

**THE INTERACTION BETWEEN SERVICE AND ORGANIZING: TWO  
HOUSING CAMPAIGNS BY THE CHINESE PROGRESSIVE ASSOCIATION**

Kaori Tsukada  
Stanford University  
Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity  
Undergraduate Honors Thesis  
May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009

**Abstract**

The Chinese Progressive Association is a 501(c)(3) grassroots organization in San Francisco Chinatown with thirty-seven years of organizing history. This paper focuses on two housing campaigns; the International Hotel Struggle was a ten-year collaborative effort between Bay Area grassroots organizations to prevent the demolition of a residential hotel in the 1970s, and the Housing Justice Campaign of 1997 sought to force the Department of Building Inspections to enforce housing codes. The paper will examine the differences between the organizational structures, organizing methods, and how service came to conflict with, rather than support, organizing.

## **Acknowledgements**

There are so many people I need to thank for being part of this process, which I've heard others call a journey, a mountain to climb, or simply "really, you're doing *that*?" It has been all these things.

First of all, thanks to Professor Michael Rosenfeld for agreeing to be my advisor even when I didn't know what I was doing, and continuing to do so when neither of us could really tell what I was trying to write. On the same note, thanks to Professor Rebecca Sandefur for taking me in when I so desperately wanted to be part of her research, and then agreeing again when I asked her to be my second reader. I also need to thank Rand Quinn, who offered continuous advice and direction throughout this process. I am honored to have been able to work with three people whose scholarship and clear thinking I admire and respect so much.

I will never be an expert on CPA, and I am starting to wonder if that is humanly possible, but thanks to everybody who has been a part of CPA in whatever capacity. Without you, I could not have written this paper and, more importantly, would have missed out on meeting the incredible people I have during the course of this research. I owe especial thanks to all my interviewees: Alex Hing, Julia Lau, Ben Lee, Pam Tau Lee, Eric Mar, Gordon Mar, Warren Mar, and Mabel Teng. Your contributions to my research and general understanding extend far beyond what can fit in this paper. I also need to thank Alex Tom, Gina Szeto, and everybody else at CPA who helped me look at CPA past and present. It is an extraordinary organization that still gives hope and instruction of social justice to people in the Bay Area and beyond.

I also have many personal thanks to give. My mother, who thinks of grassroots organizing as something that President Barack Obama used to do, and somehow manages to tell me exactly what I need to hear. My father, who was the most enthusiastic about my decision to study renewable energy and sustainable development. My sister, who has always given me the best advice, and her husband, who was brave enough to marry into this family. The experience of tackling beads, wire, and paper for their wedding decorations on my way to interviews has taught me the virtue of patience, which was more valuable to this paper than they can imagine. All my friends, but especially Maija, Visrin, and Brad for bearing with me while my "conversation" for the last several months consisted solely of "CPA this," and "CPA that," and for understanding why this paper is so important to me.

Thanks.

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## Acronyms and Foreign Words

CPA	Chinese Progressive Association
CWMAA	Chinese Workers Mutual Aid Association
DBI	Department of Building Inspections
HJC	Housing Justice Campaign
IH	International Hotel
I-Hotel	International Hotel
IWK	I Wor Kuen
KDP	Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino
Leways	Legitimate Ways
<i>Manong</i>	Filipino term indicating respect toward an elder
PRC	People's Republic of China
SNEEJ	Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
UFA	United Filipino Association

## INTRODUCTION

When I decided to write about the Chinese Progressive Association, people who knew me were surprised, since I am not even American, much less Chinese American. I am a Japanese student on a non-immigrant F-1 visa that will expire after I complete my education here. However, in many ways I chose the most American major at Stanford: Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity facilitates the study of race relations and power dynamics stemming from discrimination and the perpetuation of inequality. The subject matter I learn from this major would be largely pertinent only in the US, since race relations vary widely across the globe. Nonetheless, I was drawn to this major since although race was not something I was familiar with before my arrival in the US, it immediately became apparent as a crucial but rarely admitted factor dictating income, environment, and health disparities as manifestations of power dynamics in America. I wanted to learn how to analyze the often-dismissed importance of disparities along racial lines.

When I first began my studies, the shifting definitions of each race were confusing, and the distinctions seemed arbitrary. Yet of all the racial groupings, the one I struggled with the most was Asian American. Not only was I frequently misidentified as part of this demographic, but the demographic itself seemed to make little sense. Although many Asians do share some perspectives stemming from geographic proximity and thus shared teachings such as Confucianism or Buddhism, each is distinct and has developed with its own history of beliefs, cultures, class systems, and military strength. It was difficult to understand why people would want to self-identify as Asian American,

when it seemed to be such a broad, external label created by others who did not see what was so important about the distinctions.

What I have realized in researching for this paper is that the Asian American identity had developed as a political identity, shaped as a response to the common experience of discrimination. Although tensions and differences existed between the different peoples, the groups came together in the understanding that they suffered from the same type of discrimination, ensconced in governmental institutions and enforced face-to-face. Even originally ethnic-specific issues, such as the movement that sprang from the murder of Vincent Chin, and the threat to the I-Hotel, amassed into pan-ethnic movements, as this common history of discrimination became a rallying point for all Asian Americans<sup>1</sup>. This new political consciousness led to a reevaluation of power dynamics within the US, and how it had to change. In the 1960s, the Asian American Movement became part of the Third World Left.

The Third World Left redefined racism. Laura Pulido, a Chicana social scientist and activist, pointed out:

I experienced deep moral outrage upon learning how Blacks had been treated, and, having no idea what other groups had undergone, I came to believe that African Americans were the only oppressed racial/ethnic group in the United States. I knew that I was not Black, so it was impossible for me to think of myself as affected by racism. But I also knew that I was not white, and I struggled with being rendered invisible by the Black/white binary – despite living in a city with deep Mexican roots<sup>2</sup>.

Racism in the US was for a long time a black and white issue. As Pulido points out, there was no language or space to express the race relations between different groupings as relevant. Even though prejudices whites held toward blacks were different from those Asians felt toward blacks, or whites, these were unnamed and had no place in public

discourse. The understanding that this lack of language was due to the neglect of the histories and narratives of people of color became the basis for the Third World Strikes in San Francisco State University and University of California Berkeley. The student activists saw the Vietnam War and the diplomatic and commercial embargo against Cuba as expressions of modern imperialism against Third World peoples, and saw these race relations mirrored in the US. They demanded ethnic studies in order to reclaim the sources of knowledge and history that shaped the discrimination that their generation faced.

The vibrancy of the Asian American Movement can be traced back in large part to this influx of student involvement. Learning more about the Asian American Movement in the Bay Area, and CPA in particular, has helped me bring together what I feel I am and what others think I am in the context of the United States. Although I feel that my personal experience is distinct from the majority of Asian Americans, I came to realize that the difference was not so significant when compared to the variety of individual experiences within this group. Much like the student activists who demanded ethnic studies because the past of their peoples that shaped their current treatment and existence was hidden from them, I did not understand the race I was relegated to until I studied the Asian American Movement. With my arrival in America, the history of this people also became my own.

This paper tracks the development of an activist Chinese American organization that was born from and continues to define this political identity. The CPA is a unique organization in a number of ways. It was founded in partnership between a pre-existing cadre organization and community members, and from its beginnings it had strong ties to

this separate organization that provided guidance and resources for the CPA. The year-long discussions between the community members, small business owners, and student activists, led to a deliberate decision to create CPA. Its remarkable longevity alone is unusual among grassroots organizations; the CPA is now entering its thirty-seventh year, continuing to organize and provide services in Chinatown. I will examine how the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) has analyzed and acted on the institutional power structures to better the lives of the Chinese community in San Francisco through comparing two defining campaigns - the International Hotel Campaign in the 1970s, and the Housing Justice Campaign in the late 1990s. To this end, I will examine how political atmosphere at the time, organizational structure, organizing methods, method of collaboration, and membership participation changed between these two campaigns.

Structural changes refer to the changes in the organizational structure, such as changes in how the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) is staffed and managed. Political changes refer to the political activities of the organization, such as the campaigns and the form of organizing CPA used. However, it is the melding between the two, such as the method of collaboration with other organizations and the responses to shifting local and national political atmospheres, and taking on more or different responsibilities that defines the organization. The San Francisco CPA was born into the International Hotel (I-Hotel) Campaign, which was characterized by strong activist and extra-institutional work. The Housing Justice Campaign, on the other hand, was a campaign in which CPA sought to change city policy through a mixture of activism and use of existing institutional frameworks.

The organizational structure of the CPA underwent perhaps the most obvious change when comparing the I-Hotel Campaign and the Housing Justice Campaign. At the time of the I-Hotel Campaign, the organizational structure was based on a democratically elected steering committee, whereas during the Housing Justice Campaign, the organization developed a board of directors, directors, and professionalized staff. Much of CPA's ability to run so many service programs stemmed from the high number of committed volunteers who were invested in the future of CPA since the organization had risen from their own needs. However, the late 1990s was a time when identification with leftist politics declined, as did the organization's membership and dedication. Thus, the staff became more central in determining the future direction of the organization.

The structure also has much to do with how the organization functioned as well; the focus of the CPA during the 1970s was advocacy and activism, whereas the Housing Justice Campaign marked the CPA's advent into more Alinsky-style community organizing. This shift creates an immediate change in political tactics and methodology. The 1970s mass organizing model lay the emphasis on involving more working-class people and mobilizing everyday people who would be the ones actually affected by policy, rather than just activists. The shift to using a more textbook model of community organizing for people of color was also in response to the changing demographics in San Francisco Chinatown in the 90s due to the influx of new immigrants, which was a great shift from the largely American-born Chinese demographics of the 60s and 70s. Many of the activists at the time could only speak English, and Chinese was not a necessity, though useful. Currently, Chinese language ability, especially Cantonese, is essential to

the organizing work done at CPA, a trend that began with the Housing Justice Campaign. As such, the focus became empowering community members and building up the organization to become a better vehicle for that empowerment, rather than just mobilizing the masses.

Both service and organizing groups may share a common analysis of power, such as a common understanding of political neglect of people with low socio-economic status. Either can serve as a vehicle for spreading this analysis. However, the approaches differ in the reaction to this analysis. In addition, the way that the role of service changes the organization extends beyond the individual campaigns that define it. The interactions between service and organizing are connected to the factors discussed above, such as political atmosphere and organizing method, but has far-reaching consequences for the organization as a whole.

During the I-Hotel Struggle, providing services for the Chinatown community was in itself a political expression, and people who received the services recognized the political implications of what these services offered. In this way, service was the route through which community members became politicized and came to demand a space for themselves in which they could express their politics. This was the push for the creation of the Chinese Progressive Association, and fed the organization with more committed members as the I-Hotel Struggle continued. The level of commitment that members showed toward the organization was apparent, as the survival of the organization demanded that the members put in time, and often financial support to pay rent and for its small budget. There had been no need for designated staff beside the necessary treasurer



and steering committee positions, because the members were expected to actively maintain the organization's programs, rent, and labor required to keep the office open.

The Housing Justice Campaign was a response to the tension between service and organizing that had been growing within CPA. By 1997, service was no longer a politicizing vehicle, but necessary to uphold basic standards of living in poverty-stricken communities. Service thus became separate from organizing, run by several very dedicated volunteers who had a great sense of ownership toward the organization. The few staff members, who still saw the need for organizing within Chinatown, wished to retain that aspect of the organization. The limitation of resources brought the two into conflict, and the Housing Justice Campaign also came against other Chinatown housing service organizations that saw CPA's organizing agenda to be in conflict with their direction. This tension between service and organizing inside the organization and between others determined the direction of CPA for the next ten years.

### **Research Question**

How did CPA's methods of analyses and teaching about social power dynamics differ during the I-Hotel Struggle and the Housing Justice Campaign, and how did this manifest itself in the organization? The paper will explore this question through comparing the political atmosphere, organization methods, organizational structure, membership participation, and the role of service during the I-Hotel Campaign and Housing Justice Campaign.

### **Conceptual Framework and Research Design**

The purpose of this study is not to judge how well the San Francisco Chinese Progressive Association has done as an organization: there are too many factors and the

measures would by definition be subjective. Instead, the paper will focus on the changes within organizational structure and the factors in its development, and the successes of each campaign.

The I-Hotel Struggle is widely documented in books and articles, and there was also great media coverage of the details. For parts pertaining especially to the I Wor Kuen and the Chinese Progressive Association, I have depended on a number of primary resources such as interviews and the Annual Booklets and publications of the time from CPA archives and individuals I interviewed. Butch Wing, Warren Mar, Alex Hing, Pam Tau Lee, and Ben Lee agreed to share their stories of how they became involved in the I-Hotel Struggle and what being part of IWK and CPA meant to them. Pam Tau Lee and Ben Lee were especially helpful and agreed not only to give interviews, but contributed primary resources such as Getting Together newspapers of the time. Mabel Teng, who had arrived in San Francisco in 1978, after the I-Hotel Campaign, was helpful in tying together what happened in the 1980s to how CPA developed the Housing Justice Campaign. Julia Lau, Eric Mar, and Gordon Mar shared their experiences in the 1990s.

The Housing Justice Campaign also received media attention, but mostly toward the end of the campaign as it gathered momentum. Because it was a short campaign, I depended mostly on internal primary documentation such as meeting notes, flyers, reports, and Board of Directors meeting notes. I especially depended on interviews with Gordon Mar, who was executive director at the time, and Julia Lau, who led the Housing Justice Campaign in the latter, more active half of the campaign. Eric Mar added his perspective of CPA as he saw it in context with the political spheres that CPA became involved in as an activist organization in Chinatown.

Along the way, I encountered skepticism and distrust that academia could encompass this large topic. After going through the literature, I tend to agree; each person's story is so different, even though they all came to the same organization. It has been a challenging exercise bringing together the theory and the reality as I formulated the thesis. To synthesize the two, I have chosen to write a narrative for the trajectory of CPA, the I-Hotel Struggle, and the Housing Justice Campaign, and examine the organizational structure, method of organizing, and role of service separately as the political expression of CPA.

This thesis will consist largely of two sections: the first part will explore the CPA's organizational structure, political context, and organizing methods within the campaign narratives, and the second part will analyze the changing role of service and what that meant for the organization. Chapter One will introduce texts that mention the Chinese Progressive Association and the perceptions held by other authors of its work, showing the need for a more comprehensive understanding of this organization that has received only cursory glances. Chapter Two provides a historical narrative for the Chinese Progressive Association that puts the I-Hotel Struggle and the Housing Justice Campaign in context of the organization's development. Chapter Three is a preliminary chapter that compares the organizational structure and organizing method used during the two campaigns. Chapter Four outlines the narrative of the I-Hotel Campaign and the nature of CPA's mass work. Chapter Five gives the narrative of the Housing Justice Campaign, and CPA's success in establishing its new organizing tradition. Chapter Six explores the interaction between service and organizing during these two campaigns that determined the future direction of CPA.

