



The Chinese in America: A Narrative History

By Iris Chang

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In an epic story that spans 150 years and continues to the present day, Iris Chang tells of a people's search for a better life—the determination of the Chinese to forge an identity and a destiny in a strange land and, often against great obstacles, to find success. She chronicles the many accomplishments in America of Chinese immigrants and their descendants: building the infrastructure of their adopted country, fighting racist and exclusionary laws, walking the racial tightrope between black and white, contributing to major scientific and technological advances, expanding the literary canon, and influencing the way we think about racial and ethnic groups. Interweaving political, social, economic, and cultural history, as well as the stories of individuals, Chang offers a bracing view not only of what it means to be Chinese American, but also of what it is to be American.

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The Chinese in America: A Narrative History By Iris Chang Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #87349 in Books
- Published on: 2004-03-30
- Released on: 2004-03-30
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x 1.10" w x 5.30" l, 1.03 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 544 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this outstanding study of the Chinese-American community, the author surpasses even the high level of her bestselling *Rape of Nanking*. The first significant Chinese immigration to the United States came in the 1850s, when refugees from the Taiping War and rural poverty heard of "the Golden Mountain" across the Pacific. They reached California, and few returned home, but the universally acknowledged hard work of those who stayed and survived founded a great deal more than the restaurants and laundries that formed the commercial core—they founded a new community. Chinese immigrants building the Central Pacific Railroad used their knowledge of explosives to excavate tunnels (and discourage Irish harassment). Chinese workers also married within the Irish community, spread across America and survived even the racist Chinese Exclusion Act of 1880, which lost much of its impact when San Francisco's birth records were destroyed in the earthquake and fire of 1906 and no one could prove that a person of Chinese descent was not native born. Chang finds 20th-century Chinese-Americans navigating a rocky road between identity and assimilation, surviving new waves of immigrants from a troubled China and more recently from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Many Chinese millionaires maintain homes on both sides of the Pacific, while "parachute children" (Chinese teenagers living independently in America) are a significant phenomenon. And plain old-fashioned racism is not dead—Jerry Yang founded Yahoo!, but scientist Wen Ho Lee was, according to Chang, persecuted as much for being Chinese as for anything else. Chang's even, nuanced and expertly researched narrative evinces deep admiration for Chinese America, with good reason.

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From [Booklist](#)

Chang is the author of the best-selling *Rape of Nanking* (1997), a very disturbing but well-prepared and necessary account of the sacking of that important Chinese city by the Japanese army in the late 1930s. Her writerly acumen is again in evidence in her latest book, which, in her words, tells an epic story--and, indeed, it is shown to be exactly that. Her purview is wide: the immigration of Chinese people to the U.S. from the early nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth. Chinese immigration falls naturally into three waves: those who came here to be laborers during the days of the California gold rush and the building of the transcontinental railroad, those who came to escape the 1949 Communist takeover, and those who came in the 1980s and 1990s as relations between China and the U.S. eased somewhat. The reasons why the Chinese came to the U.S. are only half the story; the other half consists of what they did here and how they were received. But this is not just a bland narration of events. Chang threads personal stories of individuals she came across in her research into her book, making it a much more human account. A final chapter looks at possible future definitions of racial identity. This is history at its most dramatic and relevant, and the book deserves all the attention it undoubtedly will receive. *Brad Hooper*

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Review

"Engrossing... The Chinese Americans' struggle for success, its costs and tenuousness, are major themes in Chang's highly readable, panoramic history.... Absorbing, passionate." —**San Francisco Chronicle**

"A thought-provoking overview of how the Chinese have been an integral part of American history... An exemplary achievement." —**Christian Science Monitor**

"Richly detailed... I know of no better introduction to this multilayered and emotionally charged story." —**Jonathan D. Spence**

“Comprehensive, beautifully written, filled with deft and passionate analysis—the definitive book on Chinese American history for a new generation. Iris Chang places today’s Chinese Americans brilliantly into 150 years of U.S. history.” —**David Henry Hwang**, Tony Award–winning playwright

Users Review

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