

ISSC WORKING PAPER SERIES 2004-2005.02

**From “Moving Feels Like Home” to
“We Will Not Be Moved!”: Immigrant
Communities Facing Evictions and the Role
of Young People’s Organizing,
Oakland Chinatown, California, 2003-2005**

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Environmental Science, Policy and Management
March 28, 2006



INSTITUTE FOR
THE STUDY OF
SOCIAL CHANGE

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In April 2003, residents of fifty units of affordable housing were evicted from their low-income units in downtown Oakland, California's Chinatown. The ensuing community struggle demonstrated the challenges of organizing and mobilizing in immigrant and refugee communities who have been subjected to the collective trauma of the last century's wars and displacements in China and throughout Asia. Young people's organizing in Oakland's Chinatown was simultaneously an attempt to heal rifts within the community and between generations, and to articulate a normal and central space for a progressive and radical politics that is grounded in the migration stories of elders.

Introduction¹

In April 2003, over 150 people were evicted from their affordable housing units at 989 Webster Street, part of the Pacific Renaissance Plaza in downtown Oakland's Chinatown. The evictions and the ensuing community actions over the next two years highlight the challenges of mobilizing for collective action on a sustained basis and in a deeply fragmented, deeply injured community. Young people's sense of justice was different from that of professional activists and advocates, as was their sense of community. While professional activists and advocates focused on the legal aspects of the campaign, youth and young adult activists also felt that cultural work was an important aspect of mobilization. These young people added to the campaign cultural productions that emphasized healing collective injuries and celebrating community and identity in order to motivate collective action. Because of these efforts, they succeeded in changing some immigrant tenants' feelings about and experiences of mass mobilizations, American-born Chinese, and the importance of political action. They also challenged adult advocates' understandings of young people's organizing.

In this paper, based on my dissertation research, I focus on the current and former tenants of the Pacific Renaissance Plaza and the work of a youth, arts and Chinese American oriented organization, ChinJurnWorPing (CJWP). In particular, I examine

¹ Address for Correspondence: 410 38th Street APT 2, Oakland, CA 94609. I wish to thank all of the members of the Stop Chinatown Evictions Coalition, past and present, and especially members of CJWP Evictions Crew for their dedication over the years, as well as their support of this work and analysis. In addition, I thank my colleagues at the Movement Strategy Center and Urban Strategies Council for modeling different ways of relating personal political beliefs to community work. To the extent that anything makes sense, I owe those insights to them. Finally, my colleagues, friends and homies at UC Berkeley have been integral to the advancement of this work, in more ways than they might know. In particular, Michael Starkey, Catalina Garzon, Robb Smith, all ISSC Fellows, Brinda Sarathy, Gina Velasco, Lilia Soto, Roberto Hernandez, Clem Lai, Judy Han, Robin Turner, and past and present members of the Race and Environment Working Group and Racialized Natures, Naturalized Differences Working Group. Many thanks go to advisors and mentors along the way: Steve Wainwright, Phyllis Schwartz, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Ignacio Chapela, Jeff Romm, Claudia Carr, Laura Nader, Laura Enriquez, Ada Chan and of course David Minkus, Rivka Polatnick and Christine Trost at the ISSC. Mistakes and omissions are my own, and the usual disclaimers apply.

tenants' experiences of displacement and political action in the past, which inform their recent actions. Next, I present an account of the evictions and the tenants' responses to it. Finally, I discuss three cultural productions of CJWP artists that were linked to the Pacific Renaissance anti-evictions struggles, and show how young people, through these productions, articulated and performed a deep but uniquely diasporic sense of community. I argue that through the production of these artistic objects, the young activists *produce* community, in direct relation to their own understanding of some of the injuries of the community. In this paper I do not provide an exhaustive account of the struggle, but rather concentrate my analysis on the dynamics and lessons of this campaign, which are highly relevant to political organizing and community building in most oppressed communities, and especially in other immigrant refugee communities at the beginning of the 21st century.

A Region in Flux:

Activism and Economics in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1990s

*En la vida dos cosas ciertas
son la muerte y el cambio²*

- Ozomatli

The evictions in the Pacific Renaissance Plaza in Oakland took place in a climate of increased social justice activism in the Bay Area, particularly activism involving environmental justice and youth organizing, and at a time of increasingly difficult economic, political and social conditions for working class, poor and immigrant families. In the Bay Area, as in the nation, the decade of the 1990s saw a rise in grassroots environmental and social justice activism, especially among low-income and working class

² "In life, two things are certain / they are death and change." Ozomatli is a hip-hop, rock *en español* and other Latino-

communities of color (Bullard 2000, Apollon 2003). This activism took the form of struggles for environmental justice, economic justice, housing rights, equitable development and native rights, and struggles against police brutality, homophobia, and environmental racism. Youth organizing also increased dramatically during this time period, in part due to the rash of anti-youth policies that targeted youth of color as criminals.

In the same decade, earnings for the rich and educated increased dramatically, while the earnings of the working poor stagnated (Greenwich and Niedt 2001). California experienced a significant demographic shift, and several statewide ballot propositions relying on and fomenting anti-immigrant fears were passed. These policies reflected concerted initiatives by the neo-conservative right to effectively roll back the gains of the 1960s and 1970s (Lovato 2004). Locally, the low prices of homes and property in the flatlands of Oakland, relative to the rest of the Bay Area, combined with the proximity of Oakland to San Francisco and Silicon Valley made several Oakland and Bay Area neighborhoods extremely vulnerable to displacement and gentrification (Harvey *et al.* 1999, Yee and Quiroz-Martinez 1999, Velasquez Alejandrino 2000, InfoOakland 2004).

By 2000, the dot-com boom had become a bust. In this climate of increasing disparities, Jerry Brown was elected mayor of Oakland. He sought opportunities for elites and the City to make money and targeted the flatlands of Oakland as the sites from which to extract value. Thus, by 2003, Oakland was a city with an antagonistic climate characterized by increasing activism at the community and grassroots level and decreasing support for social justice concerns on the part of the City's bureaucratic apparatus.

Research Methods

My research methods included interviews with evicted tenants from Oakland Chinatown, local housing and community activists, advocates and professionals.³ The interviews are supplemented with and contextualized through ethnographic research at and around key public events: City Council meetings, rallies and other demonstrations. I also incorporate other available documentation of the struggle in my analysis, such as information on organizational and other websites, newspaper articles, fact sheets, and other public materials. These primary sources of information highlight some of the emotional and psychological effects of displacement and their significance for the *community's* sense of well-being and security. In addition, through participation, observation, interviews and conversations with members of the voluntary association CJWP, I was able to explore *with* young activists the multi-layered resonances of their activism.⁴

³ Some of the interviews were conducted as part of class work for SOC 272, taught by Professor Laura Enriquez, in Spring 2004 at UC Berkeley.