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<sup>1</sup> Geron, Kim; De la Cruz, Enrique; Saito, Leland T.; Singh, Jaideep. *Asia Pacific Americans' Social Movements and Interest Groups*. Political Science and Politics. Vol. 34. No. 3: 618-624. 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Pulido, Laura. *Black, Brown, Yellow, & Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*: 18. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 2006.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Literature Review of CPA and IWK

In recent years, a number of books about the Asian American Movement have been published. These books establish the CPA and IWK's importance in the Asian American Movement and Bay Area activism, but none discuss the trajectory of the two organizations, or the importance of how CPA changed as an organization. In *Legacy to Liberation: Politics and Culture of Revolutionary Asian Pacific America*, Ho reveals the charters and the philosophies of a number of Bay Area Leftist Asian American organizations, including the IWK<sup>1</sup>. Previously a member of the New Work IWK, Ho is a prolific writer and musician, and remains an activist; his purpose of writing this book is to establish the radical revolutionary legacy of the 60s and 70s for current revolutionaries. The book quickly documents the beginnings and rough philosophies of the IWK to introduce the personal interviews that make up the bulk of the book. However, a number of my interviewees commented that Ho had not been a central figure in the IWK, and he seems to paint the push toward a revolution out of context with the political atmosphere of the time. CPA is for him one of the many projects and groups the IWK helped to gain momentum, rather than an organization worthy of independent scrutiny.

Perhaps Wei interpreted this kind of stance to indicate that CPA was a front organization for the IWK, and that the IWK manipulated the CPA for its own political purposes. His *The Asian American Movement* speaks more about the relations between IWK and CPA, but the author makes no secret of his dislike for both organizations, and indeed, of communist organizations in general<sup>2</sup>. He does not mention what those purposes might have been, and bases his analyses solely on the CPA's 10<sup>th</sup> Annual

Booklet and “anonymous source G” from San Francisco in 1986. It is possible that “anonymous source G” was a discontented member of the CPA who questioned the relations between the IWK and the CPA, as well as the nature of their work. At one point, CPA had to hold a discussion on whether or not to keep IWK members among the active membership, since some felt that they had too much influence or were pushing the organization toward an IWK agenda. However, when the issue was put before the members for a vote, CPA members admitted the value of the IWk members, and decided to retain them<sup>3</sup>.

In addition, at the time Wei spoke with the anonymous source, the IWK had joined another cadre organization, the League of Revolutionary Struggle (LRS), which continued to provide similar support to the CPA. This suggests that the anonymous source had left the organization, possibly due to these disagreements. However, CPA has continued to organize its constituents even after the dissolution of the LRS in the later 1980s, which indicates that the organization had established itself independently. An examination of the CPA’s principles also shows that they also acted with a very different agenda from the cadre organizations. At the same time, this implies a murky understanding of the relationship between CPA and the IWK that left room for many different interpretations of what kind of organization CPA was created as. The actual nature of this relationship and how it impacted both organizations will be discussed in the next chapter.

The only book that documents the Bay Area Asian American Movement in particular is *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment*<sup>4</sup>. The book is a collection of short pieces by activists in the Bay Area and puts the Asian American communities

and social movements in perspective with the political atmosphere of the time. Each account describes the blatant racism and lack of opportunity that led to a politicized consciousness, but also depicts the activists' struggle in founding an identity out of generation gaps and the differing expectations they faced from parents, schools, and themselves. The I-Hotel and Nihonmachi (Japantown) struggles thus became key components in building the Bay Area activist youth, since these campaigns created a space for them to redefine their own expectations.

The book also addresses how the Third World Left Movement opened up civil rights issues to groupings other than race. The open collaboration between student and Leftist groups of the time provided a framework through which to think about the intersections between race, class, gender, and sexuality. The lack of awareness toward the inequalities stemming from gender and sexuality raised questions and created impetus for later feminist and LGBTQ of color activity<sup>5</sup>. However, during the height of the movement these issues, which would later develop into social movements of their own, manifested as resentments and tensions within the Third World Left on top of the ideological disagreements.

One campaign in which these tensions played out was the I-Hotel Struggle. *San Francisco's International Hotel: Mobilizing the Filipino-American Community in the Anti-Eviction Movement* is a scholarly work that follows the events surrounding the decade-long Campaign<sup>6</sup>. Habal has brought together a detailed timeline and account of events, and her coverage of some of the issues her organization faced is enlightening in terms of understanding the campaign. At the same time, she views the I-Hotel campaign mainly through her organization's focus on the significance of the I-Hotel struggle to the

Filipino community in particular, and thus she does not write in depth about the role of the IWK, CPA, or other organizations that were involved in the campaign. She acknowledges these organizations as part of the pan-Asian progressive movement and people of color collaboration that made the I-Hotel struggle possible, but does not look closely at their own connections to the I-Hotel and the I-Hotel's significance outside of the Filipino community. The campaign through its ten-year course encountered many challenges, and there is much evidence that there are still some sore points where disagreements within the coalition of organizations erupted because of differences in agendas or ideologies. Although she acknowledges the strength the other organizations brought to the I-Hotel movement, she also feels that it was a two-edged sword; in the face of the diverse nature of the many organizations, as well as their great numbers, strife became unavoidable. This made for a less unified movement, and she believes that the I-Hotel Struggle could otherwise have been prolonged, or even won.

*The Snake Dance of Asian American Activism: Community, Vision, and Power* is another scholarly work that follows the Asian American Movement from the late 60s to the 90s<sup>7</sup>. In contrast to the previous texts, this book takes the examination of the Asian American Movement to a national level and describes individual groups in order to understand them as part of the Movement. However, since their focus is on the Asian American Movement, which is a very disparate movement involving a large number of actors, each look at an organization is more cursory. Liu et al. use social movement theories effectively as a medium of analysis, employing political process theory to observe the Asian American Movement's development and reaction to events such as the Vincent Chin case and the Jesse Jackson campaigns. Although it contributes greatly to



the understanding of the Asian American Movement as a whole, the book's focus is on the purpose the organizations play in the movement, rather than how the organizations developed individually and interacted within the movement.

A survey of the literature finds that all agree that CPA was a pro-China organization, and provides the greater context of the Asian American Movement and the Third World Left from which the two developed. Much of CPA's organizing methods and structures stemmed from this Left movement, which encouraged political expression among students and the working class. However, there is confusion as to the relationship between IWK and CPA, and the analyses are not devoted to either the organization or the changing role of CPA. The lack of literature focusing on CPA's work during the 90s imply the solitary nature of its organizing and the need for a new analytical framework. In many ways, CPA changed as the political context of the Asian American Movement shifted but was able to root itself in the San Francisco Chinatown community even as the Movement waned. The next chapter will attempt to fill in these gaps, as well as put the I-Hotel and the Housing Justice campaigns in the context of CPA's history and organizational development.

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<sup>1</sup> Ho, Fred; Antonio, Caroline; Fujino, Diane; Yip, Steve. Eds. *Legacy to Liberation: Politics and Culture of Revolutionary Asian Pacific America*. San Francisco: Big Red Media. 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Wei, William. *The Asian American Movement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Lee, Ben. Personal Interview, 4 April 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Louie, Steve and Omatsu, Glenn. Eds. *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment*. Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press. 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Hing, Alex. Personal Interview. 26 March 2009.; Mar, Warren. Personal Interview. 6 February, 2009.; Habal, Estella. *San Francisco's International Hotel: Mobilizing the Filipino-American Community in the Anti-Eviction Movement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 2007.; Mangaoang, Gil. *From the 1970s to the 1990s: Perspective of a Gay Filipino American Activist*. Amerasia Journal. Vol. 20 No. 1: 33-44. 1994.

<sup>6</sup> Habal, Estella. *San Francisco's International Hotel: Mobilizing the Filipino-American Community in the Anti-Eviction Movement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Liu, Michael; Geron, Kim; Lai, Tracy. *The Snake Dance of Asian American Activism: Community, Vision, and Power*. Lanham: Lexington Books. 2008.



## CHAPTER TWO

### The I-Hotel and Housing Justice Campaigns in the Context of CPA History

#### Leading up to CPA

The Chinese Progressive Association grew from the emerging political consciousness of the residents of San Francisco Chinatown and the student activists who were drawn to the community. Leways, or Legitimate Ways, was a group of Chinatown youth who tried to keep fellow youth away from gang activity by giving them a hangout to occupy their time off the streets<sup>1</sup>. Drawing on 1960s War on Poverty money, they opened a pool hall and hired a number of youth while keeping the space open to others<sup>2</sup>. While they operated the pool hall, the more politicized youth concerned with the ghetto-like conditions of Chinatown and the open discrimination against Chinese immigrants met Black Panther Party members, who introduced them to Mao's Red Book<sup>3</sup>. After discussion within Leways, a number of the members broke away to create the Red Guards, which sought to empower youth who understood institutions to be restrictive schools, white figures of authority, places of discrimination, and support for police violence<sup>4</sup>. Warren Mar grew up in Chinatown with a number of those who started Leways, and later joined CPA and IWK.

I think you have to put it in context of where the police was. People talk about drive-by shootings. The police used to do drive-by shootings! They came by the office and shot it up because we put a poster of Chairman Mao and Huey Newton in the window. If they're going to drive by your storefront, what should be the correct response? If you're a street kid, and you have a gun, too?<sup>5</sup>

The Red Guard modeled their service programs within Chinatown after the Black Panther Party's Serve the People programs<sup>6</sup>. These were designed to benefit the unemployed and opportunity-less lumpenproletariat, or what may now be called the underclass. As a group of people under the working-class, the Black Panthers and the

Red Guard believed that the lumpenproletariat would lead the revolution, contrary to Marx's belief that they are an unreliable class of vagrants<sup>7</sup>. To this end, the Red Guard created services that were politically empowering as well as engaging to the community, such as legal help for youth in trouble with the law as well as providing a community hangout to encourage political discourse.

In 1971, the New York I Wor Kuen, which had heard about the Red Guard, came to San Francisco to discuss about politics, and found that they were in agreement about their political agendas. The two groups decided to join together and retained the name I Wor Kuen (IWK), becoming a cadre organization<sup>8</sup>. A cadre organization is based on a Leninist model of a group of committed, active individuals who collectivize their resources and seek to observe, develop, participate in, and record the struggles of a revolutionary working class<sup>9</sup>. As an example of the required commitment, League of Revolutionary Struggle members in a later cadre organization put in at least 60 hours a week toward work for the League. The San Francisco group consisted of about 40 members, and the new group held community programs such as film showings, communal dinners, and childcare. The IWK also set up a free health clinic as well as expanding their legal aid to include draft counseling and other issues that arose within the community.

The IWK and the services it provided were instrumental in the development of CPA. The programs and events not only benefited Chinatown workers, but also attracted students and old Leftists. The students had arrived in Chinatown after becoming politicized through the 1968 Third World Strikes at San Francisco State University and UC Berkeley<sup>10</sup>. The older Leftists, such as those who had been part of the Chinese

Workers Mutual Aid Association (CWMAA) and the Mun Ching, celebrated the reemergence of Leftist politics within the Chinese community. The CWMAA was founded in San Francisco Chinatown by workers who fought for the right to unionize in the Alaskan canneries. Two years after its establishment in 1937, the organization had grown to a membership of six hundred, encouraging labor unionization in a time where Asians were routinely excluded<sup>11</sup>. The Mun Ching was active in the 50s, and was a pro-China organization that brought Chinese American youth together for cultural programs as well as political expression<sup>12</sup>. Both the CWMAA and the Mun Ching became targets during the second red scare during the 40s and 50s and declined or turned to more cultural activities rather than activism<sup>13</sup>.

The Chinatown residents also became politicized by participation in IWK's programs. As the IWK delivered services that had not been available in Chinatown before, community members began to understand the previous lack of these services as the failure of the government. Until this point, the institutions that spoke for Chinatown were not voices of community members. Encounters with institutional authorities in discriminatory schools and brutal police reinforced distrust of governmental institutions<sup>14</sup>. These, along with churches, were often led by white, non-community members. The Chinese Six Companies owned the garment factories, manufacturing facilities, and rental properties, and ruled Chinatown businesses with an iron fist<sup>15</sup>. Since their political tendencies were pro-Taiwan, they suppressed pro-PRC sentiments within Chinatown, often by force, claiming that they were the spokespeople for the Chinese American Community<sup>16</sup>. However, many of the Chinatown residents had come from mainland China and felt pride in the economic success of the PRC, which they saw as a

nation-state that stood apart from any Western power, using a political system separate from Western capitalism. The Chinatown residents had no space in which they could organize around their issues, outside of city institutions and spaces controlled by the Chinese Six Companies. The residents who had come together through the IWK programs began to voice their need for their own organization, in which they too could voice their political opinions and demands.

As a cadre organization, the IWK too recognized the need for a mass organization in Chinatown that would be open to the public as a space for community members to talk about local issues and have a democratic institution in which to make their own decisions. However, Chinatown residents could not meet the commitments that the cadre organization demanded. Neither were they necessarily interested in a revolution, but they were interested in showing their support for the fast-developing PRC. The issues that they were concerned with had more to do with self-determination, which they defined as having control over their own community<sup>17</sup>. The residents, seeing the IWK and the freedom with which they expressed and initiated political dialogue, felt they needed their own mass organization, a space open to the working community and facilitating dialogue on local issues as well as political expression.

### **The Beginnings of CPA and the I-Hotel Struggle**

On December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1972, the San Francisco IWK lowered its banner at its storefront at the International Hotel and replaced it with that of the San Francisco Chinese Progressive Association<sup>18</sup>. With that, it gave the CPA and its members an office and a center for organizing, while the IWK continued organizing in San Francisco and supporting other mass organizations. The SF CPA was the first of five CPAs, and in the

next ten years, other CPAs were established in New York, Boston, Los Angeles, and for a short time in San Diego as well<sup>19</sup>. The CPAs had a democratic structure in which the members would vote members into the steering committee, which was the decision-making organ and answerable to the general membership. Some IWK members also became CPA members, and they were oftentimes voted into the steering committee where they continued to provide guidance, staff, and support to the CPA<sup>20</sup>. As a mass organization, the CPA was focused on local issues. Cadre organizations such as the IWK and the League of Revolutionary Struggle were not only involved with local individual struggles, but drew connections on a national and global scale; they called on all Third World peoples to unite in a global consciousness against imperialism in parallel struggles in countries such as the US, Vietnam, and China<sup>21</sup>. Throughout, the IWK remained a separate entity, although some members were actively involved in the CPA. A further explanation of the mass organizing model will be discussed in the next chapter in comparison to the community organizing model.

