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CHRIS FRIDAY. *Organizing Asian American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned-Salmon Industry, 1870-1942*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994.

BENSON TONG. *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco*. Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994.

JUDY YUNG. *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

ON A ROUND GLOBE, where does the "Occident" end and the "Orient" begin? Edward Said limited his famous discussion of "Orientalism" to the Middle East, reducing some of the confusion of boundaries, but the U.S. West has been a troubled zone of cultural interaction for centuries. In Said's Foucauldian formulation, the establishment of a systematic "Orientalist" discipline of study was a crucial adjunct to imperialism, a process of observation (surveillance) and categorization that helped separate, essentialize, and control the colonial subject (the Other). As characterized by Western scholars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Orient was static, politically corrupt, and generally feminized as exotic in order to justify its subjugation by the virile rationalism of the West—the corollary myth of the Occident.

Of course, Asians traveled East to come to America, and the West they encountered was far different from the one described by Frederick Jackson Turner in his famous frontier thesis. Turner's account of the "closing" of the frontier discounted the indigenous presence to describe the area as vast, free, and empty until it finally began to fill up with white people by the 1890s. Isolation and severe environments tested true men and exceptional women, but initially promised generous rewards to European American pioneers. Ideally, the western region was the last place where the popular ideal of an agrarian and small producer republic could be realized. In fact, however, slavery in the South and industrial wage labor in the North had already compromised this elusive vision, and civil war determined that the latter would supply the cheap labor needed by the capital-dependent extractive industries of the region. The resultant class tensions repeatedly exploded into violent confrontations in mining, lumber, railroad, and cannery camps as well as the towns, and cities of the western United States. As Alexander Saxton, David Roediger, and others have shown, angry, disillusioned European Americans quickly adapted the language of slavery and race to identify and assert their rights as free white workers at the expense of the Chinese and other racial-ethnic groups.

Blaming immigrants for California's economic problems is nothing new. When their labor was essential, a labor caste system developed, but competition aggravated ethnic prejudice. The result was violent, systematic discrimination against

the Chinese culminating in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The young European American men coming West sought economic opportunities, and so did their Asian counterparts. A persistent twentieth-century notion is that the former were "settlers" and the latter "sojourners" who came only to get rich before returning to homes and families in China. This distinction needs serious reevaluation. Anglos were often extremely transient while many of the Chinese hoped to remain in the United States. The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 and depression in the 1870s brought many Chinese workers into urban industrial jobs concentrated in shoe, textile, cigar, and clothing manufacture. Competitive material conditions justified but also helped create divisive racial stereotypes.

Under the circumstances, it is remarkable that the Asian American migrants managed to establish permanent communities. Regrettably, their stories are still largely marginalized within mainstream United States history, although the books reviewed in this essay help remedy that situation. In the U.S. West, Asians were considered particularly alien, inscrutable, fundamentally undesirable, and thus unassimilable. Only a few critics pointed out the hypocrisy of expecting a group of new migrants to acculturate in a hostile society. Significantly, racist complaints often used the language of sex and gender, the powerful key to Orientalist ideology. Most of the alleged transgressions of the "Orientals" were either sexual or moral: "white slavery," disease, miscegenation, and loss of racial vigor all served as justifications for social control measures. European Americans saw Asian men as coveting white women, those icons of racial purity, and Chinese women as invidiously submissive and seductive. Even now, parallel to the persistent idea that all Chinese men were sojourners is that all Chinese women were prostitutes. As Benson Tong's study shows, by 1880 only 17.5 percent of San Francisco's Chinese women were prostitutes, while over half of the Chinese women in the city lived and probably worked with men in family arrangements.

In *Organizing Asian American Labor*, Chris Friday has analyzed the situation of Asian workers in the fish canning industry, where widespread but very isolated groups developed distinct production practices, community strategies, and patterns of resistance at a time when they had few legal rights. Friday places his study in a world systems framework to analyze the labor market structure in the U.S. West during its "capitalist transformation," but he says little about the conditions that catalyzed emigration from China. (p. 5) Friday describes the contract labor system, which was usually run by ethnic entrepreneurs who assembled the work force and negotiated contracts covering both living and working conditions. Thankfully, he avoids Eurocentrism by concentrating on relations among various groups of male Asian workers, but the picture remains partial because it does not integrate the fishing component of the industry, where Anglo men predominated. It also

excludes Canada, where the labor force was an extremely heterogeneous group of Native, European, and Asian, primarily Japanese, women cannery workers and male fishers, with similar circumstances in Alaska. Of course, no single study can cover everything, but including British Columbia only when it is convenient is problematic. Obviously, the Pacific Northwest fish industry needs a synthetic comparative or bioregional treatment, but Friday has produced strong sectoral analysis integrating social history with more traditional shop (cannery) floor concerns.

