present and future. Yet, they were not residents of these places as Mexican and Chinese Angelenos had been before the tourist zones opened in 1930 and 1938 respectively.

Utilizing multiraciality, gender, and youth as lenses of analysis, Isabela Seong Leong Quintana explores what it meant to be modern and a girl for Mexican Americans and Chinese Americans during the tumultuous 1930s, a time when deportation raids, repatriation campaigns, ongoing anti-Chinese exclusion policies, and economic downturn permeated the world of Mexican and Chinese Angelenos.

### Speaker Bio:



**Isabela Seong Leong Quintana** is a community historian and Assistant Professor of Asian American Studies at UC Irvine. She teaches and writes about Critical Relational and Comparative Ethnic Studies, with a focus on Asian American and Chicanx/Latinx histories. Quintana is also a Co-Director of The Five Chinatowns Project of the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, an intergenerational community history project that seeks to document and promote knowledge about Chinese American Los Angeles. She authored a book manuscript entitled "Urban Borderlands: Neighborhood and Nation in Chinese and Mexican Los Angeles, 1870s-1930s" (forthcoming,

University of North Carolina Press) that examines gender and the spatial production of national borders in Los Angeles' Chinatown and Sonoratown neighborhoods. With a special interest in the experiences of women and children, she uses space, gender, and work as lenses to understand the late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century racial geography of Los Angeles.





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## CGM Ceremony in New Orleans

In 2017, bi-partisan legislation was introduced for the passage the Chinese American World War II Congressional Gold Medal Act. After the bill was enacted, the U.S. Mint and the Chinese American WWII Veterans Recognition Project worked together to design the final medal which will be displayed in the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. The Chinese American Citizens Alliance (C.A.C.A.) which was the driving force behind this legislation, raised funds to start a national registry of Chinese Americans who served in the Army, Army Air Force, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, and Merchant Marines during WWII.

Those who registered their service on the national registry were eligible for a CGM replica. C.A.C.A. held regional events to give the CGM replicas to living veterans or to families of veterans who have passed. Earlier this month over 500 people gathered in New Orleans at the National WWII Museum for two ceremonies to honor the soldiers and award them or their families a CGM replica. Six living Chinese Americans received their medals at the Saturday event.



L to R: Grace Leo, Suellen Cheng, Munson Kwok, Melanie Chan, Susan Dickson, Joanne Young, Winston Young, Linda Bentz



Back L to R: Elizabeth Russell, Terrence Russell, unk.  
Front L to R: Gay Yuen, Joyce Chan, Panela Young





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## CGM Ceremony in New Orleans (cont.)