⁴ In the interest of full disclosure: I was and continue to be a member of CJWP, active in the Pacific Renaissance Plaza struggle and on several fronts in Oakland progressive politics through the Movement Strategy Center and Urban Strategies Council, particularly around affordable housing and redevelopment. I participated in or helped plan many of the actions discussed below. For me, being actively involved is as much a personal choice as it is an intellectual and ethical one. As a scholar, I bring tools, information and skills to the table, and a certain amount of autonomy in how I spend my time. As a social scientist, I have been trained to hear both the surface and the depth of what people are saying, and to understand and investigate how actions and words meet up, or don't. It has been a healing practice to work with young people committed to creating healthy spaces for this type of work, and so different from what I have experienced on the Berkeley campus. Finally, the scholarly importance of being involved is that it is a misnomer to claim not to be involved. You are involved whether you are on the sidelines or in the thick of it. What matters then is the integrity of your presence and your time. If we, as a community of scholars are committed to a certain amount of commensurability between what we "study" and our own lives, then activism and advocacy are necessarily part of that practice. If as scholars we talk about and critically interrogate the creation or mobilization of community identities, then it behooves us to try to practice and create spaces and identities that are alternatives to the ones we critique. I am interested in people's real theories of change, and I am interested in theory that is articulated with a social change practice; theory should point to change. In this case, I hope this analysis will begin some healing for those in CJWP who have been injured by others' actions and words. and also help to

Brief Campaign Overview

In April 2003, residents of the 50 units of affordable housing at 989 Webster Street received eviction notices in Chinese and English. The first phase of the campaign revolved around a highly active and publicly visible effort to stop the legal evictions, and lasted until September 2003. During this period, several organizations, along with several tenant representatives, quickly formed the Stop Chinatown Evictions Coalition (SCEC, or Coalition), including Oakland Tenants Union (OTU), Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN), Just Cause Oakland (JCO), East Bay Community Law Center (EBCLC), United Seniors of Oakland and Alameda County (USOAC) and ChinJurnWorPing (CJWP). The Coalition built upon networks formed among organizations and individuals during previous work on housing issues in Oakland and anti-war mobilizations.⁵ By September 2003, the developer decided not to continue with the evictions.⁶ Even so, by the time the decision was made, the majority of households had moved out of Pacific Renaissance Plaza to places as far away as Davis and Fremont, California.

The resources mobilized by this fairly diverse coalition in the early stages of the campaign included the support of politicians at the national, state, regional and local levels: U.S. Congressional Representative Barbara Lee, State Assembly Representative Wilma Chan, County Supervisors Alice Lai-Bitker, Nate Miley and Keith Carson, and local City Council members Danny Wan and Henry Chang. In addition to Coalition members, a formidable set of well-known and politically powerful local and regional organizations was assembled by tapping into prior organizational and personal relationships. These organizations included Oakland Coalition of Congregations, the League of Women Voters, Service Employees International Union Local 790, and Urban Strategies Council, all of

⁵ In March of 2003 the United States started dropping bombs on Iraq. San Francisco and the Bay Area were major centers

which were recognized by members of the Oakland City Council as being powerful and having sway in formal political arenas.

A very different array of student, youth and cultural organizations were mobilized by the youth, arts and Asian American Movement-oriented member of the Coalition, CJWP. These included Asian Youth Promoting Advocacy and Leadership (AYPAL); Filipinos for Affirmative Action (FAA); Manilatown Heritage Foundation; Youth Building Immigrant Power (a project of Asian Immigrant Workers' Advocates); Oak Park Tenants Association; Asian American Political Association of the University of California, Berkeley; Asian Students Association of San Francisco State University; Asian American Association of Stanford University and Youth United for Community Action. Although less well known, these organizations are highly respected among youth organizers and environmental justice movement activists. They are organizations that do not consider political power to reside solely in the hands of the state. These different networks and the capacity of CJWP to seek out new allies served to complement the behind-the-scenes work of lawyers and the already-existing networks of established organizations.

By November 2003, the initial political momentum created by the organized response to the evictions was waning, and some organizations (APEN, JCO, USOAC) had already left the Coalition. The campaign leaders' decision to frame the issue as one of seniors' rights and low-income affordable housing in Chinatown had been sufficient to mobilize the Bay Area-wide Asian American community and several prominent Oakland organizations and to convince these organizations to apply political pressure to Oakland City Council members and the developer by participating in several highly visible public rallies (see Figure 1). However, as the campaign shifted from pressuring the city to suing the developer for not repaying a \$7 million loan changes in the capacities of Coalition

members, lack of trust and understanding among Coalition members and organizations, and the slowness of the legal process combined to produce a situation in which the Coalition lost the capacity to continue the highly public nature of the campaign.

Despite these developments, a November 2003 event organized by the CJWP succeeded in recruiting new allies to the struggle, including residents of other low-income immigrant neighborhoods who had fought against similar evictions and for affordable housing in the Oak Park neighborhood in the 1990s. As CJWP organizers took charge of the event, the differences in style between youth and adult organizing became apparent. In addition to the expected statements of solidarity from unions, the League of Women Voters and the Oakland Coalition of Congregations, the event included a guerilla theater skit and poetry readings.

The second phase of the campaign, which began in November 2003 and continued at least through the time of this writing, has been characterized by a lack of clarity within the Coalition about strategy. Members of CJWP argued that pursuing one lawsuit against the City was not going to be sufficient to maintain the momentum of the community campaign. For this reason, they began recruiting other evicted tenants to the campaign and filed a lawsuit for damages against the developer.⁷ Through these efforts of CJWP and the Oakland Tenant Union (OTU), the Pacific Renaissance struggle has been linked to other

campaigns in Oakland around affordable housing and community benefits.⁸ During this time, other Coalition members continued to support two family members of elderly tenants who emerged as leaders from the campaign, and they continued to support the legal cases by planning occasional public events.

In December 2004, the City of Oakland, in part due to community pressure and negative publicity, agreed to sue the developer for “transactions and false statements that duped the City into forgiving the \$7 million loan and any interest in the property” (Burt 2004). Coalition members still hoped to preserve affordable housing units in Oakland Chinatown, although there was disagreement as to whether they should specifically fight for the units at Pacific Renaissance Plaza. This struggle exposes the difference between a community-building and movement building perspective, which sees those units as the legacy of Asian American movement organizing in the 1960s, ‘70s and ‘80s,⁹ and the view of technical professionals such as affordable housing developers and lawyers, who felt that housing units were exchangeable for others in other locations in Chinatown. In December 2004, it was unclear toward which direction the tenant leaders and the Coalition’s analyses pointed. This had changed by August 2005. Dissatisfied with the options available to them as presented by an allied organization (a local non-profit housing development and management organization), the tenant representatives all agreed, after a series of discussions, on the primary importance of retaining the units at Pacific Renaissance Plaza.

