

## Decades after footage was shot, son helps father finish film documenting history of Chinese American activism

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### Body

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Feb. 21-- Feb. 21--The Rev. Harry Chuck 's grandparents immigrated to San Francisco 's Chinatown in the late 1800s.

His mother was born there in 1900 and lived her whole life in the community. Chuck, 84, lived there and was the longtime director of Donaldina Cameron House, an organization that serves the needs of low- to moderate- income immigrant Chinese families in San Francisco. He retired in 2000. He also raised his son Josh Chuck, 40, there.

Now he and Josh will be showing a documentary that took decades and a father- son collaboration to complete. "Chinatown Rising " is a mix of old footage taken by Harry in 1960s, '70s and '80s and contemporary interviews with some of the youth activists from the original filming.

There will be two screenings on Feb. 29, one at 7 p.m. at the Frida Cinema in Santa Ana and another at 10 :15 a.m. at Los Angeles ' Vista Theatre.

"We have a new generation of immigrants, and this generation has a greater sense of mobility, " Harry says. "But the older generations felt like, 'This is it. These 24 square blocks are home. We 're not welcome anywhere else, so let 's make the best of it.' "

The generation before Harry 's, many of whom were working- class immigrants who grew up when the Chinese Exclusion Act was in effect, often taught their kids to keep their heads down, not leave Chinatown and not cause trouble.

"They were afraid of being deported, being called into question by the FBI, the Cold War was going on, " Harry explains. "We were the generation that became naturalized citizens, so we didn 't have that fear ... We were also picking up on the momentum of the civil rights movement."

Harry participated in many of the protests of the early Asian American movement in San Francisco -- documenting the emerging youth gangs, the 1968 San Francisco State University student strike (these students, led by the Black Student Union, eventually established the first ethnic studies program in the country ), and the fight against the eviction of low- income seniors at the I- Hotel in their neighboring Manilatown.

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When Harry was studying film production in graduate school in the early 1970s, his thesis was titled "Chinatown San Francisco : A Community in Transition, " but at the time, he got overwhelmed with the story 's complexities.

"Looking back, I did not have enough wisdom to understand what was happening, " he says.

He promised his adviser he would eventually finish the film, but for over four decades, the 20, 000 feet of 16mm film, amounting to 10 hours of footage, sat untouched in his garage.

Four years ago, Harry was thinking of throwing the reels away, but Josh took a quick peek, was intrigued and convinced his father to digitize all of it.

"Once he started seeing it again and reliving some of the things, I could tell it had become important to him, that he wanted to finish it, " says Josh, who had production experience from co- creating a public- access TV show in college at UC Davis.

"And I felt like, as his son, if I 'm not helping him, then who would help him ?"

Before working on the film, Josh admits that he knew little about San Francisco Chinatown 's history of activism. He knew even less about his father 's involvement in it.

"My dad 's really not one to volunteer all that information at the dinner table, so it took this formal project for me to learn about a lot of things that he did, " he says.

Josh says that it really struck him how much his experiences growing up there differed from previous generations -- namely his blissful ignorance of the struggles that came before.

"And the reason it 's different is all the things that ended up in the film, all the risk and sacrifice that these activist heroes took on, " he says. "They volunteered without any idea of whether any of it would bear fruit. That 's when I felt, 'Man, people my generation and younger could really benefit from knowing all these stories.' "

"Images are very powerful, " Harry says. "You can read about about it, and you can have someone tell you about it, but if you can see it actually happening, I think that leaves a deep impression."

"Chinatown Rising " presents footage of Chinese American teachers fighting for affirmative action and bi- lingual education, the trepidation of Chinatown families as schools were desegregated for the first time, and Harry 's own leadership role in advocating for the Mei Lun Yuen affordable housing project.

The film 's core team, including producer James Q. Chan, who directed the 2016 documentary short " Forever Chinatown, " and cinematographer Anson Ho, are all Cameron House alumni. The film 's editor, Greg Louie, is Josh 's former college roommate and co- producer of their public- access show at Davis.

"The feedback has been so passionate, " Josh says of their screenings so far. "It 's inspired me to do my best to get the film out there."

Harry speaks of the seniors that are reminded of the significance of those events. Some return to future screenings with their families, because they think it 's important for them to know their history.

"Then there were younger people who were not necessarily from San Francisco or the Bay Area, but from Chinatowns across the country who said, 'Wow, we didn 't know we could 've done something like this, " he says.

Eventually, they hope to get the funding to edit the documentary into a series of shorter films, so it 's easier for teachers to show in the classroom -- and also include stories that didn 't make it into the final cut.

Nowadays, Josh thinks younger generations of Chinese Americans, especially in areas in the country that have higher populations of Asian Americans, can feel like a very comfortable part of the mainstream.

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"I think the basic question you ask yourself when you think about activism is : What do you see in your life that you feel is unjust ?" Josh says. "And so for the generation that grew up in Chinatown in the '60s, they didn 't have to look very far. It was right in front of them, it was systemic and it affected their everyday lives.

"...there are still many many groups facing the same exact challenges that our people faced, and hopefully the film can inspire young Asian people to look around themselves and say what is unjust and how can I help ?" he added.

Harry now has the perspective he lacked as a graduate student trying and failing to make this film.

"The perspective we gained was one of identity, as Chinese Americans, " he says, "and how we were capable of creating changes that could effectively serve the common good through community involvement and service ... And we would never again return to the days of fear and intimidation that our predecessors experienced."

For more information, visit [chinatownrising.com](http://chinatownrising.com).

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