The CPA began as a Leftist, pro-People's Republic of China organization, promoting awareness of mainland China's revolutionary thought and workers rights, and dedicated to self-determination, community control, and "serving the people"<sup>22</sup>. Its activities were independent of the Communist Party of China or the US, and instead the organization worked with other pro-PRC groups within the US and San Francisco Bay Area<sup>23</sup>. At the time, the PRC released information selectively, and the US also restricted information, and so those involved in CPA knew very little of what was actually happening in the PRC. Support for the PRC was based on the inspiration the members drew from what they saw as a successful grassroots model that presented a viable

alternative to Western capitalism and separate from the oppressive Stalinist Russia<sup>24</sup>.

The PRC gave real hope to CPA's principles of self-determination of Asian peoples, who had historically been colonized and exploited by the West.

It was in this context that the campaign to save the I-Hotel from demolition began. Not only was the I-Hotel the heart of Manilatown, it was a home for many low-income Asian tenants and grassroots organizations<sup>25</sup>. The conflict began when the I-Hotel was sold to the Four Seas Corporation in 1968, which posted eviction notices. The corporation did not offer alternative housing to the tenants, who had come to rely on the community that had developed in the building over the years and were dependant on the low rents<sup>26</sup>. Although the eviction was strictly legal, grassroots groups and the elderly tenants began to organize around their right to live in their own community.

In addition to collaborating with the other CPAs, the San Francisco CPA worked with other people of color grassroots organizations. This collaboration was already in place with its first campaign – the 1970s were devoted to preserving the San Francisco International Hotel and the right of low-income tenants to stay in their homes. The commercial floor of the I-Hotel was rented out to a number of progressive organizations, including the CPA, and all joined the I-Hotel Campaign. The Communist Party of the USA had little influence over these New Left groups because of its pro-Soviet, anti-Chinese inclinations<sup>27</sup>. However, the CPUSA had more weight among the labor organizations that joined the I-Hotel struggle later on with an increase in community support for the campaign<sup>28</sup>. The I-Hotel became a rallying call for workers' and low-income tenants' rights, and the focal point of Bay Area activism. The decade-long struggle ended in the demolition of the I-Hotel, but because of the strong political



feelings and continued activism surrounding the area, the I-Hotel lot stood empty for thirty years, after which a new International Hotel with low-income housing was rebuilt instead of the originally planned parking lot<sup>29</sup>. The struggle involved not only the local Asian communities, but brought in supporters from around the Bay Area, and encouraged Pan-Asian and people of color collaboration.

At the same time as the I-Hotel Campaign, CPA pushed for the normalization of diplomatic relations between the US and China. In the 1960s, pro-Kuomintang, pro-Taiwanese forces were dominant in Chinatown, and they physically tried to repress support for China and the dissemination of Chinese materials, especially pro-communist writings<sup>30</sup>. In the late 60s, more pro-China sentiments rose in Chinatown from not just a pro-communist perspective, but also from a nationalist perspective as people began to see China as a success despite opposition from the West and especially the US<sup>31</sup>. CPA held film screenings that were open to the public, sometimes showing Chinese films as well to facilitate understanding of the country's revolutionary ideas. CPA also took the lead with groups such as the US-China People's Friendship Organization to celebrate China's National Day on October 1st<sup>32</sup>.

### **Policy and Electoral Activism**

On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1979, the US and the PRC normalized relations and the CPA held a celebration in Portsmouth Square along with other pro-PRC groups. The organization then began to concentrate more on policy and electoral work<sup>33</sup>. In addition, the previously informal English classes by volunteers were formalized and became an entrance for citizenship classes in 1981<sup>34</sup>. These classes reached out to create a wider membership base.

At the end of the 1970s, the IWK merged with the Chicano August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement and the Congress of Afrikan Peoples, forming the League of Revolutionary Struggle (LRS), a people of color revolutionary organization. Other organizations soon joined, such as the East Wind Collective from Los Angeles, Japantown Collective from San Francisco, the Seize the Time Collective from San Jose and East Palo Alto, and the New York Collective<sup>35</sup>. The LRS, like the IWK, had a very different agenda from CPA; the first two were cadre organizations, and they worked toward general empowerment of people of color. Where the emphasis of CPA was on Chinatown and the community members and activists who became involved through their work there, the LRS aimed for a change in entire institutions, and their work and politics were not geographically bound<sup>36</sup>. However, CPA and the LRS did share some elements of their respective visions, including a desire for progressive politics and policies, and a commitment to immigrant rights work. When LRS began to take part in policy and electoral work, CPA also drew on its connections to LRS to become involved in the campaigns.

Thus during this time, the CPA became involved in organizing against California immigration policy, fighting against the Simpson-Mazzoli Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1982, which would have cut the 5<sup>th</sup> Preference Category, and Prop 63, the English-Only Initiative<sup>37</sup>. Simpson-Mazzoli was passed in 1986 as the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, requiring employers to verify their employees' immigration status, and allowing amnesty toward some illegal immigrants while offering a path to legalization for others. Despite its passage, which suppressed the economic activities of immigrants, the 5<sup>th</sup> Preference Category was retained, allowing immigration

for family reunification. However, Prop 63 passed overwhelmingly in 1986, regardless of the efforts of immigrant rights activist coalitions.

In 1982, CPA became involved in Justice for Vincent Chin, an Asian American response to the brutal and racist murder of a young Chinese American before his wedding night. The two white defendants, Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz, had beaten him to death calling him “Jap” and blaming him for the loss of their autoworker jobs. The district court fined the defendants only \$3,000 and no jail time, even though the two had records of violence and racism in their previous workplaces<sup>38</sup>. The pan-ethnic movement maintained momentum for nearly ten years, during which CPA members learned how to lobby and traveled nationally to work with other Asian American coalitions<sup>39</sup>.

CPA was also involved in the pan-ethnic and pan-racial support for the two Jesse Jackson campaigns as well as other people of color running for office on progressive platforms<sup>40</sup>. In 1987, the IWK joined with the Chicano August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement and the black Revolutionary Communist League to form the League of Revolutionary Struggle (LRS), a communist organization based on Marxist-Leninist-Maoist teachings<sup>41</sup>. The LRS stressed the importance of bringing more people of color into governmental offices to advocate for and increase awareness of the needs of minority communities. The LRS members active in CPA brought these perspectives and the connections to other nationwide coalitions that advocated for immigrant rights in a period of growing anti-immigration sentiment.

Image 1.



Jesse Jackson at the Chinese Progressive Association. Courtesy of the Chinese Progressive Association.

When the LRS disbanded in 1987, CPA lost its main source of political analysis that tied together the struggle in San Francisco Chinatown to other national and international political issues. CPA was thus left to develop its own political analysis of the greater social movement by itself, but this proved difficult for the small, community-oriented organization. The LRS, like the IWK, had designated cadre members whose work was to develop the political analysis that lead the organization, and helped it decide what types of campaigns the organization should become involved in. Although many members of the LRS who had previously been working with CPA as part of their mass work continued to do so, they were no longer able to extend the resources that the LRS had had. CPA alone did not have this kind of resource to draw on for political analysis. There were other individual committed members as well, but there was little in the way

of developing a cohesive and explicit political analysis of how the organization would continue forward, with which all members were in touch. Although CPA continued with its progressive works, the different campaigns were more a result of what the members thought were generally important rather than the result of a sweeping vision and an agreement as to its execution.

### **Greater Focus on Local Activism in Chinatown and the Bay Area**

The 1990s marked the CPA's entrance into more active tenant and worker rights campaigns. CPA joined Fuerza Unida's decade-long campaign against Levi-Strauss when the company fired its garment workers in favor of moving its factories abroad<sup>42</sup>. Other campaigns CPA supported include the Garment Workers Justice Campaign with Asian Immigrant Womens Advocates, the Parc 55 Hotel Organizing Drive with Local 2 and joined the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (SNEEJ)<sup>43</sup>.

In addition to supporting other campaigns, CPA also took part in organizing, creating the Chinatown Workers Resource Project that helped the SH Workers Committee win back \$16,000 in unpaid wages. The Project also initiated a monthly Worker's Rights Clinic to provide advice, assistance, and referrals to low-income immigrants with employment issues, as well as offering monthly Community Immigration Clinics<sup>44</sup>.

In the meantime, CPA maintained opposition against California policy that would negatively affect the new immigrant population of Chinatown, such as Proposition 187 designed to deny illegal immigrants social services and public education, and Proposition 209, which deleted affirmative action from public institutions<sup>45</sup>. Opposition to the passage of Prop 209 lead to the establishment of the IDEAL Scholars Fund in UC

Berkeley that supports underrepresented students. In 1993 CPA started the Chinatown Recycling Campaign, since even though Chinatown residents paid the City for recycling services, they still did not receive them. Working with groups in the Tenderloin, CPA explored the possibility of setting up a joint recycling facility that would bring more jobs to Chinatown and the Tenderloin areas<sup>46</sup>. The Chinese Power Against Tobacco (CPAT) campaign began in 1995 as concern grew for the increase in smoking among youth. CPA youth conducted surveys to pinpoint causes for the increase, and succeeded in leading the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to allocate one million dollars per year to tobacco prevention programs<sup>47</sup>.

### **The Emergence of the Housing Justice Campaign**

The Housing Justice Campaign began in 1997 with a tenant survey of the state of SRO housing (single room occupancy housing) in Chinatown. CPA submitted *Housing Code Enforcement in San Francisco Chinatown: Key Findings and Policy Recommendations* to the Department of Building Inspections (DBI)<sup>48</sup>. When the policy recommendations were not incorporated, CPA began the Housing Justice Campaign to ensure that the housing code would be enforced, especially in SRO housing. As a result, the policy recommendations were incorporated into new DBI policies, and the Department hired a new Chinese-speaking housing inspector as well as Chinese-speaking staff so that Chinatown residents could inform the DBI if their landlords did not lend an ear to their complaints<sup>49</sup>. The DBI also began routine inspections of all residential buildings in Chinatown. On the grassroots level, CPA encouraged a core group of tenant leaders to meet monthly, and this evolved into community enforcement of inspections and maintenance as well as tenant-led fire prevention and awareness programs in 2005<sup>50</sup>.

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- <sup>25</sup> Wong, Susan. *CCHC is Awarded \$13 Million to Rebuild Senior Housing at the International Hotel Site*. *Neighborhood Bulletin: Newsletter for the Chinatown Resource Center and Chinese Community Housing Corporation*. Vol. 17 No. 1. 1995.
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## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Factors Affecting Power Dynamic Analyses**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter provided the context for the I-Hotel Struggle and the Housing Justice Campaign within the narrative of CPA's history. CPA's perception of power dynamics is crucial to framing its campaigns, and this chapter will explore the factors influencing the organization's analysis of power dynamics and how they have changed over time. Significant factors include Chinatown demographics, organizational structure, sources of power analyses, and collaboration with other organizations.

#### **Chinatown Demographics**

In the next two chapters, I outline the local political atmosphere in which each of the two housing campaigns developed. However, the changing Chinatown demographics deserve a section of its own, since this has greatly affected the needs and demands within Chinatown and the population that CPA organized.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943 with the Magnuson Act, which allowed China a limited quota of American visas because it had been a U.S. ally in WWII. Many arrived as laborers with the intent to return home. These immigrants accrued debts in the trip to America that they could not fully repay due to the low wages. The 1970s Chinatown demographic thus consisted largely of older immigrant men unable to return to China<sup>1</sup>. Few Chinese women came to the US as labor or with their relatives and husbands, and anti-miscegenation laws prevented intermarriage with women of other races. These men were thus often denied family life<sup>2</sup>. It was not until the Immigration and Nationality Services Act of 1965 that the limit was raised to 20,000 immigrants per country, with unrestricted family reunification visas. From this time forward, there was a

large influx of new immigrants, who as workers new to this country could be easily exploited. Families began to appear in Chinatown, but older bachelor males remained the majority<sup>3</sup>. Each decade after 1960 showed a steady increase in the Chinese population of San Francisco, even as the total population of the city remained fairly stable (See Figure 1).

By the 1990s, the population in Chinatown had changed dramatically. Although the Richmond and Sunset districts in San Francisco came to house a large Chinese American population, Chinatown remained the destination of choice for new immigrants due to language accessibility<sup>4</sup>. Between thirty and forty percent of the residents were new immigrants who had arrived in the last ten years (See Figure 2). In response to this demographic change, the CPA started some social service programs such as after-school tutoring, English and citizenship classes, and martial arts workshops for youth, while reaching out to the new population to participate in workers' struggles involving worker protection, backlogs in pay, and lack of job safety. The issues within residential hotels became more pronounced in the overcrowded neighborhood.

Figure 1.

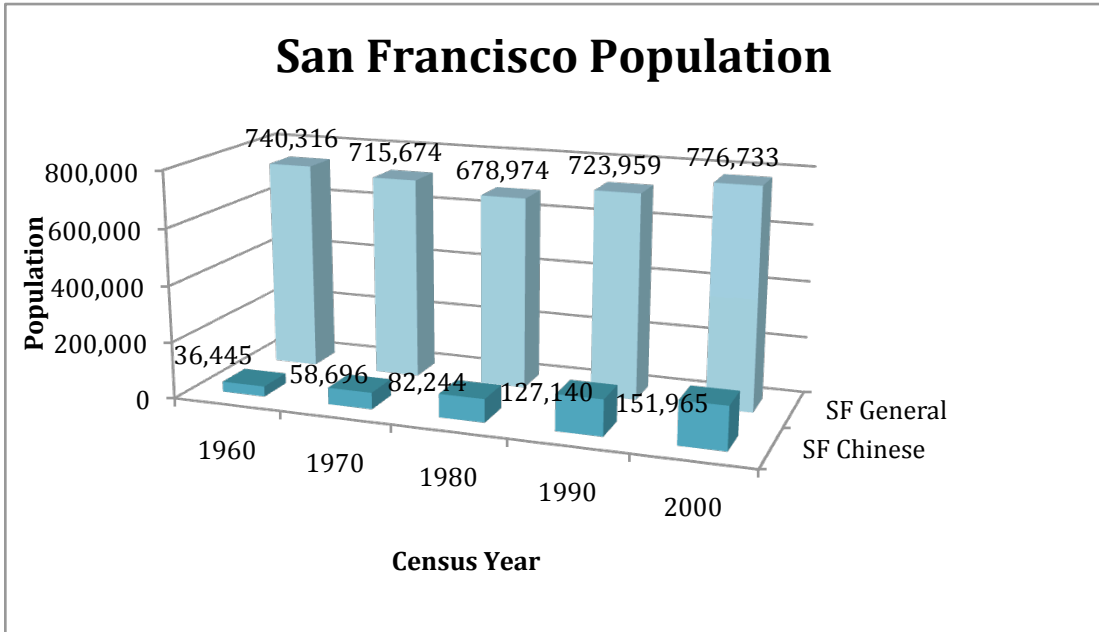
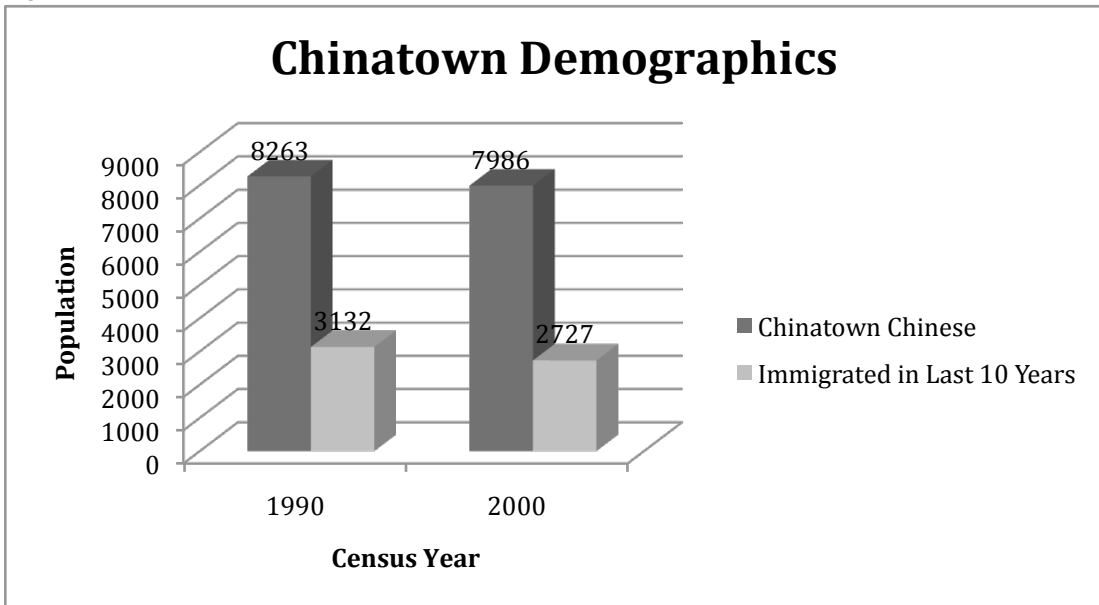


Figure 2.