⁸ Community benefits in terms of development and redevelopment are attempts by community organizations, in coalition with labor, local non-profit housing developers, other non-profits and sometimes environmentalists to secure benefits for low-income communities from developers. Community benefits agreements are legally binding agreements between the developer and community organizations. This type of negotiation is especially important in urban infill development projects that have a high probability of causing or exacerbating gentrification and displacement of low-income families in largely people of color neighborhoods, often economically depressed. The idea is that development can be used to stabilize communities and residents instead of displacing them. Examples of successfully negotiated community benefits campaigns include the Pacific Renaissance Plaza in the 1970s and 1980s, the Bay View Hunter’s Point Shipyard in San Francisco, California and the Staples Center agreement in Los Angeles, California. For more information on Community Benefits Agreements, especially the Staples Center Agreement, see Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (www.laane.org). For more information on equitable development, see PolicyLink (www.policylink.org) and Urban Strategies Council (www.urbanstrategies.org). The Bay View Hunter’s Point Shipyard Agreement can be found at the following websites: <http://www.lennarbayarea.com/Pages/hunters1.html> and at <http://www.hunterspointshipyard.com/index.html>.

⁹ This fact is discussed in another chapter of my dissertation, which looks at urban renewal in Oakland and Oakland

At the time of this writing (May 2005), the Coalition continues to meet while the lawsuits wind their way through the legal system. Recapturing the energy and activity of the first summer seems highly unlikely and probably unnecessary for the moment. The landlord continues to rent the units out at market-rate¹⁰ to new families on a month-to-month basis, pending a resolution of the lawsuits. Of the original tenants at the time of the evictions, only one family remains.

Coalition members will have to collectively recognize that they are functioning in a period of tenant organizing, not community mobilization, and that this period is characterized by less visible community involvement (in terms of numbers); a reliance on political education and leadership development of individual tenants, representatives and community members; and the maintenance of visibility through intermittent community and media events. Tenant organizing in the context of immigrant and refugee communities, however, is not a straightforward task. Individual and collective histories and memories in this community have deeply impacted people's willingness to engage in collective political action, even when it is in their own self-interest to do so. In fact, people have developed strategies for dealing with displacement that reduce their likelihood of public, collective political activity.

¹⁰ In the lingo of housing, "market- rate" is precisely that: the rate of the market. The contrast between market-rate housing and affordable housing is that affordable housing is usually offered at some discounted rate, and in relation to the median

The Tenants of 989 Webster Street, or Why “Moving Feels Like Home”

You young people fighting Chan are like a young water buffalo trying to fight a tiger.

- Former Pacific Renaissance Plaza tenant

*I need to write about /
how moving feels like home.*

- Ching-In Chen (Chen 2003)

By May 2005, only one of the original forty-five households that resided at 989 Webster Street in April 2003 is still living there. Through translators where necessary, I have had the opportunity to interview and work with and for several of the residents of households who stayed past the July 31, 2003 deadline. In addition, ChinJurnWorPing (CJWP) has managed to keep track of four more households that had moved out, totaling eight.

Early on, the rhetoric of the campaign presented the tenants of Pacific Renaissance Plaza as elderly immigrants, victims of a heartless and greedy landlord (whom the City eventually sued for fraudulent practices around the affordable housing units) and relatively helpless – unless the public stepped in.¹¹ As seen in Figure 1, young Asian American activists and community members reframed this portrayal of seniors using a cultural frame of respect of seniors. This was also a frame used earlier in the campaign by tenants and tenant representatives.

¹¹ The professional advocates who advised this framing were basing it on polling information from a previous, successful campaign for renter’s rights that indicated that seniors’ protection and children’s protection were frames that most

While this frame may be useful for mobilizing other Oakland residents, from a tenant organizing and community empowerment point of view it is also problematic. At a deep level, the tenants do not generally see themselves as powerless (with the exception of this instance). And while they have been the victims of the actions of a greedy and heartless landlord, they do not see themselves generally as victims in the world. Rather, they see themselves as survivors and actors in their own lives. Collectively, they have experienced and survived the multiple wars and turmoils of the last century in Asia, including several rounds of civil war in China, the Japanese occupation during World War II, the brutal internal policies of Mao in the 1960s and 1970s and the massacre in 1989 of students and working class people in Tiananmen Square. The eldest resident of Pacific Renaissance Plaza, Yen Hom, became the most public example of this history. She was featured prominently in articles in *AsianWeek*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *San Jose Mercury News* and the *Los Angeles Times* (DaFao 2003, Kleupfel 2003, Nhu 2003). Mrs. Hom had survived Japanese bombing of China during World War II and the displacements of the Communist Revolution of China in the 1940s and 1950s. Her husband had been a pilot in the Chinese Air Force. She spent most of her middle age as a mother of two boys, ran a store in East Oakland, and eventually retired. She moved into Pacific Renaissance Plaza in the early 1990s and was one of the longest-term residents of the apartments.

Of her two sons, one is a social worker in East Oakland and the other is a filmmaker, photographer and artist living in San Francisco. Both had participated in the struggles of Asian Americans in the Bay Area – one, in the Third World Strike at UC Berkeley demanding an Ethnic Studies department, and the other in the International Hotel

struggle in San Francisco in the 1970s.¹² For them, the current struggle at Pacific Renaissance Plaza was linked to prior struggles they had been involved in as young men, and to their analyses of capitalism and race. They also felt that it was socially important that some people stayed and fought the evictions, because this goes against the tradition of Chinese people leaving – fleeing – when there’s trouble. Taking a stand, publicly, was important, and they were both convinced that standing up, finally, also prolonged and made more meaningful the life of their elderly mother in her last year.

While Mrs. Hom was an immigrant from southern China, some of the other residents were ethnic Chinese who had emigrated from Taiwan or were refugees from Vietnam and other parts of Southeast Asia. Both streams of immigration are tied to U.S. government ambitions in Southeast Asia and tied to fears of Communism in China. Indeed, the diversity of stories and experiences of the residents of the Pacific Renaissance Plaza represents most of the migration streams of Asians in the immigrant community in Oakland.

The residents, then, of Pacific Renaissance Plaza’s 989 Webster Street apartments were extremely diverse in terms of political experience, economic status, and countries of origin. Tenants included young adults in their 30s to elders in their late 70s and 80s. While most were monolingual Cantonese or Mandarin speakers, some residents could also speak English. Some were recent immigrants, having moved to the U.S. in the last 10 years, while others had lived over 30 or 40 years in the U.S. They had come to the U.S. from Canton, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and had worked as restaurant busboys, small store

¹² The International Hotel (I-Hotel) was a single resident occupancy (SRO) hotel in San Francisco Chinatown and Manilatown, on Kearny Street. Young people in the 1960s were organizing in the building as part of the Asian American Movement. The elderly Chinese and Filipino residents received eviction notices and the ensuing community struggle lasted 10 years, with the developer changing hands several times. The final night of the I-Hotel, police forcibly evicted the elderly residents, while community supporters resisted by forming a human wall five and six people deep (Choy 1993 [1983], Louie and Omatsu 2001). The I-Hotel continues to have resonance for activists from that time period as well as for young activists now (Lee 2004). The original site today is being reconstructed as a senior center and community center, with affordable housing, guided by the International Hotel Foundation and the Manilatown Heritage Foundation (MHF). Activists from that time period who are still well-known and active include poet Al Robles and Emil Guzman, who now works in the San Francisco Housing Department and chairs the MHF. As of August 2005, the New International Hotel is

owners, businessmen, and in social service departments in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Others were journalists, bank tellers, or medical doctors. Their children, many of whom are located in the Bay Area, are social service providers, businessmen and women, architects, teachers and school children. Many households included more than one generation or couple.