Maj. Gen. Stephen D. Tom and Joanne Young



Maj. Gen. K.K. Chinn, Jeffrey Young  
and Winston Young

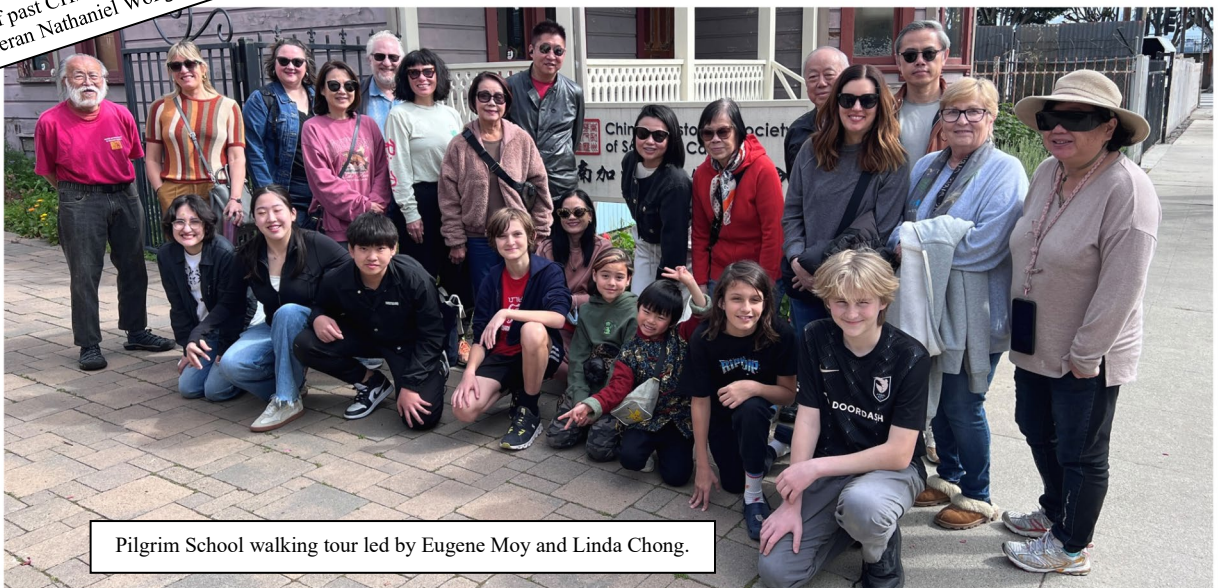


Maj. Gen. K.K. Chinn, Grace Leo, Ricky Leo



Maj. Gen. William S. Chen and Faith Wong-Reed,  
daughter of past CHSSC president Cy Wong, son of  
WWII veteran Nathaniel Wong, Sr.

## Walking Tour



Pilgrim School walking tour led by Eugene Moy and Linda Chong.



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## Meet Our Community Archivist



**Chelsea Shi-Chao Liu** (she/her) is the recent recipient of an MA in History & Archival Studies from Claremont Graduate University. She also holds a BA in English Literature from Sarah Lawrence College. Her interests include Asian American studies, gender and sexuality, and visual culture. She is currently working part-time with the Japanese American National Museum and has worked with the Library of Congress, the Claremont Colleges Library Special Collections, and Claremont Heritage. Chelsea grew up in Arcadia, California and Beijing, China, where her family still lives.

## Meet Our Intern



Originally from London, Canada, **Michaela Telfer** (she/her) is a second year MLIS student at UCLA taking coursework in special collections, academic librarianship, and archives. Before coming to UCLA, she completed a PhD in Comparative Literature at USC, specializing in 19th-century Russian and French literature. Her professional and research interests focus on the relationships between archives and state power and the role of affect in archival practices. In her spare time, she loves to read, hike, and try new baking recipes.

## Doctoral Student Visits CHSSC



**Victoria Tran**, a doctoral student in sociology at UCLA, visits CHSSC. Her dissertation will focus on how community groups in L.A.'s Chinatown have engaged with government officials, residents, and small business owners on redevelopment projects from 1978-2000. She was here to analyze our archival documents for her study.





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## Partnership with LA Phil

Kevine Ecliserio-Velez, Marketing Coordinator, Promotions & Partnerships, Los Angeles Philharmonic Association reached out to CHSSC about promoting their Lunar New Year concert at Walt Disney Concert Hall. She was impressed by our efforts to foster cultural engagement and preserve history in our community. Board members Susan Dickson, Gordon Hom, Grace Leo and Ricky Leo attended the concert which included a performance by Yi-Wen Jiang's string quartet arrangement of popular Chinese folk melodies in celebration of the Year of the Wood Dragon.



L to R:  
Mei Ong,  
Harvey Yoshihara,  
Jeanie Yoshihara,  
Ernest Low,  
Anita Lee,  
Gordon Hom,  
Candace Lee,  
Susan Dickson,  
Grace Leo,  
Kevine Ecliserio-Velez,  
Ricky Leo

## 2024 Ching Ming (Qingming)

Date: Saturday, April 13, 2024

Time: 10:00am - 12:00pm

Location: Evergreen Cemetery

204 N Evergreen Ave, Los Angeles, CA

(at the 19th Century Chinese Shrine at the east end of the cemetery)

This year, CHSSC will host a Ching Ming (Qingming) observance at the 19th Century Chinese Memorial Shrine which we purchased in 1992 and restored in 1995. Ching Ming (which literally means Pure and Bright) Festivals have been an annual tradition in China and Asia whereby ancestral tombs are cleaned and swept, and offerings are made. As we have done previously, we ask for volunteers to help clean the shrine area and the small field of headstones from the Metro Gold Line project, and to place flowers (donations welcome) at the site, to honor the memory of early Chinese pioneers of Los Angeles.



## Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

411 Bernard Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012  
Phone: 323-352-8824 Email: [info@chssc.org](mailto:info@chssc.org)  
Website: <https://chssc.org/>

## Donations for March

*In Memory of Leslie Noelle  
Lienjun Mar*

*Patricia Mar*

*Donations*

*Judy Lee*

*Wes Leslie*

## Current and Upcoming Events

### **“Where You Stand: Chinatown 1880 to 1939” Exhibit at Union Station**

The exhibit invites participants into the center of the vibrant community of families, businesses, and associations through a multi-dimensional experience of the Chinese community of early Los Angeles.

View historic photographs, listen to oral history recordings, and view augmented reality presentations superimposed onto other locations around Union Station. Click on the link to learn more:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/1e5f963472f4400da19fcb0e3ccfdd5e?item=1>