Faced with a labor shortage in the early years of abundant fish harvests, employers relied upon predominantly Chinese contractors to hire and supervise successive migrations of male Asian workers for seasonal, labor-intensive employment. Far from objecting, skilled white workers (fishers, mechanics, supervisors) at least tacitly accepted the need for a Chinese work force to do the hard and unpleasant work of canning. The Chinese sorted themselves into a labor hierarchy based on skill and used various strategies, including direct action, to improve their circumstances. Legal exclusion briefly boosted their bargaining position, but eventually employers had to find new labor sources for their booming industry. These included more recent groups of Asian migrants in addition to European American women and children who were usually the relatives of fishermen. Friday indicates that Alaskan employers turned to Native women, but they had always been a primary source of cannery labor in the northern areas. As an extension of aboriginal hunting and gathering strategies, Native men caught and Native women processed the fish, but the fact that Indians worked according to their own schedules and needs exasperated employers in need of dependable labor. By the mid-1890s, they began to hire Japanese men, but Chinese labor contractors still controlled much of the access to cannery work and favored their compatriots, creating ethnic tensions between the two groups. Japanese agents made some inroads into the contracting system, but when the Filipinos joined the migratory circuit in the 1910s and 1920s, they found it very difficult to create a similar niche and turned to unionization as an alternative.

In the nineteenth century, Chinese cannery workers lived in three different types of communities: the bunkhouse village, the cannery town, and the small-town cannery. In the isolated camps of the former, the Chinese extended their work relations into bachelor communities and social networks. Food sharing, as well as various other amusements and vices, helped alleviate the loneliness of aging men separated from their families. When the Japanese moved in, cultural clashes often led to the provision of separate quarters and kitchens. In cannery towns such as Astoria, Oregon, a small Chinese American community offered limited possibilities for female companionship, entrepreneurial opportunity within the ethnic economy, and social, political, and religious organization. Friday suggests that life

in the more economically diversified small towns was hardest on Chinese laborers who were segregated at the cannery but still close enough to be targets for violence and discrimination. Initially free from exclusionary restrictions, the Japanese could and often did bring their wives in order to establish communities such as Stevenson, B.C., where many of the men fished while the women worked in the canneries. The Filipinos shared with the Japanese hopes for education and upward mobility, but economic conditions during the Depression thwarted these plans. The Filipinos also lacked the family and community networks and strong nationalist unity characteristic of the Japanese.

The political center of Friday's book is the description of interethnic cooperation and industrial organization in the cannery industry in the late 1930s, an achievement that was no less remarkable for being so brief. Uncontrollable circumstances, including World War Two, Japanese internment, and trends in the industry toward mechanization and consolidation, soon destroyed a fragile unity. In his examination of the organizational efforts of Filipinos, Japanese, and radical European Americans, Friday deals lightly with the controversial issue of communism. One could argue, however, that the Communist Party's early commitment to racial equality was one of the few positive aspects of its program. Communists, including those working within the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), made laudable efforts to organize low-wage, racial-ethnic laborers, and this record stands in clear contrast to that of the American Federation of Labor (AFL).

Aided by passage of the National Recovery Act, Seattle Filipinos who wanted to break up the contract labor system formed the Cannery Workers and United Farm Laborers Union (CWFLU) in 1933. By assuming the social welfare responsibilities of the contractors, as well as the hiring process, the union gained status, but also proved vulnerable to charges of graft and corruption. In December 1936, two union officials were murdered. In San Francisco, the contracting system was stronger but subject to sensational investigations and prosecutions which helped organizers establish the Alaska Cannery Workers Union (ACWU) in 1935-1936. In the late 1930s, they had to work overtime to sustain solidarity threatened by the 1937 Japanese invasion of China, the divisions within the Chinese community between supporters of the Chinese communists and the Kuomintang, and the bitter factional fights of the AFL and the CIO. In 1937, the ACWU decided to affiliate with the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA-CIO). The AFL retaliated with a dual unionism strategy, but ACWU won an National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) certification election in 1938. The AFL tried to undermine Seattle's CWFLU even before it decided to affiliate with the CIO and made considerable gains by playing to Japanese nationalism, but lost the union election in 1938.