The residents were also exposed to various experiences of government and war, including the wars in China in the middle part of the last century, the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution and concurrent U.S.-backed wars in Southeast Asia and McCarthy-era type repression in Taiwan, and the Tiananmen Square protests and massacre that closed the 1980s. Most came to the U.S. with the belief that the U.S. government would protect their rights against these types of incursions. All were low- or fixed income. For some, given their experiences of war, violence, immigration and labor, filtered through Chinese, Taiwanese, Cantonese and Hong Kong cultural lenses, being evicted was a small matter compared to the experiences they had known. Others, who had been part of organized lawsuits in prior campaigns, knew how long the legal system could take to remedy ills, and preferred to move on. A few tenants stayed to fight, either because they were too old or sick to move, or because they were so shocked at the injustice. However, this sense of injustice was rooted in at least one person's idea that this shouldn't happen *in the U.S.*, since landlords' rapacity is a well-known character trope in Chinese stories.

Even though the tenants desired the existence of a righteous government, due to their varying experiences with and in government, they did not place great trust in the system. In general, given the experience in China of the past century of government sponsored mass movements, people like these tenants have a deep mistrust of even the most well-intentioned government-sponsored policies, as well as of mass movements. In fact,

of Maoist slogans from the Cultural Revolution. Mass political manifestations and, by extension, collective political action are suspect and to be avoided at best. The belief that a righteous government will protect people's rights was apparent when, in the early phase of the campaign, tenants came out to rallies and public manifestations. When results were not immediate, however, many concentrated their energies on moving and finding new places to live. As the eviction date drew closer, most households moved out of Pacific Renaissance Plaza; some moved to places with rents of two or three hundred dollars higher per month. At this point most households also stopped being involved in tenant meetings. For them, moving on was a physical as well as a psychological break with the place they had called their home.

The tenants are survivors, and the survival strategy has been one of moving – fast, at the first sign of trouble, to be in advance of the frontlines of war. An example of this was one man who had moved from Taiwan to Oakland because he wanted there to be some place for his son to go, in the event that Taiwan and China go to war. Although he had been a senior employee in Taiwan's Ministry of Social Services, he was spending his retirement making bracelets and handicrafts in Oakland to sell at local farmers' markets. This man's actions, like those who moved out as soon as they could after receiving the evictions notices, are related to deep cultural patterns of fear and generations-long experience with war. Moving – fleeing, escaping – is a survival strategy, and somehow familiar, as Ching-In Chen expresses in her poem-film, “moving feels like home” (Chen 2003). And, for these tenants and Chinese immigrants in the United States in general, there is the sense of living on a terrain with very limited options. Most tenants expressed fear and anxiety around their options when they received the eviction notices. Even when told of their options, there was a deeply held skepticism on their part as to the possibility that their rights would be upheld

– their questions ranged from ones like, “But does this really work?” to questions about the legal process that stumped even the community law clinic’s interns.

The stories of the tenants from Pacific Renaissance Plaza encompass the full range and diversity of class, national and generational positions of the Chinese diaspora, and highlight the importance of people's personal histories and experiences in relation to their likelihood of reacting to structural injury in a collective and overtly political fashion.¹³ Given the experience of the last century throughout Asia, poor, senior and working class Chinese immigrants in the United States face cultural barriers to advocating on their own behalf and in their own self-interest, in addition to structural ones. In particular, given the displacements they have already experienced, moving has become a survival strategy. This makes perfect sense in the context of immigrants’ experiences, and the loss of social, political, familial, cultural and linguistic ties that help individuals and families feel connected to a community, a place, or a nation.¹⁴ Finally, immigrant families’ experiences cannot be understood solely in the context of their countries of origin. One must also consider the complicated situations and intersections of entire families: immigrant parents or grandparents, 1.5 and second generation children, and their varying extended family structures and networks that link forwards and backwards into most streams of migration and immigration that make up the Chinese diaspora.

In this historical-cultural context, then, the difficulty of community organizing becomes apparent. Because of the deeply ingrained fears and memories of persecution around mass movements, the same manifestations and tactics of community organizers and professional activists that are a source of inspiration for U.S.-born and younger activists are

¹³ Here and later in the paper, I use political to denote the arena of formal politics, in the narrow sense, such as participation in electoral politics. I differentiate this form of politics from cultural politics and other forms of political activity that are outside the formal political arena.

¹⁴ Catherine Ceniza Chov (2003). in *Empire of Care*. documents the “grooves” of practices, beliefs, relationships and ties

not attractive to the generation of Chinese migrants that grew up in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. In addition, language barriers and the lack of extensive family networks may contribute to a lack of understanding of one's legal and political options and may serve to reinforce individuals' mistrust of legal options and recourse. Because of their complicated positionality as 1.5-, second and nth generation people of Chinese, Taiwanese and Cantonese descent, young organizers in CJWP directed much of their community cultural activities around the anti-evictions struggles toward re-framing what they considered to be the major barriers to political activity in the Chinese immigrant community.

Young People's Organizing: "We Will Not Be Moved!"

The young(er) activists of CJWP had different relationships to the Chinatown community, to the City of Oakland and to top-down power from those of the more established and well-resourced groups in the Coalition. While CJWP members had extensive networks in the youth organizing movement organizations in the Bay Area, the Asian American arts and performance networks, and anti-war mobilization organizations, the networks formed by OTU, APEN and JCO included well-known political and community organizations in Oakland, lawyers throughout the Bay Area, unions and those within the bureaucratic and administrative structure of the City. Coalition organizations shared similar but importantly different understandings of and approaches to community organizing. One of the main features present in youth and young people's organizing that was missing from the approach of the adult-led and adult-focused organizations is the focus on transformational organizing, which entails political education of activists, tenants and community members simultaneously. Young people's organizing often assumes that no one knows everything. and that everyone is still learning. whereas professional models of

organizing and community change often presuppose a "theory" and "model" of community change that an organization then attempts to "apply." Unless those models include the ability to be flexible and change through time and in relation to different communities, these models of organizing, while sometimes successful in terms of policy successes, also have created a "dysfunctional organizational culture"¹⁵ in several community organizations in Oakland, with the effect of alienating the immigrant and working class base in the neighborhoods that make up the "marginalized" communities in Oakland. This is a challenge and a tension that organizers in Oakland will continue to face, in addition to the challenges of organizing in this hyperdiverse city.

The Importance of History: Mobilizing Young Activists

WE WILL NOT BE MOVED
Detachment or action you've got to choose. ...
WE WILL NOT BE MOVED
Generations overdue now we got to prove.

- Magnetic North (Vu and Kan 2004)

Young people's organizing in the Bay Area and nationwide often includes a stronger emphasis on cultural activism and transformational organizing when compared to professional or Alinsky-based models of organizing with adults (Rios 2004; Quiroz-Martinez et al. 2005). CJWP fits this trend. As with most young people's organizing efforts, adults and mentors are key supports. In this case, CJWP's advisors and mentors came from professional, non-profit, academic and old-school (or "OG"¹⁶) activist sectors. In order for young people to understand the importance of affordable housing in relation to "revolutionary politics" and social justice, members of CJWP, who are from different class

¹⁵ Personal communication, community organizer, May 29, 2005.