Smaller tract information became available in 1990. The information for this graph was compiled from demographic information from Tracts 113, 114, and 118, the core San Francisco Chinatown tracts.

## **Organizational Structure and Membership Participation**

During the one-year discussions and meetings that resulted in CPA, the community members had set up a temporary steering committee to facilitate the talks and decision-making process<sup>5</sup>. When CPA opened in 1972, the membership voted in a new, ten-member steering committee. Since it was a community organization, and as part of the purpose was to create a democratic institution for Chinatown residents, the simple structure of steering committee and general membership ensured that each voice could be heard.

Although the discussion period before the founding of CPA was an open process, CPA learned from the experience of the CWMAA and the Mun Ching and kept a closed membership: potential members had to be referred by two members<sup>6</sup>. The organization was pro-PRC and was also a place that fostered labor organizing, which could make it a target for red-baiting. Warren Mar described the closed membership as a very active one:

We had at least a thousand members, in the 70s. That means they were all paying dues. And we expected the members to do stuff. A lot of the old men did carpentry. I painted the place. I did the roof. If something was broken, we fixed it. If we needed something, we went and got it. It was very self-sufficient. It was possible in the 60s and the 70s... There was no staff. CPA did not have paid people. There was nobody that made a living working at CPA, but people had to keep the doors open. We actually had longer hours than CPA has today. But that's also because we had a lot of retired members that hung out there. So it was the hang out<sup>7</sup>.

Despite the demands of the organization, the members were invested in its survival. The services that CPA provided were responses to needs that members discussed and agreed to provide, and events such as Sunday dinners and cooking competitions brought the members closer<sup>8</sup>.

In the 1990s CPA began to take on some other characteristics of a more traditional 501(c)(3). Ben Lee, who had been treasurer for CPA in the days during the I-Hotel struggle, had filed for 501(c)(3) status for the CPA in 1976<sup>9</sup>. He had wanted tax-exempt status for the organization whose budget was only in the thousands of dollars, maintained through donations and membership fees. However, this in no way affected the political direction of the organization during the 70 and 80s, since it was not common knowledge within the membership; Pam Tau Lee had thought that CPA had applied for it sometime in the early 1990s under Gordon Mar's leadership, and Gordon believed that the CPA had had that status since its beginnings in 1972<sup>10</sup>. Because of this, although 501(c)(3) organizations are technically not allowed to endorse candidates or participate in electoral work, CPA in the 1980s was very much involved in the Rainbow Coalition and local elections pushing for progressive people of color in office. Mabel Teng, who had led much of the electoral work and organizing around policy, also had not known about CPA's 501(c)(3) status and stated, "We did it [electoral work] because we knew it was important...we didn't know any better<sup>11</sup>."

This changed during the 1990s. In 1991, CPA received its first significant grant as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization from a foundation, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. The funds went into the Chinatown Workers Resource Project<sup>12</sup>. This project was the predecessor to the current Worker's Organizing Center, but at the time it provided services instead of a resource for workers seeking to organize. However, the grant did allow CPA to remain active in Chinatown while donations from members declined, and became the first of many others.

During this period, CPA went through great structural changes: previously, CPA had been staffed entirely by volunteers. As membership and commitment among the remaining members declined, a need for paid staff arose. A membership survey in 1997 only had about 90 respondents, many of whom did not live in Chinatown<sup>13</sup>. In 1991 the CPA hired its first staff member, and by 1993 it had three full-time staff members<sup>14</sup>. During the 1990s, CPA began to take on the structure of a more formal nonprofit organization by gradually replacing the steering committee with a Board of Directors, executive director, and staff. Previously, CPA had depended largely on volunteers to accomplish campaign work and provide supplies, but a need for more professionalized organizational staff arose from the decline in political activism and members in the late 1980s and 1990s. The Housing Justice Campaign in 1997 was a pivotal point where the organization established a strong Board in favor of organizing.

### **Sources of Power Analyses and Method of Organizing**

Mass organizing is an idea derived from Maoist texts, and refers to organizing among the working class based on the belief that their strength and knowledge are the root of a new, more egalitarian and just society<sup>15</sup>. As an extension of “from the masses to the masses,” part of the purpose of cadre organizations such as the IWK participate in the development of this revolutionary working class. However, whereas the IWK focused on more ideological issues, CPA was the ground in which this vision gained substance. Self-determination was one such issue. The IWK embraced the ideology of self-determination not only out of frustration with imperialistic oppression in Third World Countries, but also in response to expressions of violence within the US toward people of color. Within the specific context of Chinatown, CPA members interpreted self-

determination as the community being able to exert control within its environment, by repressing police brutality and having a say in school curricula. Part of the difference between the Red Guard and the IWK was that the Red Guard focused on the lumpenproletariat, whereas the IWK came to believe that only the working class would be able to begin a revolution<sup>16</sup>. In CPA, mass organizing manifested in the use of the organization as a place where one could garner support for workers who were organizing to recover backwages, or for better working conditions. Regardless of whether or not everyone else at CPA worked at the same place, the political discourse was already in place such that support would be immediate and the strike or demonstration could gather more numbers than the original workers alone.

The Housing Justice campaign marks CPA's beginnings in community organizing over previous strategies of advocacy and activism<sup>17</sup>. Saul Alinsky popularized this method of professionalizing organizers to coordinate a group of people with little political or economic power<sup>18</sup>. CPA's Housing Justice Campaign used a textbook approach for community organizing among communities of color. Since this was their first campaign, CPA received guidance from the Center for Third World Organizing, which took the basic principles of Alinsky's community organizing and added power analyses based on their understanding of racial power dynamics and discrimination. Using the community organizing framework, CPA pursued housing justice as a campaign because there was a need for it, but also in order to build its organizational base and to encourage more community members to be involved in activism as well as becoming community leaders<sup>19</sup>.

## **Nature of Collaboration with Allies**

The nature of CPA's political collaborations has changed through the decades. Coalitions and alliances in the 1970s and 1980s were based on specific campaigns; the I-Hotel, normalization of relations between the US and China, Vincent Chin, and various propositions. CPA formed and joined these issue-based collaborations because they matched a pre-existing political agenda. Issue-based campaigns also attracted entirely different organizations that agreed on that one issue, increasing CPA's networking capacities and

The collaborations during the Housing Justice Campaign were also issue-based, but the SRO Collaboratives that CPA initiated were mainly a collection of service organizations. This collaboration allowed CPA to gain more information about Chinatown's housing conditions and how to target the Department of Building Inspections, and increased City funding toward progressive housing organizations. At the same time, the service organizations were more focused on widening the provision of services over pushing the City to enforce housing codes or otherwise take part in raising the quality of life in residential hotel.

The community leadership cultivated during the Campaign allowed CPA to move on to create the Workers Organizing Center, now CPA's main program. With community support, CPA began to join more principle-based coalitions, such as the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, Rights to the City, and the May 1<sup>st</sup> Alliance for Land, Work, and Power. These coalitions, in contrast to issue-based coalitions like the I-Hotel campaign, concentrate on principles such as environmental justice, social and economic justice, or empowerment<sup>20</sup>. These allow for broader



coalition-building, and has led to increased Bay Area and national interactions on the principles of economic, housing, and social justice.

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<sup>2</sup> Wing, Butch. Personal Interview. 15 February 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Lee, Pam Tau. Personal Interview. 17 January 2009.

<sup>4</sup> *1997 Chinatown Housing Survey: A Report by Chinatown Resource Center and Chinese Progressive Association*. July 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Lee, Ben. Personal Interview. 4 April 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Mar, Warren. Personal Interview. 6 February 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Lee, Pam Tau. Personal Interview. 17 January 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Lee, Ben. Personal Interview. 4 April 2009.

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<sup>10</sup> Lee, Pam Tau. Personal Interview. 17 January 2009.

Mar, Gordon. Personal Interview. 29 January, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Teng, Mabel. Personal Interview. 25 April 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Mar, Gordon. Personal Interview. 29 January, 2009.

Chinese Progressive Association, Chinese Progressive Association Twenty-First Anniversary Celebration: *Voices of the Community, Voices for Justice*. San Francisco: Getting Together Press. 1993

<sup>13</sup> Print-out. Membership Survey Results. 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Mar, Gordon. Personal Interview. 29 January 2009.

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<sup>15</sup> Pulido, Laura. *Black, Brown, Yellow, & Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Lee, Ben. Personal Interview. 4 April 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Mar, Gordon. Personal Interview. 29 January 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Alinsky, Saul David. *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Vintage Books. 1971.

<sup>19</sup> Mar, Gordon. Personal Interview. 29 January 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Chinese Progressive Association, Chinese Progressive Association 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Booklet. San Francisco: Getting Together Press. 2008.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **The I-Hotel Movement**

#### **Introduction**

The International Hotel struggle in San Francisco was a fight to save a low-income senior housing site that was an integral part of Manilatown. Also called the I-Hotel and the IH, the threat to the Hotel instigated a ten-year movement, which began with a small tenant demonstration, and eventually drew together thousands of activists from dozens of various organizations throughout the Bay Area in its defense. In its latter days, the hotel became an emblem of pan-Asian and multiracial cooperation<sup>1</sup>. During the I-Hotel struggle, CPA worked as a mass organization, with a steering committee voted into place, and involved members who had come together through programs and events run by the I Wor Kuen. As such, there was a strong IWK presence within CPA; however, the two remained separate organizations with different agendas: IWK was a revolutionary leftist organization, and CPA was a community organization that responded to local issues and needs.

#### **The I-Hotel Struggle: Its Emergence and Context**

##### ***Manilatown and Chinatown***

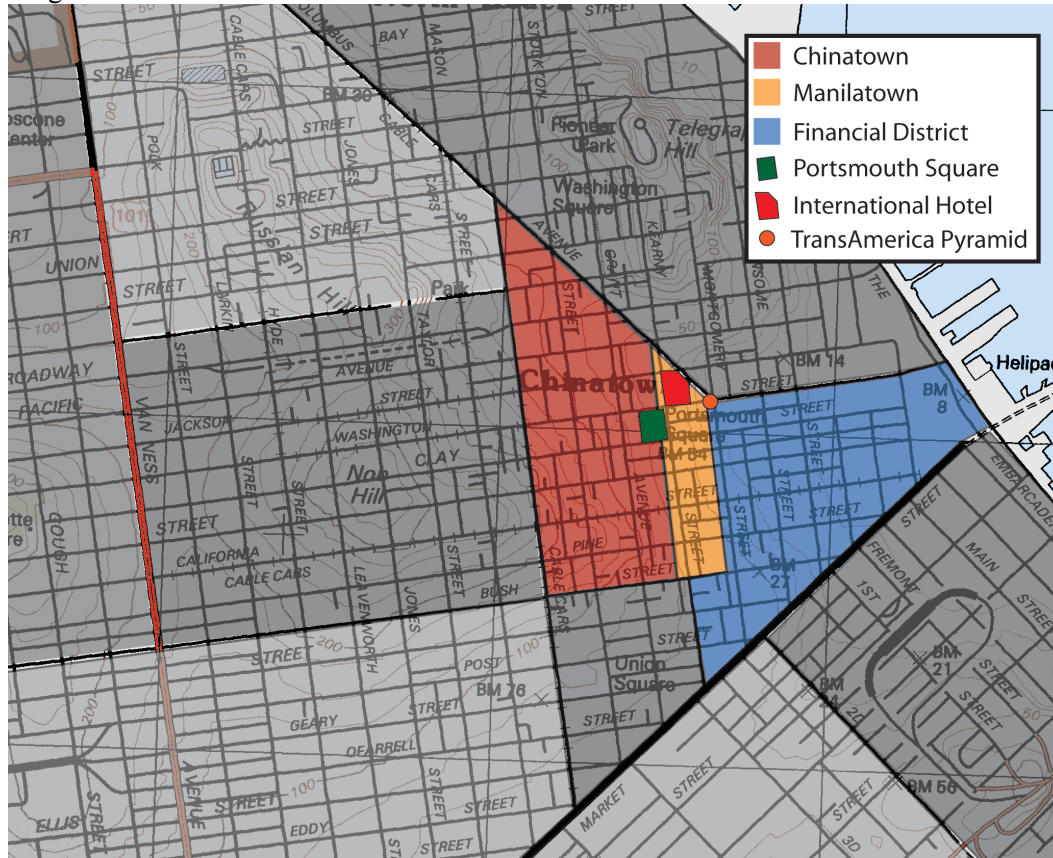
Manilatown was one of the many ethnic enclaves that developed from the implicit and explicit discrimination that enforced residential segregation. The first wave of Filipinos to the US was comprised mostly of male migrant workers who headed toward seasonal work in Hawaii and California in the 1920s and 1930s<sup>2</sup>. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Gentleman's Agreement of 1907 with Japan (in which Japan and the US informally agreed that Japan would no longer issue passports to laborers desiring to move to the US, and the US would not restrict the immigration of wives and family

members of the Japanese who had already immigrated to the US) had dried the two traditional sources of mass cheap labor, and so Filipinos were actively recruited as cheap labor in California; as US colonial subjects the anti-immigration laws did not apply to them. Although they were not considered immigrants in the legal sense, discrimination was rampant in their treatment and they were paid less than white workers<sup>3</sup>. This treatment extended to residential discrimination as well; migrants wintered in the residential hotels on the edge of Chinatown, which was the only place they were welcome to rent a room that they could afford. The racial residential line was often enforced not only by the law, but also by individual racism and violence as well<sup>4</sup>.