For the next few years, the CIO organizations tried to maintain a delicate balance between ethnic representation and union control. Perhaps trying to avoid the more militant ACWU in San Francisco, cannery owners shifted their center of operations to Seattle in 1941; in 1943, the two unions amalgamated. Growing polarization over the Japanese issue culminated in the union's failure to protest internment and its support for Filipino confiscation of Japanese land. Changing postwar conditions, especially the precipitous decline in fish stocks, decimated the industry. The union was also the target of vicious red-baiting in the late 1940s, and Friday's epilogue is not clear on the organization's fate. Sources such as Vicki Ruiz's work indicate that the UCAPAWA expired in 1950, a casualty of the CIO's anti-communist purges. It is a sad ending, compared to the brief triumphs of the 1936-1942 period.

Another major postwar development was sustained female employment. Some cannery labor had always been female, although Friday does not really address the experiences of women workers. He makes a good effort to develop a gendered analysis of male worker communities, but women themselves are shadowy figures in his narrative except when they become indispensable for community studies. Friday notes that Filipinos in Alaska socialized and intermarried with European American women—a rather remarkable situation considering strong social and legal prohibitions. Japanese, and to a lesser degree, Chinese men sometimes formed attachments to Native women, but these were often temporary or commercial in nature. Happily, Friday's discussion of early Chinese communities avoids the common misperception that all the women were prostitutes. This pernicious image is further challenged by the work of Benson Tong and Judy Yung.

In *Unsubmissive Women*, Tong has produced a useful descriptive study of Chinese prostitution synthesized from a variety of English-language sources. He explicitly acknowledges his debt to the work of Lucie Cheng Hirata, but does not pursue her more provocative insights. In her article, "Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America" (*Signs* 5 [1979], 3-29), Hirata stressed the high labor value of prostitution which earned local Chinese investors enormous profits at a time when they were restricted from many other economic opportunities. Of course, corrupt European American officials, landlords, lawyers, and auxiliary vice merchants also profited handsomely. Hirata also suggested that prostitution helped sustain the semifeudal patriarchal system of the Chinese homeland by keeping overseas workers happy but unattached in the United States, thus encouraging their continuing emotional and economic commitment to China.

Tong's narrative discusses the serious problems in China that forced women to sign disadvantageous indentured labor contracts and families to sell their daughters, and the stratagems used to trick or even kidnap women and to circumvent

legal restrictions. New arrivals were whisked off to Chinatown where they became either relatively privileged concubines, higher priced prostitutes catering to an exclusively Chinese clientele, or women of the crib trade. Some tried to escape by suicide, running away, or legal means, but the Chinese organizations (tongs) in control of the vice trade paid good money for official cooperation, and were also quick to use the U.S. legal system to recover their property. Apparently the respectable Chinese community ignored the whole business except when it generated negative publicity and violence, but as Peggy Pascoe's work has demonstrated, the Chinese women did find support among European American women missionaries.

Tong's effort to humanize these early Chinese American migrants by countering stereotyped fantasies about "Oriental" women and giving them some dignity and control over their lives is a noble one. Some structures of oppression are so overwhelming, however, that it becomes difficult to rescue the trapped unfortunates. Thus Tong's characterization of these women as "unsubmissive" is problematic, since unquestionably many of them suffered and died miserably from disease, overwork, or neglect. As he repeatedly observes, "the vast majority failed . . . to break free." (pp. 55, 77) Most of these women were essentially slaves, and while slaves do have options for resistance, these are usually limited and potentially dangerous. How can we know whether basic individual survival is an act of resistance or acquiescence? In his chapter on "Violence and Public Women," Tong leans too far toward self-determination. He argues that "cases of violence against Chinese public women were few and far between" based on the infrequency of incidents in newspaper reports, presumably of police court proceedings, during a brief period between 1872 and 1873. (p. 139) While he reasonably criticizes lurid and misleading journalistic (and historic) accounts, Tong needs to address the probability of underreporting and expand his limited sample size, preferably by going directly to the official public records if they are available. Obviously owners, pimps, complicit public officials, and clients preferred to avoid confrontations, but that seems insufficient support for his claim that "Women controlled what took place in their cribs and in their beds." (p. 145) Isolation in Chinatown might have protected them from hostile European Americans, but it also increased the chances that abuses committed by fellow Chinese would go unobserved or unpunished.