¹⁶ "OG" is a common abbreviation used by younger activists in their teens, 20s and early 30s to signify "older generation" or "old guard" activists who were part of 1960s and 1970s-era activism. It is also a reference found within hip-hop and

and geographical backgrounds, needed to embed this struggle within a larger history of activism in the Asian American community in the Bay Area.

Some CJWP members came to the campaign with a political stance and analysis that was based in a desire to ground themselves in local Chinese communities in the Bay Area, while others came to the campaign later because of a desire to work on this particular campaign. Most knew very little about affordable housing issues, although many came from an explicitly anti-racist political stance and had student organizing, community organizing or direct social service provision experience. They had come together out of a desire to increase the visibility of left and radical politics in the Chinese-American community in the Bay Area. Other members joined the campaign later, for various reasons: as one woman said, “My grandparents live in affordable housing in Oakland. These people could be my grandparents.”¹⁷

Organizing, for these children of immigrants, was tied to a broadly inclusive and diasporic notion of community as extended family, based on an *experience* of family that includes themselves, the cousins who grew up in vanilla suburbs, the uncle and aunt who just came over last year, and the sister who is a well-paid doctor with conservative politics in the South Bay. Professional organizers’ narrow view of immigrants as the individuals who came over reproduces the fractures imposed by bureaucratic definitions of immigrants rather than embracing the diasporic notion of community used within the community itself. Thus, instead of supporting young people’s efforts, professional advocacy organizations reinforced the alienation of young people’s organizing in the community, and undercut a common cultural dynamic of immigrant families, where young people serve as linguistic and cultural interpreters and navigators for immigrant elders and new arrivals. At the same time, in many immigrant communities, there is also a sense of a “generation gap.” In

contrast to this approach, the young people and elders who came together to form CJWP strove to change the political nature of activism and leftist politics in the Chinese-American community embraced by *people like their parents and grandparents* – and, in doing so, to connect or reconnect with the community from which they felt alienated.¹⁸

Through leads initially uncovered by the joint efforts of OTU, EBCLC and CJWP, and followed up by myself, Coalition members learned that the community benefits enjoyed by residents of the Pacific Renaissance Plaza – the Oakland Asian Cultural Center, the Asian Branch of the Oakland Public Library, the public plaza and 50 units of affordable housing – were themselves the products of community struggle in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. In particular, the original desire for affordable housing units was sparked and supported by the Reverend Frank Mar, known among OG Asian American movement activists as a staunch supporter of services for immigrants and youth in Oakland Chinatown. A second generation of activists in Oakland Chinatown, concurrent with the Third World strikes on the Berkeley campus and the International Hotel struggle in San Francisco Chinatown/Manilatown, alternately struggled and worked with the City of Oakland and other organizations to secure these benefits from the 1970s through the late 1980s.

Willard Chow describes these struggles over the meaning and goals of redevelopment in the 1960s and 1970s in the Chinatown community as being largely between “community” interests and business interests represented by the Chinatown Chamber of Commerce (Chow 1974). Frank Mar was a key Oakland Chinatown figure who spearheaded efforts for affordable housing and social services for youth and seniors, and was the earliest advocate for and supporter of Asian American activism in Oakland

¹⁸ Here I am referring to the sense of a generation gap, which is also related to Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of searching for home, as expressed as a longing or desire, but with which the individual, by nature of her being (queer, educated, politically progressive or radical, etc). is also irreconcilable. always also an outsider (Anzaldúa 1987. Anzaldúa and

(Mar 1984). Newspaper articles published in the 1980s show that there were financial difficulties with what was originally going to be a locally financed development, starting with the initial feasibility study in the 1960s that was paid for by community members. Local Chinese- or Asian American developers did not have access to the capital to finance the large developments that the City and Chinatown Chamber of Commerce envisioned (Jones and Associates *et al.* 1965, Chow 1974, Oakland Post 1974). Instead, they awarded a contract to a foreign developer from Malaysia, to construct “Hong Kong USA,” a Disneyland type park with a Japanese garden and pagoda (Oakland Post 1978),¹⁹ to be built by an Asian investor/developer (Harrison 1985).²⁰ The plans for the development were contested throughout this period by business interests who wanted to create what Funie Hsu (2003) calls an “urban cultural playground” and by those like Frank Mar and many young Asian Americans from UC Berkeley who advocated for a community-oriented development that served the needs of local low-income residents. It was not until the late 1980s that a proposal was negotiated and a development agreement signed (*AsianWeek* 1986). The project did not open its doors until 1993.

Framing the story of Pacific Renaissance Plaza’s affordable units as the product of struggle linked to those of the 1960s and 1970s added moral and historical importance to those units for both the tenants and many of the organizations in the Coalition, beyond the injustice done to the tenants. The site of the Plaza was now the only physical marker of the struggles of the 1960s and 1970s movement era in Oakland, when Black Panthers and Red Guards²¹ worked together. Framing the Pacific Renaissance Plaza evictions as embedded in a long history of conflict over the definition of community and development in Chinatown

¹⁹ This development may have been seen as a complement to the similarly Orientalist plans for Japantown proposed at the same time by San Francisco developers. See Clement Lai’s important work on similar struggles in the Western Addition and Japantown in San Francisco in the 1960s and 1970s.

²⁰ Thanks to Julia Liou of Asian Health Services and Kelly Fong for providing electronic copies of the original documents.

²¹ Both groups were militant activist groups based in African American and Asian American enclaves. respectfully. in the

also changed the political nature of the struggle. The ten-year struggle to convince a developer to provide affordable housing at a financial loss, was now understood by community members as part of nearly forty years of community struggle that produced barely seven years of affordable housing, subsidized by the City, at an overcharge to the tenants, at that. Linking the current struggle to the efforts of the respected Reverend Mar also increased support among some members of the established Chinese American families of Oakland, including individuals who were able to influence some members of the City Council.

For many CJWP members, establishing such a direct link to the I-Hotel in San Francisco and to a relatively unknown set of struggles in Oakland in the same time period added a sort of mystique to the issue. The link also validated this struggle and the methods they used, ranging from collaborative tactics, such as visits to City Council, to more confrontational direct actions like rallies and pickets. CJWP activists also organized several non-confrontational mass mobilizations that were more like celebrations of community pride and demonstrations of wide-ranging solidarity than the more confrontational picketing used earlier to target and shame the developer.

The history of resistance also has meaning for other Chinese American and Asian American activists. For instance, one activist told me, “This has been a community struggle for 30 years, we have to fight.”²² The I-Hotel movement also had a lasting impact on Mrs. Yen Hom, a long-term resident of the Pacific Renaissance Plaza, who pledged, “I’m not leaving until the sheriffs come and drag me out.”²³ Asian Americans’ defiance, in solidarity with immigrant elders, had made a lasting impression on women in Mrs. Hom’s generation, as well as for those of the current generation, and helped to unite people separated by the experiences of over sixty-five years, two continents, the Pacific Ocean, and several

languages (新島 2004). History does take on meaning, but in the context of new stories being made and told. Every generation must discover its purpose and make meaning for itself.