Manilatown began to form on the east side of Chinatown on Kearney Street as Filipino workers became more of a fixture in the city, while widely unrecognized by the greater San Francisco population as a community separate from Chinatown in character. Indeed, Manilatown had evolved from Chinatown businesses starting to accommodate Filipino needs, such as when Chinese and Japanese markets began stocking Filipino merchandise and foods, and eventually the east segment of Chinatown had expanded to provide services geared toward the growing migrant Filipino population<sup>5</sup>. Eventually, many of these businesses, such as restaurants, pool halls, and barbershops, came to be operated by the Filipinos. The period between 1920 and 1940 was the height of Manilatown, which housed 20,000 Filipino workers among thriving Filipino businesses extending along ten blocks of Kearney Street<sup>6</sup>. However, by 1968 the ten blocks had diminished to three blocks, and the population of Manilatown remained largely bachelor male and increasingly elderly, few of whom had been able to bring their families to hard

migrant life in the U.S<sup>7</sup>. Equally few had been able to marry due to anti-miscegenation laws, forcing on the elderly men a life without families<sup>8</sup>.

Image 2.



Map situating Chinatown, Manilatown, and the Financial District. Original Map from Map Libre Project. Shades and landmarks added. Manilatown in orange became prime real estate as the Financial District in blue began to expand.

### ***Redevelopment***

After World War II, America as a nation experienced a mass migration from the city to the suburbs as the government encouraged suburbanization through national investment in freeways and housing loans through FHA and VA guarantees, which favored the construction of suburbs. Suburbanization further exacerbated racial segregation, as redlining and restrictive covenants prevented the non-white population from leaving the city without the assistance that veterans and higher-income whites

received<sup>9</sup>. San Francisco was not immune from this effect, and urban infrastructure began to suffer as the City slowly began to decentralize and property values fell.

In 1955, Charles Blyth and James Zellerbach formed the Blyth-Zellerbach Committee, a group of prominent corporate executives, to supervise the redevelopment and rebuilding of San Francisco Downtown<sup>10</sup>. Its objective was to convert land uses in the city from low-density, inefficient uses, to more high-intensity, profitable uses. Its first project in 1959 was exemplary of this resolve, taking out a popular produce market and converting it into what is now the Embarcadero and Golden Gateway<sup>11</sup>. The Committee then decided that the City would benefit from a defined Financial District with skyscrapers hosting office buildings, and commercial hotels geared toward tourists. During the following fifteen years, over 19.4 million square feet of new commercial office space was constructed in the downtown area, housed in the first sky-scrappers that San Francisco had seen<sup>12</sup>. The development and succeeding expansion of the Financial District directly threatened the adjacent North Beach, the area South of Market, Chinatown, and Manilatown. The low-income tenants who lived in the many residential hotels in these neighborhoods were viewed as mere obstacles to the goal of development. The International Hotel was not the only hotel to feel the threat of redevelopment – many others, such as Palm Hotel, Justice Hotel, and Ping Yuen Housing, also turned out tenants and were demolished through a mixture of legal measures and intimidation tactics<sup>13</sup>. All of these neighborhoods were aware of the developer's perception that they were run-down neighborhoods blighting the beauty and utility of the City, and were in fact actively targeted in the search for more land<sup>14</sup>.

The sudden redevelopment brought together strong grassroots opposition as environmental concerns arose over the increasing commuter pollution, preservationists exclaimed at the demolition of historically significant buildings, and housing concerns rose in the adjacent neighborhoods. The TransAmerica building, with its characteristic pyramid shape, became their target, but the grassroots groups were unable to stop the project from closing down community spaces<sup>15</sup>. The building and its struggle had left a mark on all concerned with the changing San Francisco landscape, and became a symbol for the inexorable advent of the Financial District upon the surrounding neighborhoods.

### ***The I-Hotel: A Center for Community and Student Activism***

The International Hotel stood prominently in Manilatown as one of many residential hotels. By 1968, Manilatown had shrunk to three blocks along Kearney Street. The International Hotel, also called the I-Hotel and the IH, became a community fixture and a focus of activism in San Francisco with the emergence of the “back to community” or “back to our roots” movement that arose in the late 60s and early 70s among Asian Pacific American students<sup>16</sup>.

Much like in the Chinese American community, young Filipino Americans had been raised to assimilate and to forget their language and heritage so that these would not detract from their ability to be successful in America<sup>17</sup>. Later waves of more middle-class family immigration from the Philippines settled largely in Daly City, seemingly unaware of the Manilatown community, or when aware, having a low opinion of the area<sup>18</sup>. The young Filipino activists were the children of these families, who were in general better off than the Manilatown Filipinos due to greater education, training, or

because they had served in the U.S. military during World War II and had earned military benefits<sup>19</sup>.

However, rampant racism against the Filipino and Chinese, as well as the lack of historical narrative, politicized youth to demand Asian American studies programs to better understand their ethnic identities in America as well as the roles their ancestors played in its history. The five-month long strike by the Third World Liberation Front, consisting of a union of African American, Latino American, Native American, and Asian American activists in San Francisco State University, led to the first Ethnic Studies Department in the nation. This “shedding of silence” was especially significant to Asian Pacific American student activists as they began to shed the ideas of assimilation that they had grown up with and began to voice their place in America as a people with a distinct but unnamed history<sup>20</sup>. The Third World Strike at University of California Berkeley quickly followed in January 1969 as the Third World Liberation Front movement spread among the students.

The hard-won ethnic studies departments soon faced a need to find direction. Overall, there were two branches to the ethnic studies movement. One emphasized the importance of documenting the undocumented past of the migrants, identifying key Asian Pacific Americans, and uncovering the history of the Asian immigrants that the move to assimilation had deleted. The other found that uncovering the history was important, but that even more, current Asian communities already had issues that needed to be addressed. The latter was what drew Pam Tau Lee and Butch Wing, both of whom later joined the I Wor Kuen, to the “return to community” movement. Pam, who entered Berkeley in 1970, had found the I-Hotel through a Filipino student group who had acted



on this philosophy<sup>21</sup>. Butch, who had arrived at Berkeley in 1973, had come to the I-Hotel through Asian American Studies 30, a fieldwork class that allowed students to work within community organizations in the Bay Area<sup>22</sup>. The Filipino students who had found the I-Hotel began to call the elderly Filipino tenants “*manongs*,” a term indicating respect for an elder in Tagalog<sup>23</sup>. The I-Hotel movement was able to tap into this large resource of previously politicized students who were seeking another way in which to further explore their immigrant heritage in America.

### **The Trajectory of the International Hotel Struggle 1968-1977**

October of 1968, Milton Meyer and Company issued the tenants of the International Hotel an eviction notice; the notice declared that they were required to move out by the New Year to make space for a parking lot for the fast-growing Financial District<sup>24</sup>. Many of the tenants had been living in the Hotel for decades, and although a third moved out, most were unwilling to leave the hotel. In addition, other residential hotels in Chinatown and Manilatown were full from the redevelopment that had been taking place since the 1960s, and there was no alternative hotel or building where the *manongs* could reinstate their community. The United Filipino Association (UFA) stood up to represent the tenants, as the tenants were forced to decide whether to move out or to claim their right to stay in the hotel. The UFA was a group of Manilatown businessmen and tenants who saw the struggle as a way to not only establish the Manilatown community, but its economy in San Francisco as well. Some of the *manongs* had taken part in the Delano Grape Strike of 1965, and many others had also gained organizing experience from involvement in similar labor and labor discrimination organizing<sup>25</sup>. The

elderly Filipino and Chinese tenants, with the support of the student activists, decided to assert their right to stay in the I-Hotel.

On November 27th, the elderly residents of the hotel marched outside the I-Hotel with placards quietly demanding what they thought was a completely reasonable request<sup>26</sup>. The calm march was markedly different from the loud, confrontational anti-war demonstrations in the rest of the city, which it would soon come to resemble. Supervisor Jack Morrison marched with the tenants, and suggested appealing to the Board of Permit Appeals. Assemblyman John Burton also lobbied against Milton Meyer and Company, citing the alarming speed with which redevelopment was changing the landscape and land usage of San Francisco. At the same time, the Human Rights Commission also became involved, as did Mayor Alioto's advisory committee to the Office of Aging, saying that alternative housing for the elderly tenants should be a precondition to the demolition of the Hotel.

In April 1969, of the 182 residents of the I-Hotel, half of the hotel's residents were Filipino, a fifth were Chinese, and the others were a mixture of black, Latino, and very low-income families. By the end of May, the residents had dropped to about 65, of which the vast majority was Filipino<sup>27</sup>. (UFA) took the lead in advocating for the housing rights of the *manongs*. Supervisor Jack Morrison marched with the tenants, and suggested appealing to the Board of Permit Appeals. Assemblyman John Burton lobbied against Shorenstein, citing the alarming speed with which redevelopment was changing the landscape and land usage of San Francisco. The Human Rights Commission also became involved, as did Mayor Alioto's advisory committee to the Office of Aging,

saying that alternative housing for the elderly tenants should be a precondition to the demolition of the Hotel.

As discussed earlier, the postwar wave of Filipino immigration was more middle-class than the *manongs*, and many of the young Filipino student activists hailed from this heritage. The second wave of Filipino migration began after World War II. Habal describes her father's cohort, which had been part of the military efforts in WWII and had been given the right to settle in the US<sup>28</sup>. As veterans, they differed from the *manongs* of Manilatown and brought their family units to create Filipino military settlements in the US. However, even as the Filipino youth became more politicized and involved in the Manilatown struggle, their parents, who did not identify with the struggle, refused to become involved. The I-Hotel campaign was an open challenge to society, counter to the assimilation strategy that they had heretofore adhered to. Habal documents some cases where some in the Filipino community ridiculed and scorned the elderly Filipino tenants who became active in the I-Hotel struggle. This community did not want to be identified with the *manongs*, who belonged to another time, while their children felt a kinship with the older men because they saw them as living proof of their history in America.

On March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1969, Shorenstein agreed to sign a lease agreement two days later with the UFA, which acted as the tenants' representatives. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, a fire erupted in the north wing of the second floor, killing three tenants. The tenants believed the fire was arson, an intimidation tactic that was not unknown to happen in other residential hotels marked to make way for redevelopment<sup>29</sup>. Shorenstein cancelled the lease saying that the building was dangerous for human habitation, even though inspection by the fire department found that although there were a number of housing code violations, the

Hotel was structurally sound. The fire strengthened the tenants' resolve and that of their supporters. Sid Wolinsky from the San Francisco's Neighborhood Legal Assistance Federation filed a suit alleging that the removal of the tenants from the I-Hotel without providing alternative housing was unconstitutional. Federal Judge George Harris dismissed the suit on May 8<sup>th</sup>, declaring "it is manifest to the court that there is no federal question involved<sup>30</sup>."

Mayor Alioto then held a meeting with The I-Hotel tenants and leaders of the Filipino community, proposing that he would first move the tenants to nearby hotels, where if the rents were higher than the thirty-five dollars a month for the I-Hotel, the City Rent Supplement Program would pay the difference for up to 18 months. Then the tenants would all be moved to a new 110-unit housing center built by the city's housing authority at 550 Ellis Street, which was already approved for senior citizen housing. The Mayor would also ask Shorenstein that the I-Hotel property only be sold or leased to those who would set up a Filipino cultural center. 550 Ellis Street was in the Tenderloin, far away from Chinatown where the residents bought their food and with a high crime rate<sup>31</sup>. Since the tenants distrusted that the city would keep its promise that they would all be able to relocate together, they chose to stay in control of the situation by remaining at the Hotel<sup>32</sup>.

On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1969, the UFA and Milton Meyer and Company signed a three-year lease agreement, in which the renters would pay \$23,000 for property taxes as well as \$40,000 a year, triple the rent they had originally paid<sup>33</sup>. The company could cancel the lease at any time after two years, as long as they provided six month's notice and repaid the UFA for the hotel renovation costs. The Center for Community Change of

Washington, D.C. and the Ford Foundation gave the residents \$50,000 for renovation and guaranteed the rent<sup>34</sup>.

The Hotel began to rent its commercial spaces again in order to secure money for rent, but this time, the I-Hotel's manager and head of the IHTA Joe Diones chose community organizations and businesses that would keep with the character of the I-Hotel. Many groups from Chinatown moved in along with the Filipino businesses, such as Leways (Legitimate Ways), which later became the Red Guard, which then joined the I Wor Kuen, and the Asian Community Center run by the Wei Min She. There was also Everybody's Bookstore, The Kearney Street Workshop, the Chinese Progressive Association, and Kalayaan, a Filipino organization. All these organizations were politically Leftist community organizations that provided services and organized the elderly tenants as well as other Chinatown and Manilatown residents to join the I-Hotel struggle<sup>35</sup>.

At the same time, with the money the hotel had received for renovation, the Hotel was able to send out a call for students, inviting them to help in the community effort to renovate and renew the I-Hotel<sup>36</sup>. Students arrived from UC Berkeley, San Francisco State, City College of San Francisco. Filipino identity movement and political activism came together to form mutual respect and personal connections between the *manongs* and the student activists. This was a time when the I-Hotel built its following of student activists from the entire Bay Area. The *manongs* had been largely ignored by the more recently immigrated Filipino community, but found validation in the admiration of the youth who wanted to hear of their labor organizing. With the renovations, the I-Hotel became a more attractive place for people to live, and the residents swelled to twice the

number that had been present when the evictions began. Butch Wing, part of the student movement at the time, became involved in the I-Hotel renovation project through his sister, who had been working at the free health clinic.

Part of it was to provide direct services for the tenants. So we provided, you know, a lot of social services for the tenants, as a backup support, for helping them with the rent, helping them with housing and repairs, getting them to the doctors, getting them to their appointments, so there was a whole support apparatus that the community forged around the tenants<sup>37</sup>.