Using census sources, Tong expands Hirata's preliminary demographic analysis. Between 1860 and 1870, the absolute number of Chinese women in San Francisco increased from less than 700 to almost 3,000, but the proportion engaged in prostitution was already declining (from 85 to 62.6 percent). Tong explores the possibility of outmigration to other areas of the West, but it remains unclear how many women actually left the profession by marriage. Because there were so few

Chinese women, and because prostitutes earned some respect as dutiful daughters (at least within working-class Chinese society), Hirata suggested that many married laborers. Tong disputes this idea because redeeming a prostitute was very expensive, and flight was very dangerous (although both did occur), so he reasons that only the wealthier Chinese could afford to buy wives. The employment data indicates that in 1880, 66.9 percent of Chinese women did not work, compared to 32.2 percent in 1870. During this decade, many legitimate Chinese wives arrived to join their husbands, which is the story Judy Yung tells, but many others were certainly former prostitutes. In spite of miscegenation laws, a handful married European American men, but for the most part, members of both groups thought it was degrading to have sexual relations with the other. By 1880, 52.5 percent of Chinese women lived with men in family arrangements, and often with a man employed in the same line of work, suggesting a growing female presence in both family businesses and the low-wage industrial and service sectors.

Tong is unclear as to whether such a career history carried a stigma within the Chinese community. As prostitutes, women were shunned and marginalized because “Chinese society considered prostitutes ‘polluted’ and ‘unclean’—in the physical, moral, and spiritual senses—because they engaged in frequent sexual intercourse.” (pp. 115, 122) Elsewhere he seems to imply that prostitution was understood as a necessity. There is clearly a class distinction here, and one wonders how the more elite Chinese reacted as ex-prostitutes became founding members of the community. Tong does not discuss whether this sensitive issue was a source of community tension because his story essentially ends with exclusion. In *Unbound Feet*, Judy Yung can also slip past this tricky question because her wonderful book concentrates on the twentieth-century experiences of Chinese American women in San Francisco. She discusses the early period briefly, but her study really begins in 1902, “the first time that the issue of women’s emancipation was publicly aired in San Francisco Chinatown,” and ends with World War Two as a turning point in terms of improved civic and economic opportunity. (p. 8) Yung examines the role of women within the community, class and generational differences, dual national loyalty, and especially political and feminist activism. The footbinding metaphor illustrates a process of progressive liberation closely connected to revolutionary democratization, nationalism, and feminism in China. Yung cautions that “Unlike in the West, in China the argument for improving women’s lot was always put in terms of how it would benefit the Chinese race and nation, rather than how it would benefit women as individuals.” (p. 54) This admonition reminds us of the need to carefully historicize and regionalize gender processes rather than to essentialize European American feminism as an unquestioned standard.

Yung’s story begins literally with an introduction to her own family. Reminding



us how easily history can be lost, Yung reveals that until she began her research, she did not realize that she was actually a fourth-generation Chinese American. Yung discovered that in 1893 her maternal great-grandmother, Leong Shee Chin, arrived in San Francisco to join her husband of five years, Chin Lung, who had emigrated to the United States just before the 1882 Exclusion Act. The wife of a laborer could not enter the country under the new law, but merchants and their wives were exempt, so Chin Lung invested in a store and then sent for Leong Shee. While Yung's great-grandfather prospered as an agriculturalist in the Sacramento Valley, her great-grandmother, who had bound feet, preferred to live and raise her children in the protected enclave of San Francisco's Chinatown. Leong Shee was not satisfied and returned to China in 1904, but she was a changed woman, especially after the 1911 Revolution. Yung relates how "she unbound her feet, converted to Christianity, and became educated and active in the local Church of Christ." In addition, "she invested her husband's money wisely in property and business ventures, had a two-story house with indoor plumbing built for herself in Macao, purchased four *mui tsai* [slave girls] to serve her and her family, and lived to the ripe age of ninety-four." (p. 50) Thus Great-Grandmother Leong Shee becomes emblematic of the processes of both traditionalism and change that Yung discerns in the lives of many Chinese American women.