Cultural and Arts Activism as a Mobilizing and Healing Practice

Bringing into the struggle younger and more militant activists who had a deep commitment to community work, and giving them reasons to stay involved and attached, also brought to the struggle their capacity to throw creative community (and media) events and create original art, such as paintings, t-shirts, videos and posters, which the Coalition utilized throughout the course of the struggle. In this section I examine three different sorts of cultural production in which artists affiliated with CJWP engaged. These include an open mic fundraiser in July 2003, a poem-film by poet Ching-In Chen, which was first screened in Spring 2004, and a series of paintings by visual artist and graphic designer Joy Gloria Liu. Together, these productions illustrate young people's sense of community and the relationship of Chinese "lifelong unintentional migrants" (Chen 2003) to displacement, political action, and community.

The open mic fundraiser was held in July 2003 (see Figure 2). Through the efforts of the CJWP organizers, a wide array of Asian Americans showed up, from U.S.-born and 1.5-generation high school and college students to new immigrants, second-generation professionals, and members of the Asian American movement in the 1960s and 70s. Present were Al Robles and Emil Guzman, key figures in the International Hotel movement, and Charlie Chin, an OG musician and performing artist. Artwork, photos and posters featured memorabilia from the Asian American movement of the 1960s and 1970s,

Civil Rights movement. In addition, the open mic fundraiser featured a venue where young artists and activists performed and exhibited side-by-side with artists in their 50s and 60s.

As Gordon Lee expresses in his paper “Excavating Memories, Constructing Dreams,” the International Hotel *story* is important because it is a story that links generations’ histories. It has become mythical. The story is also important because it is part of a long standing but suppressed history of struggles for respect and dignity that are part of Asian *American* history and of people’s daily lives. It is a crystallization of many forces and the momentum of the times in which it was embedded (Lee 2004). The International Hotel story is also important because many of the young people of CJWP and other Asian American formations claim the I-Hotel as part of their ancestry, and the Pacific Renaissance Plaza story is in broad brushstrokes highly similar. Also, as I showed earlier, the Pacific Renaissance Plaza’s affordable housing units are a product of similar struggles in Oakland, which occurred at the same time as the I-Hotel dispute.

The open mic fundraiser also highlights another general feature of youth organizing nationwide, which I and others document in another study (Quiroz-Martinez *et al.* 2005) and Victor Rios (2004) documents in his study of Chicano youth in the Bay Area: Youth activists use cultural and media arts as tools for community gathering and organizing, and as ways to reflect on how they see the world around them, to place a particular situation in a larger, systemic analysis, and to communicate their perspectives in light of identity, often grounded in historical events, identities and community-specific icons. In doing so, they *create* collective identities linked to progressive and radical political projects. This is what Chen (2003) calls “the rhythm of bilingual children singing their own cross continent creation story.”

Young activists were able to link the stories and struggles of recently arrived migrants with those of old Oakland Chinese Americans like Frank Mar, the prominent pastor mentioned earlier who fought for affordable housing and supported young people's organizing and services for seniors in the 1960s and 1970s. They linked these different migration stories and histories together with the experiences of being second-generation and growing up at the end of the 20th century. *This* is the community that CJWP's young adult activists called out to and called into being in the production of the open mic, encompassing a different scope of activists *and* community than the more bureaucratically-minded adult and professional activists. Specifically, as evidenced by the production of the event, these young organizers envisioned community and ancestry as encompassing the multiple streams of migration of Chinese- and Asian Americans into the United States, and much more than blood. In addition, they claim activists of other movements as their ancestors, elders, sisters and brothers.

*The rhythm of bilingual children /
singing their own cross-continent creation story.*

- Ching-In Chen (2003)

Ching-In Chen's poem-film opens with Art Hom, the son of one of the eldest tenants of Pacific Renaissance Plaza, at a rally at San Francisco State University, saying, "In the 60s, we used to hold sit-ins. Well, my mother has been conducting a live-in against the landlord's request for the last six to eight months." Chen overlays the beginning of the hip-hop song, "We Will Not Be Moved!" by Asian American hip hop duo Magnetic North (Teresa Vu and Derek Kan), with the voices of several different people with various accents who read and perform a poem (Figure 3), and with images of Oakland Chinatown, the Pacific Renaissance Plaza, and members of CJWP putting up flyers and distributing leaflets

about upcoming events. The poem-film ends with the camera resting on a grandmother, sitting in the Plaza, and then cuts to the rest of Magnetic North's song, while rolling credits and information on how to get involved. The last shot is Sam Hom, the younger son of Mrs. Yen Hom, at a rally in front of Oakland City Hall. With his fist raised, and wearing his father's bomber jacket, he says, "Thank you very much. Power to the people. Tenants united will never be defeated."

In this production, we see clearly the links that Chen is trying to draw between movement tactics in the 1960s and the current struggle. She uses the currency of urban youth: hip hop and poetry. By including performers with various accents (among them, East Asian, South Asian and Chicano), she normalizes the voices of immigrants, and shows that this particular struggle is not just about Chinatown and Chinese elders, but that it is relevant to immigrant communities in general. The poem evokes the reasons why people migrate(d) to the U.S., their hopes and aspirations, and is critical of suburban "cream-filled walls" where the lack of community is equated with a lack of civic participation and isolation. Through images and words, the poem-film also expresses a love for Chinatown, and for the inhabitants there, regardless of blood connection. Again, as in the previous open mic production, tropes of family are portrayed with much love for the suffering that the elders have gone through, for a family that is not blood, and for the histories of struggle that are often suppressed in immigrant families under the pressure of assimilation.

*4 vertical panels encompass four treasons upon /
one fierce woman surpassing*

- joy gloria liu (Liu 2004)

Yen Hom passed away on October 29, 2005. Joy Gloria Liu's paintings of Mrs. Hom's life (see Figure 4) is another production that excavates histories of resistance within

the lives of people like our parents and grandparents. As the daughter of immigrant Taiwanese parents, Liu understands the double consciousness of Chinese Americans who live in a racist society, but who are also part of a community that holds a deep sentiment that U.S.-born children are not fully Chinese and never quite good enough. The painting depicts, in the first three panels, Chinese fighter planes over Yen Hom's village in southern China, the Japanese invasion of China, and the conflict between the Chinese Communist Party and Kuo Ming Tang (Nationalist Party). Each time, when faced with displacement and war, Yen Hom fled, eventually making it to Oakland and running a small corner store in East Oakland. The last panel depicts Mrs. Hom at age 90 standing up to another displacement. This time she stayed in her apartment and conducted a live-in for 18 months. According to her sons, Mrs. Hom's decision to stay and fight gave additional meaning to the last year and a half of her life. She had a lot more energy. Standing up to this injustice was an affirmation of her life – as she said, “I am not a dead rat to be thrown in the streets” (Kleupfel 2003). Liu's paintings and accompanying artist statement honors the history of displacement and trauma, asserts that “there are still hearts left in these mined fields” and finally, that “you * cant * run * forever.” For Liu, the role of young people in continuing the struggle is to honor the spirit of those who have fought before us, for “the right to thrive instead of get by surviving.” The task that lies ahead is to “continue to make fruit of doubt, squeeze hope outta concrete dreams and nightmares colored green.”