The lease agreement ended and month-to-month rental began in 1972. Later that year, the UFA disbanded, believing that they had done their part in preventing the eviction. In 1973, Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP) was founded as a left-wing Filipino organization, and began to represent the tenants after the UFA disbanded. The KDP was more student-, tenant- and activist-based, whereas the UFA had been an association of Filipino leaders and small businessmen with an economic stake in the survival of Manilatown. The Four Seas Investment Corporation bought the I-Hotel from Milton Meyer and Company, but the tenants only found out in September 1974, when the Four Seas Corporation ordered an eviction. A month later, the tenants and their supporters held a demonstration, while the San Francisco Lawyers Committee for Urban Affairs filed a suit on the behalf of the tenants for damages and an injunction against the eviction. Meanwhile, the tenants and their supporters also began to prepare for the possibility of an eviction. Representatives began to go about once a month to the Farm, an organization with links to white labor organizing, and trained in creating a human wall around the I-Hotel. Pam Tau Lee was one such representative.

I was being part of the...representatives of different organizations like me, would go to the Farm, and we would then learn from people who knew about civil disagreement, so we all agreed how we would lock arms, we would make sure that people knew to bring handkerchiefs, water, and different other things,

commands, and who was going to have the walkie talkies and the communications, with different key leaders who would tell us when to stay, and when to break up, you know, all of that kind of stuff. So we spent several months at the Farm, trying to get ready. And we would have several rallies to get organized<sup>38</sup>.

Image 3.



Practicing for the Wall. Representatives teaching demonstrators how to link arms and form a human wall. Courtesy of the Chinese Progressive Association.

In January 1975, Four Seas applied to the Central Permit Bureau for a demolition permit for the I-Hotel, which it received in March 10<sup>th</sup>. The Board of Permit Appeals upheld Four Sea's permit in the face of opposition from tenants and supporters. In 1976, Building Inspector Alfred Goldberg refused to cancel the demolition permit, and the International Hotel Tenants Association (IHTA) appealed to the Board of Permit Appeals<sup>39</sup>. The case went to the State Supreme Court, but the Court rejected the appeal and lifted the stay on eviction<sup>40</sup>.

Image 4.



A Rally for the International Hotel. It was at rallies such as these that the International Hotel Support Committee developed phone trees practiced using them. After the rally, demonstrators would practice forming the human wall. Courtesy of the Chinese Progressive Association.

In the meantime, the tenants and their supporters began to step up the pace of their rallies. These rallies did not only demand the end to demolition plans, but also provided a meeting-place for the large numbers and variety of demonstrators who became involved with the I-Hotel. Butch Wing describes how the rallies cultivated the phone trees and put them to the test.

Every city-wide housing organization in the city. We had a phone tree that went out and especially, I remember the eviction night... We got word that the sheriff was coming to do the eviction, and the phone tree went out, you know, and it just popped every housing association in the phone tree, and we probably had five, then thousands of people in front of the hotel in an hour. And we formed a human barricade around the hotel that night. So it was a fairly, you know, we didn't have email, we didn't have text messages, we didn't have cell phones, so we did it old-fashioned, you know, phone tree. You know, phone call, phone call, phone call, you know, the network, the team people. You had five people to call, and each of those had five people to call, each of those five, you know. So it just branched



out. Because I think that the struggle had gone on so long. So that network, that support system had been tested and nurtured and was able to put into play.

While the case was in the Supreme Court, Mayor George Moscone presented a proposal to the Housing Authority for nonprofit ownership of the I-Hotel, which the Housing Authority accepted but the Board of Supervisors turned down, proposing instead to use the funds to expand police forces<sup>41</sup>. Moscone vetoed their proposal, and the Board of Supervisors voted to uphold the plan six-to-four<sup>42</sup>. Judge Brown issued a new order of eviction, but the sheriff's department cited lack of manpower with which to carry out the eviction. On December 20<sup>th</sup>, Sherriff Hongisto and Undersheriff Denman are charged with contempt of court for not fulfilling eviction, and the Sherriff was placed in jail for five days<sup>43</sup>.

January 7th, 1977, the Sheriff attempted to evict the tenants, but only succeeded in evicting the commercial tenants<sup>44</sup>. This proved useless, since the commercial tenants returned to the building after eviction. In fact, CPA members were the last to leave the building at the final eviction, chaining themselves to the I-Hotel in a mute protest<sup>45</sup>. The next day, the San Francisco Housing Authority lost a court petition for immediate possession of the I-Hotel for low-income public housing, and appeals the case to the State Court of Appeal. The tenants and their supporters also rallied to indicate their demands; on the 12th, a demonstration of between 2,500 and 3,000 supporters filled the front of the Hotel, and on the 16<sup>th</sup>, 7,000 supporters showed up for a demonstration<sup>46</sup>. Judge Brown stayed the order of eviction because Police Chief Charles Gain reported that automatic weapons and gasoline were seen at the I-Hotel, which tenants and supporters denied. In the meantime, Joe Diones was ousted as head of IHTA because of disagreements within the Tenants Association, and Emil de Guzman was elected to replace him.

On July 27<sup>th</sup>, the State Supreme Court lifted all legal barriers to the eviction of the tenants. Unknown to the I-Hotel supporters, the Sheriff had coordinated the eviction to be at 12:30am on August 4<sup>th</sup> so that he would have two shifts of police available for the eviction<sup>47</sup>. That night, lookouts for the I-Hotel posted at the sheriff's station saw police action and initiated calls on the phone tree. Although the police had blocked off the freeways, an estimated 5,000 people had gathered at the I-Hotel by the time police arrived, creating a human wall around the I-Hotel four- to five-deep<sup>48</sup>. The police created a "wedge," reforming five or so times before brutally breaking through the demonstrators and entering the building<sup>49</sup>. With his police force, the sheriff evicted 120 residents, two-thirds of whom were Filipino, and the rest of whom were Chinese<sup>50</sup>.

Image 5.



Eviction Night. Police breaking up the human wall on their way to the entrance of the International Hotel. Courtesy of the Chinese Progressive Association.

## **After the Eviction: from 1977 to the Present**

In some ways, the I-Hotel movement could be said to have continued after the eviction, but the goals and character of the movement changed vastly after the loss of its icon. The new goals were to find housing for the displaced elderly residents and to ensure that the Hotel grounds remained a low-income senior housing site. Many of the *manongs* passed away from the shock of displacement, unable to return to the home and community they had lost. Many organizations pulled out after the struggle, shifting the characteristics of the organizations involved in the I-Hotel from encompassing a large milieu of political groups, to ones that concentrated on the vision of the I-Hotel as a site for low-income senior housing.

CPA also lost its office in the eviction, and a number of years after were spent moving from space to space. After its active work in the I-Hotel Struggle, few landlords wanted to take on the trouble of housing the organization. Although individual members who had formed bonds with the tenants continued searching for affordable housing for the elderly tenants, the organization prioritized finding a new space in which to bring community members together. Finally after a few years CPA found a more permanent space on Broadway, where active membership had to be rebuilt. CPA representatives were present in the first few hearings on the I-Hotel redevelopment plan, but faced with bureaucracy, the organization began to turn toward other campaigns<sup>51</sup>.

In November 1977, Proposition U, which would have had the city buy the I-Hotel, renovate it to fit housing codes, and put the I-Hotel under the Housing Authority for low-income public housing, was defeated<sup>52</sup>. The Four Seas began demolishing the Hotel without a permit in February 1978, and was placed on two years probation, but completed

the demolition in the autumn of the next year. Because of sustained community outcry, Mayor Dianne Feinstein created the International Hotel Citizens Advisory Committee, given the power to review all new development plans. The community leaders in the Committee guarded the empty site for 30 years after the I-Hotel demolition in 1979, always pushing for a plan that provided low-income housing for the elderly<sup>53</sup>. From then on, the Four Seas Corporation and the City of San Francisco maintained negotiations and developed plans for a mixed-use project proposal that would incorporate low-income housing for seniors.

However, in 1986, Four Seas withdrew the proposal and sold the I-Hotel to Pan-Magna in 1991, which in 1994 agreed to sell the I-Hotel site for community use to the San Francisco Archdiocese of the Catholic Church<sup>54</sup>. The sale was finalized in 1998, and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded a \$7.6 million grant to develop low-income housing on the site<sup>55</sup>, and the San Francisco Mayor's Office of Housing added another 8.7 million toward the senior housing component. From contributions and combined grants, the International Hotel Citizens Advisory Committee was able to secure \$29 million for the new building<sup>56</sup>. August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2005, the new International Hotel opened for residents and an opening ceremony is held. The new building stands on the long-vacant site of 848 Kearney street, and contains a parking lot, St. Mary's Chinese Catholic School, the Manilatown Heritage Foundation, and 104 units of low-income senior housing<sup>57</sup>. The I-Hotel did mark the end of the extension of the Financial District sky-scrappers; Kearney Street still retains the Stanford Hotel, a residential hotel that has survived redevelopment, and is now largely a street of restaurants and businesses catering to clients from the Financial District. Although the

street has lost its previous Filipino affiliation, the I-Hotel struggle spurred a movement to preserve low-income housing. The continuation of the movement after succeeded in maintaining this prime real estate for elderly low-income housing three decades later.

Image 6.



The current International Hotel. It stands on the same black community activists have defended since 1977. Photograph by author.

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## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **The Housing Justice Campaign**

#### **Introduction**

The Housing Justice Campaign (HJC) extended from 1997 to 1999, a short period of time compared to the decade-long I-Hotel Struggle, but was no less important as a period for determining a new organizational structure and establishing a base. The HJC was the first campaign in which CPA took the initiative to bring the city government's attention to conditions within the Chinatown community. This was also the first time CPA embraced Alinsky-style community organizing, which aims to empower the community and through that build the organization itself as well. While the I-Hotel struggle sought to keep low-income housing for the *manongs*, the HJC's goal was to secure higher standards of living for the residents of the single-room occupancy hotel rooms through targeting the Department of Building Inspections to complete building inspections and enforce the housing codes. In addition, the CPA was able to raise its profile by gathering media attention as well as becoming a name in Chinatown housing struggles.

#### **The Housing Justice Campaign: Its Emergence and Context**

##### ***Housing in Chinatown and San Francisco***

Single-room occupancy hotels, or SRO hotels, used to house mostly low-income bachelor men who came to the city to work, such as the *manongs* of Manilatown. However, as housing demand in the past three decades grew, largely driven by the growing newly immigrant population, these SRO housing facilities came increasingly in demand as housing for low-income couples or even families<sup>1</sup>. The SRO units often provide very cramped quarters for single individuals, much less for more than one

occupant. In addition, the buildings are aging and become increasingly dirty as the numbers of residents increase. Chinatown is full of these SRO housing units, since new Chinese immigrants are attracted to the everyday use of a familiar language and the consequently increased employment opportunities. Residents living in these SRO units are often in badly maintained buildings with unresponsive landlords, suffer from bad air quality from lack of ventilation, and share unhygienic kitchens and bathrooms. The miserable state of the SRO units was common knowledge, but the value of SROs as low-income housing was undeniable. Thus, housing justice groups in the Mission at the time mostly focused on preventing gentrification and redevelopment, still a very real issue today in the Mission and South of Market areas<sup>2</sup>.

### ***The Department of Building Inspections***

CPA's Housing Justice Campaign directly targeted Frank Chiu, the head of the new Department of Building Inspections (DBI). The DBI had already gone through a process of restructuring after its backlog of over 2000 housing cases became public knowledge. Proposition G passed in the November 1994 elections, removing the Bureau of Building Inspection from the Department of Public Works and instead placing it under a new seven-member Building Inspection Commission<sup>3</sup>. However, the bureaucratic steps to building code enforcement did not change, and the Department of Building Inspections placed under the new Building Inspection Commission was not successful in reducing the backlog. A San Francisco Chronicle article outlined the unchanged nature of the procedure in response to a housing complaint:

Although building inspection has been reorganized, the basic administrative process leading to abatement of a building as a public nuisance hasn't changed: A complaint is made, an inspector surveys the property, prepares

a notice of violation and sends a second notice if the first is ignored, and a hearing is held, 60 to 80 days after the initial notice.

If the property owner remains unresponsive, an order of abatement is recorded against the property, giving the owner 90 days to bring it up to code. On the 91<sup>st</sup> day, the case can be referred to the city attorney.<sup>4</sup>

The department's Public Service Chief, James Hutchinson, admitted that the backlog of 3000 cases from the previous year had not been reduced even after the Bureau was restructured into a Department. The Building Inspection Commission's competency was called into question with its failures to give public notice before taking control in January, and in firing four members on two advisory panels<sup>5</sup>. Questions also arose as to whether or not the Commission was taking adequate recording and transparency measures<sup>6</sup>. By 1997, these complaints had not diminished. Especially in Chinatown, there seemed to be no routine inspections, and few among SRO residents knew that there was a government institution to which they could complain.

### **The Housing Justice Campaign (HJC) 1997-1999**

CPA's first Chinatown housing survey in 1993 queried demographic factors, quality of housing, rent, and housing preferences of the 103 participants<sup>7</sup>. CPA began thinking about housing justice as a possible organizing campaign after seeing the results: of the largely Chinese population, an eighth had moved into Chinatown in the last 20 years, and the majority of the SRO units housed families. Although the new immigrants found living in Chinatown highly convenient and appreciated the lower rent, they felt overcrowded in what housing they could afford. The survey did not ask about the quality of housing, but the surveyors found that many of those filling out the surveys lived in substandard housing conditions. In July of 1995, CPA began to seriously consider a

housing justice campaign in Chinatown, calling it the Chinatown Environmental Organizing Project and holding the DBI accountable for enforcing housing codes<sup>8</sup>.

CPA began to take stock of the situation, interviewing one of the inspectors stationed in Chinatown and speaking with staff at the Chinatown Resource Center (CRC), which was already working with Chinatown tenants. In this way, CPA discovered that there were no regular inspections in Chinatown and that there was one Chinese-speaking inspector, but that she was not stationed in Chinatown<sup>9</sup>. Talks with the CRC found that the DBI did not have effective outreach programs in Chinatown, and few residents knew of its existence or its responsibilities. Furthermore, residents could complain to the landlords, but they were unlikely to press again even if no actions were taken<sup>10</sup>.

CPA began to draft a new housing survey to be filled in 1995, but after talks with the CRC, the two organizations decided to work on a joint survey. In 1996, the CRC subcontracted with CPA to train surveyors and gather detailed information on the housing conditions within Chinatown<sup>11</sup>. CPA trained seven teams of surveyors and began surveying between April 13<sup>th</sup> and June 1<sup>st</sup> in 1997. Compared to the 1993 housing survey, this survey was more detailed, asking for the tenants' backgrounds, housing conditions, rent, and landlord response. Housing code violations were also checked, such as the accessibility of the fire escape (often nailed shut), the sanitary conditions, and general safety. Out of the 4068 housing units counted in a previous door-to-door count of SRO units, CPA and the CRC were able to collect 576 surveys, or over 14% of Chinatown households<sup>12</sup>.