This personalized account immediately tells a very different story, one of individuals and families trying to establish new lives in the United States in spite of tremendous obstacles. Now the experiences of "sojourners" and prostitutes can fit into complicated migratory patterns, community-building processes, and life cycles. By 1900, the wives of elite merchants remained secluded, but most Chinese American women worked as part of a family support strategy. Yung clearly shows what Tong could only suggest: that because of their scarcity, economic contributions, role in transmitting Chinese culture, and the absence of in-laws, women began to enjoy greater respect and freedom of movement than they had in traditional Chinese society.

The Chinese women who migrated to the United States in the early 1900s experienced revolutionary change at home and suffered indignities and discrimination in their new land, but slowly communities grew. The inhabitants of San Francisco's Chinatown established schools, churches, hospitals, publications, and social and civic organizations to provide the services largely denied them by the outside society. Reformers cleaned up the vice trade but retained just enough exotic imagery to convert it into a profitable tourist attraction. More women with children meant that fewer earned wages; instead, they worked in family businesses, took in boarders, or did sewing at home. Others entered garment factories, where Chinese women predominated after World War I, or performed public service.

The 1911 victory of China's progressives had important ideological implications for the new generation of American-born daughters. Chinese parents insisted on their education, in spite of segregationist policies, and many young women eventually earned advanced degrees. Unfortunately, persistent discrimination blocked career opportunities outside Chinatown. The majority remained to become important role models and community leaders; others returned to China to assist with modernization projects in that country. Organizations such as churches and the YMCA negotiated the Americanization process, but other new behaviors, especially attitudes toward personal relationships and marriage, aggravated the generation gap. If it seems surprising that the Chinese American process of transculturation was similar to that of other groups, this only demonstrates the power of residual stereotypes.

It was not until World War Two that the demand for labor combined with growing sympathy for Chinese allies to help open the dominant society to Chinese Americans. Ironically, systematic discrimination seems to have protected Chinatown against the worst ravages of the Depression because the community was already accustomed to self-sufficiency, subsequently supplemented by federal relief and jobs. After so many years of virulent antagonism, workers were cautious about joining the mainstream labor movement, but they formed a Chinese local of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), and managed the large 1938 National Dollar Strike. In Chinatown, World War Two started with the Mukden Incident in September 1931. The community immediately rallied to raise money, boycott Japanese goods, and initiate a propaganda and information campaign to publicize China's situation at a time when America was still deeply isolationist. When the United States entered the war, Yung states that "Social attitudes toward Chinese Americans changed overnight. Once considered immoral, unclean, and a threat to the American way of life, they were now depicted as good, honest, hardworking Americans." (p. 250) Chinese Americans joined the Armed Services in integrated units, finally got jobs outside of Chinatown, and benefitted from favorable changes in immigration policy. Discrimination did not disappear, but the changes represented a real watershed and the final integration of Chinese Americans in the land where many had lived for decades.

No study is perfect, of course. Due to the availability of sources, Yung depends largely on material relating to middle- and upper-class women, but she recognizes this bias. The celebratory tone of multiple individual success stories is indeed inspirational, but how representative is it? There are some loud silences, such as the question of Chinatown's response to Japanese Americans during World War Two, particularly internment. On the whole, however, Yung presents a breathtakingly rich array of material, including the records of Chinese women's organizations,

Chinese-language publications, and extensive personal histories, and she promises to publish a fuller documentary collection in the future. Her years of dedication as a community-based librarian and historian are clearly evident, although she is by no means unique. The upheavals of the 1960s forced the historical profession to recognize important issues raised by community scholars, but not necessarily their contributions, and proper recognition is long overdue. Certainly collaborative research can offer promising ways to deal with complicated language and cross-cultural issues.

The works reviewed in this essay all help illuminate the pathos and beauty of lives marginalized by hatred and ignorance. In her 1975 autobiography, *No Chinese Stranger* (quoted by Yung on p. 177), Jade Snow Wong wrote hopefully that

With strong belief in our purpose, it may not be folly for the determined, with the hearts of children, to attack the high mountain of prejudice in our own way. When we die, our children and grandchildren will keep on working until, some day, the mountain will diminish. Then there will be no Chinese stranger.

Scholars once helped construct the stereotypes that separated the “Orient” from the “Occident,” so now they have an obligation to try to correct those images and flatten that mountain. The result will be a more inclusive understanding of over a century of interaction among these Eastwestern neighbors.

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