The graphic design style of Liu also shows clearly several characteristics of the activism of Generation X and Yers, also known as youth activists and hip hop activists (Chang 2003, Young Wisdom Project of the Movement Strategy Center 2004, Movement Strategy Center 2005). Her graphic design and illustrative style echoes the illustrative styles of muralists and graffiti artists, having moved from either the realist or modernist styles of painters. The shifting perspective of the pine tree moving through the four panels

ties them together. The mixed media (wood, glass, acrylic paints) encompass not just the four paintings, but also the entire installation (candles, incense). In this installation Liu is drawing on Chinese tradition of honoring the dead through the burning of candles and incense, but honors Mrs. Hom through her words and through the telling of her story with more than one image. Liu also manages to portray several controversial and difficult periods of recent history in China, without passing judgment. In all, the beauty of the piece is a testament to the resilience and courage of Yen Hom and her generation of women in the face of over a century of war and displacements.

These productions –the open mic, the video, and the paintings – reveal young Chinese and Taiwanese American women’s intimate understanding of deep pain and fear within the Chinese and Taiwanese immigrant community. The productions are also simultaneously interventions: they offer alternative interpretations of events as attempts to heal injury, provide alternate versions of community, draw strength from actions born of fear and survival, and reinscribe the relationship between elders and youth as supportive and healthy instead of antagonistic and hierarchical.

First, their evocation of a community as a family that consists of multiple generations, born in many places *including generations born in the United States or outside of Asia* (e.g. the Caribbean, Africa, or elsewhere), and including previous generations of activists, contrasts with professional activists’ definition of community as only recent, monolingual immigrants. Their practice of enacting and gathering community and family draws upon young people’s activism as defined by Jeff Chang (2005), Chinese and immigrant forms of organizing, as well as Chinese and other immigrant families as defined by the extended family (and in opposition to the nuclear family).

Second, young activists of CJWP articulated an alternative to what they understood from their own immigrant family experiences – that moving feels like home. They took this deeply ingrained belief that precludes or discourages resistance and oppositional thought and practice in the community, and articulated opposition as “We will not be moved!” This cry was heard in other Asian communities at the same time, and resonates, in light of the history of Japanese American internment during World War II and the deportation of Southeast Asians today. They articulated their opposition to moving using the currency of young people’s and hip hop activism (mixed media, poetry, hip hop), and situated it in the context of honoring elders and women, their struggles in coming to the United States, and the bitterness of unrealized dreams and hopes of immigrants like their parents and grandparents. For these young people, the young adults of immigrant families, resisting the urge to run resonates at many levels and also draws strength from a response born out of a survival instinct that came across the ocean.

Finally, young people’s activism of CJWP honors elders. As was expressed to me in interviews, there is a complex relationship between these activists as well as other 1.5-, second and nth generation Chinese and Taiwanese American young people and those who immigrated – their sisters and brothers, parents and grandparents. In these artistic productions, young women counteract the widely-held belief among immigrants that in America young people disrespect elders, don’t understand or respect Chinese customs and beliefs, and therefore are not Chinese enough. They create expressions that demonstrate the potential strength of being “not Chinese, not American.” Instead of being *hollow* inside, and prevented from being truly connected to either culture, as is connoted in a commonly held derogatory name in Cantonese for American born Chinese – *jooksing* (竹心), *these* *jooksing* have created acts and art pieces that reflect “traditionally” Chinese values such as

youth and young adults, that is, *full* – full of culture, full of love, full of hope, full of strength. In addition, they challenge some deeply held practices, such as moving and avoiding confrontation and public oppositional action, in the context of linking practice to hurts and trauma of older generations. So these acts are also healing acts for these young women themselves.

Given the deeply ingrained displacements and fears in the collective psyche of migrants that I discussed in the first section of this paper, young Chinese-American (women's) attempts to articulate an alternative sense of community and to excavate stories and myths of individual and collective strength are helping to heal those collective psychological wounds, to bridge the geographical and temporal rifts present in a constantly shifting and continually migrating community. In the act of representing their community, they articulate a grounded, normal, and central space for progressive politics.

This is the rhythm of bilingual children, singing their own cross continent creation story.

Conclusion

Driven by their diasporic sense of community, young people's organizing in immigrant communities in the case of Pacific Renaissance Plaza in Oakland, California Chinatown transformed what had been, up until their interventions, a mostly professional adult-oriented and adult-led movement. Several factors account for their success. First, these young people understood and responded to the deep cultural fear and negative view of 1960s mass movement-style demonstrations held by older members of the Chinese immigrant community. They also were compassionate to the fate of elders and evicted

evictions informed the decisions made by professional advocates, who were more likely to use economic measures to determine the feasibility of demands. Second, the young people understood the transformative effects of their organizing and the necessity of incorporating political education into the campaign precisely because most of these youth came from conservative or aggressively apolitical families. After all, they were organizing with and among people like themselves, their parents and grandparents. Third, in contrast to professional advocates, young people's organizing in immigrant communities was embedded within a broad sense of community that bridged generational, country of origin and language differences. In fact, they embraced a sense of community that was different from the professional advocate's sense of community. They understood that immigrant extended family structures and networks contrast with American or Western nuclear family ideal types.

The community enacted by professional advocates included other neo-Alinskyist organizations or organizations with formal political power. In contrast, the community and family constituted and enacted by young organizers of CJWP included elders in "the Movement," cousins in other social justice, anti-capitalist and other movements, sisters and brothers in local movements, arts and culture organizations, and youth organizing. Elders and family included people from all races and ethnicities, people who are part of an economic elite, who grew up in the suburbs, who may have issues of internalized racism and sexism, as well as people who have grown up in the neighborhood, live there now, and are the core membership base of professional advocates' organizing efforts. Because of the fractures within the community, young people's organizing was also an attempt to create a space to heal the wounds created by negative stereotypes of young people and artists and articulate a normal and central space for progressive politics within the community. Thus,

in the act of struggling for recognition and space, they also created it. They produced the transformations that they (continue to) seek.

In addition to demonstrating the transformative effects of youth organizing, this case study holds several lessons for existing academic and popular literature. First, the Pacific Renaissance case demonstrates the importance of cultural and historical knowledge as resources²⁴ for mobilizing collective action and for framing social justice struggles. In particular, this case study shows that young people in the Chinese American youth organizing and arts communities have been central to producing narratives that have changed immigrants' and older people's views of collective political action. Second, this study shows that young people's organizing for social justice in the Bay Area takes a different form from professional and elite activism. Third, this case study documents the stories and voices of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans, which are frequently left out of the largely elite-focused "official" histories and accounts of Oakland and the Bay Area.²⁵ In doing so, this study begins to restore the place and importance of *our* voices, experiences, dreams and struggles in that story, and challenges students of social movements to do the same.