Image 7.



Door-to-door outreach. Ensuring that tenants know the responsibilities of the Department of Building Inspections. Courtesy of the Chinese Progressive Association.

The results revealed a shocking lack of knowledge of the DBI and landlord responsibilities, as well as the overwhelming need for these services. Ninety-six percent of respondents were unaware of a government agency responsible for enforcing housing codes, and 33% found their landlords unresponsive. Over 65% of the respondents saw living in Chinatown as one of the benefits of their housing. This way, they would be close to family and friends as well as have access to jobs, stores, and social services in Cantonese. The cheaper rent also attracted high numbers of vulnerable populations; Ninety-three percent were low-income, of which 53% received Supplemental Security

Income (SSI). Rents averaged between \$200 and \$400, but 28% of those who received SSI were spending half or more of their income on housing. Chinatown proved especially attractive for Chinese immigrants; though only 5% of the respondents were recent immigrants who had resided in the US for less than three years, 97% were foreign-born<sup>13</sup>. In addition, 80% of the units had at least one housing violation, and 60% had two or more<sup>14</sup>.

The results of the 1997 Housing Survey were distributed at the Chinatown 2000 Tenants Convention. This report, in addition to policy recommendations, was subsequently submitted to the DBI. The recommendations included hiring a Chinese-speaking Inspector, Chinese-speaking staff to receive calls of complaints from tenants, and making DBI information more available to Chinatown residents<sup>15</sup>. The DBI agreed to incorporate these recommendations but did not immediately take action on these promises, citing lack of resources and budget concerns. In response, CPA launched the Housing Justice Campaign to ensure that these promises were kept and that the housing complaints submitted by the residents would be followed by inspections and housing code enforcement.

Unlike the CRC, CPA was not only interested in the results of the survey, but also in the use of the process as a tool to reach more Chinatown residents and begin a community organizing campaign. In addition to surveying the units door-to-door, the surveyors also helped residents submit complaints to their landlords, and when this elicited no response, to the DBI with the housing violations that they found. At the same time, CPA staff members began to meet periodically with the Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO), which adjusted Alinsky-style community organizing to better fit

the circumstances and power dynamics involving people of color. With guidance from CTWO, CPA decided on the goals of the Housing Justice Campaign:

1. Educate, organize and mobilize low-income Chinatown tenants and other concerned community members to improve the living environment in Chinatown.
2. Expand CPA's membership and volunteer base.
3. Increase CPAs visibility.
4. Develop and strengthen strategic alliances with other grassroots organizations struggling for environmental, social and economic justice.<sup>16</sup>

In keeping with the community organizing model, CPA's goals were not only to empower the Chinatown community, but also to build up CPA's capacity as a community organization, as goals two, three, and four indicate.

However, CPA had not taken part in this particular model before, and needed a staff member who could bring community-organizing experience to the Campaign. Julia Lau had been community organizing in Los Angeles as a student and immediately after graduation. When the organization that she had been working with folded through lack of funding, she applied for a job at CPA, since it was then the only group that organized in the Asian Community in California<sup>17</sup>. Under her leadership, the Housing Justice Campaign began to take shape – along with the number of surveys, membership and support for CPA grew.

However, in its first community organizing campaign, the CPA encountered some resistance from the tenants to organizing.

Yeah, to be honest, we were just getting to know a lot of folks brand-new, right? We had our kind of membership of folks but it wasn't necessarily, the people we were bringing into the campaign were real, just the people living in the community it was really direct. It was really great for the organization because it really connected us to the people who were really dealing with this stuff, the bad housing conditions. Every meeting we had food, that helps, and we were able to find, who were the natural leaders, who are the people who are really, like we found...Mr. Guo, there's another main person...certain people who were comfortable speaking, we brought them on as interns, actually<sup>18</sup>.

CPA incorporated a number of organizers from within the community and trained them as interns, professionalizing the organizers from the community as well. These community members spoke at the demonstrations and at meetings with DBI head Frank Chiu, negotiating with the Department for the need for Chinese-speaking staff as well as enforcement in order to ensure that landlords fix housing code violations.

From July to August in 1998, CPA followed up with the 145 tenants who had had housing code violations and informed them of DBI's responsibilities. CPA helped 122 tenants write letters of complaints to their landlords, only nine of whom had their problem fixed within six months. In September 1998, CPA coordinated the public delivery of more than 100 code violations to the DBI with the tenants, the most common problems being insect or rodent infestation, peeling paint, lack of heat, no stove or broken stove, and leaking or broken toilet<sup>19</sup>. The demonstration caught the attention of local media, as CPA became a source of information for Chinatown's substandard housing conditions. Under increased enforcement from the DBI, by 1999 landlords had fixed housing code violations in over 100 Chinatown buildings<sup>20</sup>. Media attention sparked increased scrutiny of the DBI, which responded by hiring a Chinese-speaking inspector and staff and publishing materials and holding complaint phone lines in Chinese. To even out services to the rest of the city population, the DBI also hired a Spanish-speaking inspector and staff<sup>21</sup>. CPA was thus able to follow through until the DBI fulfilled its demands.

CPA also initiated a Chinatown SRO Family Collaborative with the Chinatown Community Development Center and the Community Tenants Association. By February 2000, the Examiner referred tenants who had issues in residential hotels to the Chinese



Progressive Association and the member organizations taking part in the SRO Collaborative<sup>22</sup>. The SRO Collaborative, now SRO Families United Collaborative, is a partnership between CPA, the Chinatown Community Development Center, South of Market Community Action Network, Coalition on Homelessness, and Dolores Street Community Services. The Collaboratives increased connections and partnerships with other organizations, but they also succeeded in attracting larger amounts of funding than the individual organizations could have secured alone. As of April 2009, the DBI will continue to fund the Collaborative \$750,000 for its programs, now concentrating on fire prevention, outreach, and cultivating peer support<sup>23</sup>.

### **Housing Justice at CPA After HJC**

The SRO Collaboratives greatly increased the budget of all the organizations involved, but organizing around housing justice at CPA began to decline after CPA began to accept the City funds. A large amount of the sum was dedicated to outreach in Chinatown about housing rights, and on behalf of the DBI. Gordon Mar, who was the Executive Director, remembers that the funds were a mixed blessing.

We were able to get the city funding just to do outreach, not so much organizing. So that was a bit...that created a kind of challenge to do our work then because we were only funded to do outreach. And some groups maybe, a few other groups I'd say in the Mission have been able to do some organizing and political work. I'd say for the CPA, kind of led us to, our housing, tenant work was focusing on outreach, and leadership development and a little bit less organizing<sup>24</sup>.

After the DBI became more responsive in enforcing housing codes, housing quality improved for the buildings that were structurally unsafe and were not maintained properly. However, issues such as cockroach and rodent infestations continued.

Although the DBI was responsible for referring these to the Department of Public Health, the Department was not responsive. In 2005, CPA launched another housing justice

campaign, this time focusing on the health code violations in the SRO housing units. The campaign began much in the same way as the 1997 Housing Justice Campaign, with a housing survey followed by developing community leadership. However, the Department of Public Health was more bureaucratic and a larger institution than the DBI, and was less amenable to demands. From this point on, CPA's organizing moved toward the workers, and today the Workers Organizing Center is CPA's main organizing program.

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<sup>1</sup> Pamuk, Ayse. *Geography of Immigrant Clusters in Global Cities: A Case Study of San Francisco, 2000*. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research. Vol. 28, No. 2: 287-307. 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Notes about Housing Justice. Tom, Alex. January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Walsh, Diana. *New Building Inspectors Debut But City Bureau's Struggle to Become a Department is Fraught with Confusion, Snags*. San Francisco Examiner A. January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Chin, Steven A. and Brazil, Eric. *Making a Fuss Over Abandoned Buildings:irate Neighbors Find City Hall Unresponsive*. San Francisco Chronicle Thursday, July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1995. Page A1

<sup>5</sup> Chin, Steven A. *Access Appeals Trio Losing Posts: Building Inspection Commission Votes Out 3 Members*. San Francisco Examiner. March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Lehrman, Sally. *City Probes Embattled New Building Commission*. San Francisco Examiner A. April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Flyer. Findings from the 1993 Chinatown Housing Survey.

<sup>8</sup> Print-out. Chinatown Environmental Organizing Project Draft Outline 7-26-95

<sup>9</sup> Print-Out. Chinatown Housing Code Enforcement Campaign. Notes on interview with Inspector David Gogna 7-11-96.

<sup>10</sup> Print-Out. Chinatown Housing Code Enforcement Campaign. Notes on interview with Tan Chow at the Chinatown Resource Center 6-23-96.

<sup>11</sup> E-mail. Kwan, Wai Ching to Mar, Gordon. Subject: LISC Proposal Info. 9-22-96.

<sup>12</sup> Print-out. Housing Unit Count. Wai Ching Kwan to Gordon Mar. Date unknown: before April 1997, after December 1996.

<sup>13</sup> 1997 Chinatown Housing Survey: A Report by Chinatown Resource Center and Chinese Progressive Association. July 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Chao, Julie. *New Inspector Part of Effort to Upgrade Chinatown Housing*. San Francisco Examiner A. May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Policy recommendations to DBI. 9-09-97.

<sup>16</sup> Print-out. CPA Chinatown Housing Code Enforcement Campaign (10/97-9/98). Date unknown: after December 1996, before June 1997.

<sup>17</sup> Julia Lau, Personal Interview. 16 February 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Julia Lau, Personal Interview. 16 February 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Chao, Julie. *Chinatown Tenants Fed Up With Roommates: Filth and Squalor: Activists Ask City for Help, File List of More Than 100 Violations*. San Francisco Examiner A. October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1998.

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<sup>20</sup> Chao, Julie. New Inspector Part of Effort to Upgrade Chinatown Housing. San Francisco Examiner A. May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1999.

<sup>21</sup> Chao, Julie. New Inspector Part of Effort to Upgrade Chinatown Housing. San Francisco Examiner A. May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1999.

<sup>22</sup> How to Get Help. Examiner Staff Report. San Francisco Examiner. February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2000.

<sup>23</sup> Print-Out. Mission, Chinatown, Central City, and Families United SRO Collaboratives Program Summary: SRO Tenant Stabilization, Fire Prevention, and Outreach. April, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Mar, Gordon. Personal Interview. January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009.



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **The Interactions Between Service and Organizing**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapters have covered the history and the growth of the organization, exploring changes in organizational structure and methods of organizing. This chapter will focus on the character of CPA during the I-Hotel Struggle and the Housing Justice Campaign to look at how the role of service developed in the organization. If organizing is about understanding power dynamics and acting upon the analysis, then service is a response to the needs within a community. However, they are not mutually exclusive. Leading up to and during the I-Hotel Struggle, services were a part of the organizing and brought active, political members to CPA. In contrast, the Housing Justice Campaign demonstrated tensions between the service and organizing sectors. Once a uniting force, service even became a divisive factor as members debated the direction and flow of resources of CPA. The relationship between service and organizing cannot be confined exclusively to any one of the categories of political atmosphere, organizational structure, power analyses, or organizing methods. The interaction between service and organizing is a manifestation of what these factors mean for the continuation of the organization, separate from the individual campaigns.

#### **Service in the I-Hotel Struggle**

The Chinese Progressive Association as a political organization grew out of the provision of services in Chinatown. Members of the Red Guard and the I Wor Kuen had felt that the City discriminated against Chinatown residents in allocating resources<sup>1</sup>. The services the IWK provided were the services that the City neglected to provide to the

residents of the Chinatown ghetto<sup>2</sup>. Ben Lee suggested offering legal aid for Chinatown youth who could not afford representation after being arrested by police.

I worked on cases, gamblers in a gambling hall get busted, you know, thirty-five defendants lined up, and then we got to deal outside. I was the translator. People helped murderers...at least people had their legal rights. Whether they were right or wrong was another matter, at least we'd be able to provide them with legal. Cause at that time, poor people didn't have legal. Now we have Asian Law Caucus, which is great right? But we didn't have that. But we...anyway, that was the Red Guard's...our mass work. A lot of people were on staff at draft help, and Asian Legal Service, were Red Guard members. See, and then also at that time in the Red Guard...our...mass work<sup>3</sup>.

This service in particular raised awareness that even in an institution advocating fair arbitration such as the justice system, Chinatown residents could not afford representation. The Red Guard, and later IWK, also offered draft counsel for those being drafted into the Vietnam War. IWK set up a free Health Clinic that offered tuberculosis tests, pap smears, and venereal disease tests, staffed by students<sup>4</sup>. Both those who delivered and those who received these services were aware that the delivery in itself was a political statement about the failures of the local and national government. The ideas of self-determination thus began to take root.

Self-determination was a large part of both the IWK and CPA's mission, and much of this was rooted in the knowledge that those who claimed to represent Chinatown were not in the majority, but were the large business owners and politicians who held the economic power in the neighborhood. The Chinese Six Companies of San Francisco owned much of the garment factories, manufacturing jobs, and housing in San Francisco and were very pro-Taiwan and pro-Kuomintang. They made their opposition to the People's Republic of China and to the normalization of relations between the PRC and the US abundantly clear in the proclamation they issued in 1971. The Six Companies felt

so sure of their authority as representative of all Chinese Americans as to say, "...our entire overseas Chinese Community unanimously approves of the withdrawal of the Republic of China [Taiwan] from the United Nations..."<sup>5</sup> The Chinese Six Companies also enforced Chinatown residents' agreement with their use of gangs and family associations in order to maintain their version of order.

In addition, institutions within Chinatown were clearly out of the residents' control. School teachers and administrators were mostly white, and they did not live inside the community<sup>6</sup>. Chinatown was confined within its own segregated space<sup>7</sup>. Beside the Tongs that had the Chinese Six Companies stamp of approval, police violence was also rampant. The very institutions that should have served Chinatown's needs perpetuated discrimination and violence. The working class in Chinatown truly had no voice. When the community members felt that they needed an organization of their own, these were the issues that they incorporated into CPA.

Heavy at that time was issues of police brutality with youth. Kids would get beat up all the time by the police. Racial profiling was heavy so the [CPA] by-laws reflected what people were feeling about the times...From 1972, the issues of the Shanghai Communiqué, which dealt with issues of normalization with issues of China, issues of oppression and exploitation, takes on a very anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist tone, and that was from people's experiences. So these kinds of political...the elements of the by-laws reflected their experiences, what was important to them. And that's how CPA kind of came about. Cross-generation, American-born, immigrant, solidarity with other third world countries, pride in the liberation struggles that were going on globally<sup>8</sup>.

At the same time, politics and power dynamics were not all that the CPA considered. Chinatown residents were often very low-income and had difficulties in day-to-day life. Accordingly, CPA provided services such as communal dinners, free health clinics, and movie showings. CPA would charge a minimal fee for the dinners, with the members' understanding that the money was going into more community activities. Cooking

competitions brought the Chinatown community closer together and provided amusement. Movies were a special event at the time, and Pam Tau Lee describes how they brought in people starved for information and entertainment.

They [CPA] would show movies like the Battle of Algiers, Charlie Chaplin, movies from China, and so when you think about that time, you didn't have video, you know, these big movie things were like huge, kind of a...experience for people, it was dynamic. So people would come down and watch...little things like Charlie Chaplin, people *loved* Charlie Chaplin, and, cause there was no speaking, but it was about America...and his things reflected a lot of experiences that a lot of people were feeling.

These services had greater significance than to simply raise the quality of life; the people who were bringing the services to the community were Chinese Americans who wished to pour resources from the ivory tower of school campuses into the community. Warren Mar stresses that although CPA provided services, it was never a service organization.

One of the things that was important about CPA is that we didn't believe in the Agency model. There was always social workers, people that want to help the poor people. There were always professional social workers. We were not social workers. We were not a charity. We didn't want to help poor people. We wanted to empower poor people. We didn't want to give out turkeys and clothes. We made them pay for dinner. But they knew the money we took for dinner was paying for food and keeping the doors open. I have respect for the people who want to feed poor people, but that's a different model. I'm the social worker professional, you're poor and powerless. We told the tenants they should take over the hotel. That's socialism. That's what we tried to do. Of course, we failed, but it's empowering for the tenants and workers. We never told them I'm going to help you because you're poor<sup>9</sup>.

The services that IWK and CPA provided were not only a source of physical and material comfort, but empowered the working class who were constantly misrepresented by authorities with their own agendas. Service was a channel through which CPA was able to talk about what they felt was lacking in institutional support. The organization found a receptive audience in the workers who received the services. The concept of self-determination resounded with the people who had not had adequate political or economic



representation. To them, self-determination indicated their ability to represent themselves and take control of their community.

This model of service and political awareness was not entirely new: Warren Mar had also become politicized through the services he received from community and student organizations before he became involved with IWK. Speaking about his experience growing up in Chinatown, he adds,

I became involved in organizing for youth rights and services because the New Left had begun doing those things for the community and I received some of those services. These included getting legal representation, summer employment and recreation. Many of the work project leaders were college students fresh from the strike at San Francisco State or involved in the Third World Liberation Front in Berkeley. We were always talking about politics<sup>10</sup>.

In this way, it was through the services the IWK provided to Chinatown residents that the community members became involved and began to feel a need for political expression, and it was this need that led to the formation of the Chinese Progressive Association. Although membership demanded dues and labor, this created a strong sense of community and ownership of CPA. The members responded with great devotion, recognizing that this organization would fulfill their need to have a community and voice their concerns in their own political space.

### **Service During the Housing Justice Campaign**

Services for the community had always been a part of CPA, but by the mid-1990s its service programs had grown with a large number of committed volunteers running a number of service programs through the small organization. The increase of services was partly a response to the sudden rise in immigration, in which new Cantonese-speaking immigrants moved to Chinatown in greater numbers. Manufacturing jobs dropped in value and the exploitation of Chinatown workers reached new peaks as globalization

allowed companies to move their manufacturing sectors abroad. The companies could also easily exploit the newly immigrant workers, who did not understand the workings of American institutions<sup>11</sup>.

At the same time that CPA was developing a shift in direction toward service, its staff and organizational structure was also undergoing a change. During the 1990s, the organization slowly began to gravitate from its previous system with a steering committee elected into place, to the more familiar nonprofit style with a Board of Directors, an Executive Director, and staff. By 1997, the organization had acquired three full-time employees, who at times hired volunteers for part-time positions, such as those for youth summer programs<sup>12</sup>. In addition, ten committed volunteers taught Citizenship, English, and Cantonese classes and led tutoring and martial arts for community youth<sup>13</sup>. Together with the Women's Group, these volunteers were increasingly outspoken proponents of remaking the CPA as a service organization fulfilling needs in Chinatown, while the staff members, led by Gordon as Executive Director, advocated for a return to CPA's original focus on activism. Julia Lau describes the situation when she arrived in 1997:

Though at the time a lot of the volunteers, there was still that dynamic, a tension, cause there was a whole force of people. Some of the younger volunteers, maybe 20-something, who were a little more service-oriented, who wanted to do some social service kind of stuff, like youth group and teaching, classes, language classes, and citizenship, supporting that. And the women's group, which was more about the social kind of connection, and then there was a push among the staff, I'd say mostly Gordon and I, and then probably a few key Board members, like Pam Tau Lee...who really had more of an agenda around bringing CPA more toward organizing and really waging social justice campaigns, the organizing campaigns. There was really that kind of tension going on. The housing campaign was really *the* campaign that established that more for sure<sup>14</sup>.

Organizing had fallen out of favor in the Asian American community in California. This was mainly what drew Julia Lau to the San Francisco CPA from Los Angeles – she saw no other job options for a community organizer<sup>15</sup>. CPA had to begin cultivating an awareness of power dynamics again.

In 1997, the Chinese Progressive Association also adopted new by-laws. The new laws restated CPA's commitment toward justice and equality and, most importantly, designated the role of and the relations between a Board of Directors and the membership<sup>16</sup>. Like the Steering Committee, members of the Board could only be voted into place during annual elections by active members. On paper, the role of the Board remained much the same as that of the Steering Committee as the highest decision-making body of the organization. The difference lay mostly in the relations between the Board and the general membership.

What constituted “active membership” in the 1990s bore little resemblance to what it was in the 1970s. During the I-Hotel Struggle, CPA demanded labor and time of its members; they kept the office open, operated programs, helped fix the I-Hotel in exchange for reduced rent, and took part in decision-making for the organization. This volunteer work was all part of the membership, and many paid more than membership dues whenever CPA needed a new mimeograph machine or other equipment<sup>17</sup>. By the time of the Housing Justice Campaign, the membership consisted largely of members that received services from CPA, and a select few were very active and volunteered to run after-school tutoring programs or teach Martial Arts<sup>18</sup>.

In part, the role of service in general had changed. Service became more and more apoliticized, as nonprofit service organizations came to depend on foundations in

order to achieve the greater goal of serving greater numbers in need. Thus, service became a response to needs separate from political intentions. In addition, CPA was no longer one of the few places that provided services such as after-school programs or English and citizenship classes, but one among many, as the influence of churches and other nonprofit organizations in the service sector grew. The services that they offered were in line with the general trend of service separate from politics. Those who received the services saw CPA as one more provider of services and could more easily discount any political intent behind the service. In the 1980s, the English and Citizenship classes were a way not only for CPA to recruit members, but politically active members who understood what progressive politics offered to their lives as immigrants in America. In the 1990s, the service was a response to the need in Chinatown for citizenship classes rather than to recruit and develop politically aware Chinese Americans. Service became separate from politics, and this was reflected in the structure of the organization.

Tensions between service and organizing grew not only within the organization, but between organizations as well. These tensions became clear during a meeting among SRO Collaborative members and the DBI negotiating for the proper allocation of funding for tenant outreach. Julia remembers,

So the meeting didn't stay on topic. There are all these groups, who are supposed to be our allies, they were in the [SRO] Collaborative. Here, CCDC is in there, Tenderloin Housing Clinic. Everyone kind of has their own agendas, and here it where it breaks down. And it seems like these tenants groups are criticizing the campaign. Norman makes it very clear that CCDC wants the money from the DBI, and he said that since CPA turned the money down, that he would take it...I think for us, it was like, if we took the money from them, then we can't have a campaign against them. So it's a way for them [DBI] to subvert our campaign...I think the gist, some of the feeling is, you know, questioning was, was an organizing campaign really necessary here, some would argue, CPA is trying to use this to have an organizing campaign, but could you do it in other ways, you

know, DBI gave money to community outreach, so it's not like, screw Chinatown<sup>19</sup>

The other organizations within the SRO Collaborative were all service organizations. These service organizations had progressive agendas like housing justice, but their main goal was to continue providing services to residential hotel tenants that would improve quality of life. Organizing is an entirely different point of view: the focus of community organizing is on one issue, a target, and community empowerment. Both the service organizations and CPA agreed on the general power dynamic analysis where City officials were neglecting tenants of low socio-economic status. However, organizing differs in that the focus is on acting upon that analysis to change the power structure. Incorporating service into this framework is difficult, because the expectation of the apolitical nature of service does not mesh well with changing power structures. The tension between service and organizing within CPA was mirrored in the tension between organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> Hing, Alex. Personal Interview. 26 March 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Mar, Warren. Personal Interview. 6 February 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Lee, Ben. Personal Interview. 4 April 2009.

<sup>4</sup> *Getting Together*. Vol. 2. No. 2. Getting Together Press. 1971.

<sup>5</sup> Proclamation by the Chinese Six Companies of San Francisco (1971): p. 323. In *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present*. Yung, Judy; Chang, Gordon H.; Lai, Him Mark. Eds. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Louie, Steve and Omatsu, Glenn. Eds. *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment*. Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press. 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Hing, Alex. Personal Interview. 26 March 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Lee, Pam Tau. Personal Interview. 17 January 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Mar, Warren. *From Pool Halls to Building Worker's Organizations*. In *Asian Americans: The Movement and The Moment*. Louie, Steve and Omatsu, Glenn. Eds. *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment*: 39-41. Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press. 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Mar, Gordon. Personal Interview. 29 January 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, and Chinese Progressive Association, Chinese Progressive Association 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Banquet and Celebration. San Francisco: Getting Together Press. 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>14</sup> Lau, Julia. Personal Interview. 16 February 2009.
- <sup>15</sup> Lau, Julia. Personal Interview. 16 February 2009.
- <sup>16</sup> Chinese Progressive Association By-Laws. 1997.
- <sup>17</sup> Mar, Warren. Personal Interview. 6 February 2009.
- <sup>18</sup> Lau, Julia. Personal Interview. 16 February 2009.
- <sup>19</sup> Lau, Julia. Personal Interview. 18 March 2009.

## CONCLUSION

CPA is one of the many social movement organizations that grew out of the Third World Left, but it is the only one that has not only survived, but also continues to organize. Many organizations, such as the IWK, the LRS, and the Black Panther Party have decided to or been forced to disband decades ago. Others, such as East Wind, have shifted their organization's careers from organizing to service for the community. As Julia Lau found, CPA is the only organization left on the West Coast that continues to organize within the Chinatown community.

This paper has two purposes - to document CPA's history and two of its definitive campaigns, and to increase the understanding of how a social movement organization can change with the use of a different analysis of power dynamics. CPA's mission has largely remained unchanged; it remains an inclusive organization that welcomes members from the community, small businesses, students, and other activists. Its programs and campaigns seek to better the living and working conditions of the working-class Chinese community, and to give disenfranchised members and communities a greater voice. By staying a part of the organizing community, CPA has remained a force for change within Chinatown.

Organizing is intrinsically about analyzing the power structures and dynamics that put barriers in place, and to try to remove them through activism. CPA presents a unique case where the purpose of the organization has not changed, but the method through which it fulfills this purpose has changed. The accompanying changes of political atmosphere, organizational structure, organizing method, collaboration with other

organizations, and the role of service, have the potential to provide social movement scholars with some missing links within the literature.

Although CPA by itself may not count as a social movement, it is part of a larger movement of organizers who seek to empower the disenfranchised. When researching for this paper, I first began by looking at social movement theory. Piven and Cloward believe that a focus on an organization detracts from the efficacy of the movement, but the Housing Justice Campaign focused on both, and was highly successful in building up the organization while increasing the quality of life in residential hotels<sup>1</sup>. Organizing, separate from movement-building, can clearly have a positive effect. One of the elements of McAdam's Political Process Theory does raise indigenous organizational strength, but he depends on the organization already being a part of the community, rather than the development of the organization from the needs of the community<sup>2</sup>. These theories are relevant to organizing, but provide context and motivations for movement-building among organizations. Addressing the development of an organization within a movement by examining the method of analysis and corresponding organizing method can bring much-needed perspective to the development of a movement.

Another issue that I have not seen addressed often within social movement literature is an explicit exploration of the interactions between service and organizing. In CPA, and in other Third World Movement organizations, the interaction was a large part of organizing. The difference between service as a vehicle for teaching power dynamics to a wider audience, and service as an apolitical entity that serves people's needs, is a shocking find, since today schools such as Stanford often promote service-learning,



perhaps without fully understanding the connections between service and raising political awareness. Looking at CPA's history, service in itself is no longer political, although it has the potential to be so. Seeing needs in the world does not automatically give rise to questions as what kind of political system put the needs in place. Perhaps it is time for service and organizing to again share a common analysis of power.

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<sup>1</sup> Piven, Frances Fox, and Cloward, Richard A. *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*. New York: Random House. 1977.

<sup>2</sup> McAdam, Doug. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1982.

## DISCUSSION

CPA seems to have the very convenient tendency to change trends every decade. The 1970s was the decade of the I-Hotel, Us-China normalization and ties to the I Wor Kuen. The 1980s was the decade of public policy and electoral work, tied to the work of the League of Revolutionary Struggle. The 1990s was a time of transition with no partner cadre organization, but was also a time when the organization built its community organizing base in Chinatown. This decade, CPA has created a space for Chinatown workers to organize, and will surely evolve further. Although much has changed structurally and in the general nature of the campaigns that CPA has taken part in, CPA has continued to cultivate membership in the Chinese working class across San Francisco.

At the same time, CPA refuses to fit into a box. The decadal trends exist, but CPA has been part of many varied service and organizing activities, many of which have no place in this paper due to my focus, but are still integral parts of this organization. I chose two housing campaigns that were integral in determining the direction of the organization. However, CPA took part in and led many other campaigns and projects that also help to define CPA's political direction. Mabel Teng spent nearly a decade in the Justice for Vincent Chin coalition, where she learned to lobby and ultimately decided to run for political office. Gordon Mar suggested that I look into the history of the relationship between China and CPA; although there were no monetary interactions, CPA members were invited to visit the People's Republic of China a number of times, as an opportunity to visit their ancestors' homes and to see socialism in action. Although the visiting members were aware that much of what they were shown was too perfect, this

was also an opportunity to see the country where they found a viable alternative to capitalism in an age of restricted information. Eric Mar, Gordon's brother and now Supervisor of the Richmond District, was most interested in the interactions between CPA as a nonprofit and the political sphere of Chinatown and San Francisco; he had been part of the movement to bring back district elections for the Board of Supervisors. Today, CPA remains the only organizing group within Chinatown, and the staff works on a multitude of campaigns and programs. My focus on the two housing campaigns allowed me to see critical points in CPA's development as an organization, but did not encompass the other multitudes of programs and how they factored into what CPA is today. More cohesive analysis of the evolution of each program is needed to fully understand CPA's ability to change and respond to the needs of the San Francisco Chinatown community.