²⁴ This is a gesture towards Western social science social movement theory. However, the language of resources itself may be considered problematic within a social justice and transformational organizing frame, as it is deeply linked to notions of capitalism and property.

²⁵ Few documents exist that include Asian and Pacific islanders' stories as part of Oakland's diverse communities. While Eve Ma's (2000) history of Oakland Chinatown brings some aspects of the history of Chinese-Americans in Oakland to light, the book rarely examines important differences in positionality and fractures within the Chinese community in Oakland. Bill Wong's (2004) photo book *Oakland's Chinatown* reframes the Pacific Renaissance struggle as a case of

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Figure 1. Young activists, Coalition members and supporters in front of the Parc 55 Hotel in San Francisco, CA, where the developer Lawrence Chan was chairing a meeting of the Hong Kong Association of Northern California. June 12, 2003. Photo: Derek Chung.

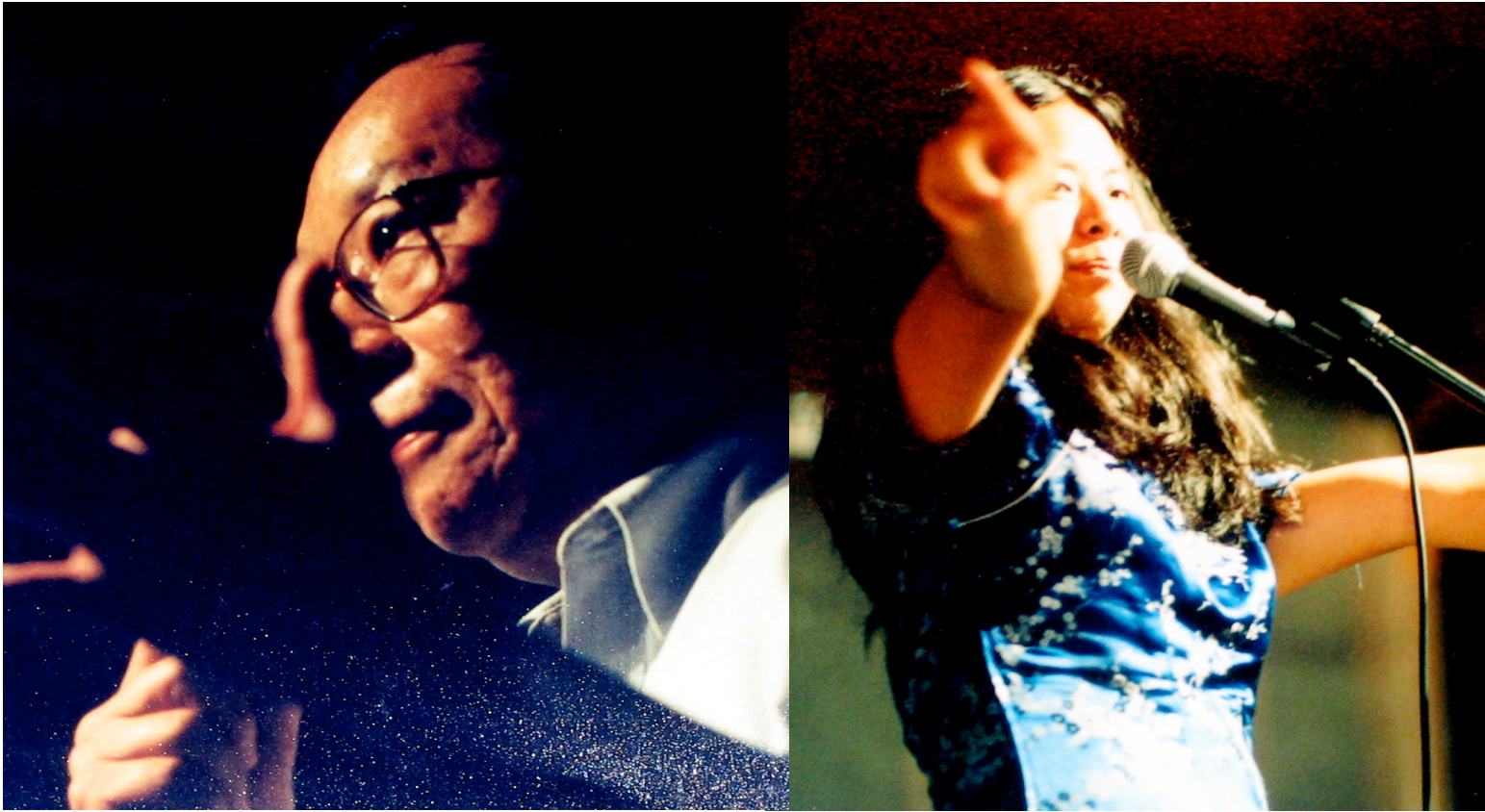


Figure 2. Francis Chang, the son of elderly tenants at the Pacific Renaissance Plaza, and Ching-In Chen, CJWP member and organizer of Mango Mic, a monthly bay Area API open mic, speak out at the open mic fundraiser, July 12, 2003. Photos: Craig Matsuzaki.

I need to write about / how moving feels like home

I need to write about how moving feels like home
 survival within these streetside halfway weed cracks
 the wanderers street edges in cultivation
 These corners built on years of fallen asphalt language
 Ethnic enclave waste

The rhythm of bilingual children
 singing their own cross continent creation story
 Of how these street signs
 9th and Webster
 Broadway and 10th
 11th and Harrison
 Guideposts to these star strick [?] scar worn bodies
 Hoping to bridge the gap from Chinatown to beyond

Always
 bending
 carrying
 reaching for that
 chance of salvation
 from those who say 5 dollar plate of chink food
 last longer than Saturday morning perspiration

others who surround themselves with suburban cream
 filled walls
 doorways blocking the daily battle cries of their
 people
 who cannot ignore one another
 or sit in isolation
 and slowly die one

but this language they don't comprehend
 rises out of the weight these purple and gray concrete
 remnants
 smell like summer cooking of food stalls
 sweat and papaya

the roast of melting duck and crispy pork skin
 fish scales crucified the wrinkles of a grandma's palm

maybe she lives here
 among these cracked, crushed ice streets
 which taste like unburied persimmon seeds
 I see her shadow cascading among waterfalls and
 windowpanes
 Doorsteps and shop entrances
 Friends and neighbors

She
 lifelong unintentional migrant
 the learned salt of remembrance
 city streets swallow years of her morning laughing
 fragrance
 under these walls cradle the withered body
 taste like fists
 flowers
 flights
 concrete
 vegetables
 a gold mine of desperate times

family offering
 a home her spirit inhabits
 breezes throughout
 she
 loved
 beautiful
 strong
 as a woman
 as woman
 here

-- Ching-In Chen, *We Will Not Be Moved!* (2003)

Figure 3. The lines in Ching-In Chen's poem-film.



Figure 4. Joy Gloria Liu's paintings of Mrs. Yen Hom's life, as installed in front of the courthouse in Oakland, California. December 17, 2004. Photos: Diana Pei Wu.

Figure 5. Art Hom, at a December 17, 2004 commemoration event in front of Alameda County Superior Courthouse, Oakland, CA. Photo: Diana Pei Wu.





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