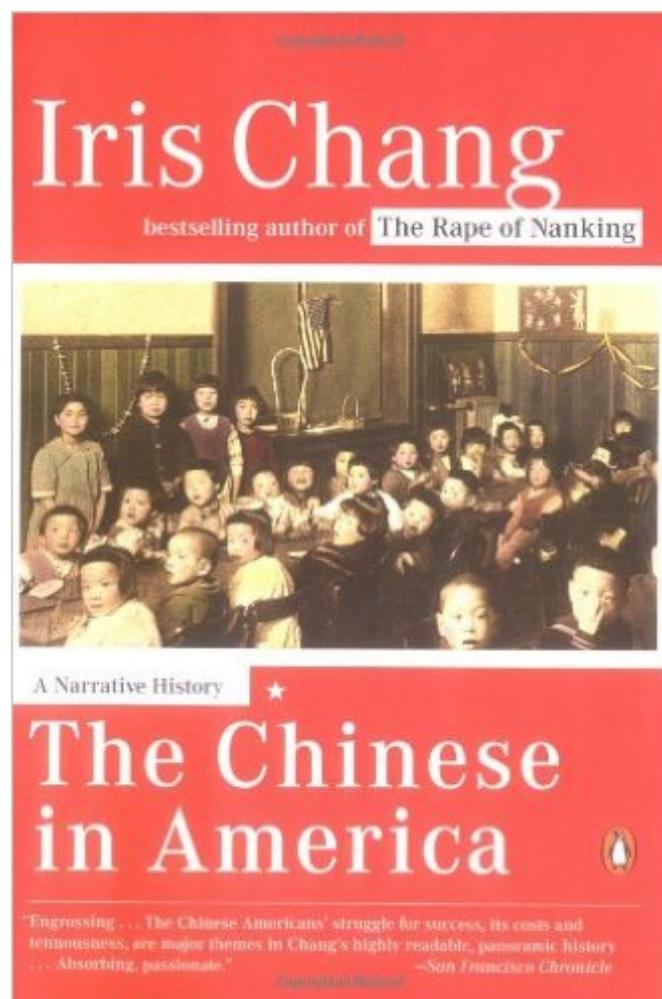


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The Chinese In America: A Narrative History



Synopsis

In an epic story that spans 150 years and continues to the present day, Iris Chang tells of a peopleâ™s search for a better lifeâ"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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Before I start commenting on this book, let me mention my own background: I came to America from Hong Kong when I was 18, and only recently became a naturalized American citizen. I have lived in America for 15 years. I came across The Chinese In America first because a white friend who adopted a Chinese girl recommended the book to me. Since I have little interest in history, I was reluctant to read it at first; but a few pages later I was engrossed by the book. In history classes in college I learned a little bit about the Chinese building rail roads and the Exclusion Act, but not much more. This book gave much more detail and is so well written that I had no trouble reading it

to the end. I am sure my being Chinese helped spark the interest in a subject I normally don't care about. When I was done, I was so impressed with the book that I ordered a copy from .com so that my kids can read it when they grow up. I think most of the book is accurate, but there are some errors. For example, the book mentioned the Imperial Examination in China as being initiated by the Ching (Manchurian) emperors. I am quite certain that's not true. That Exam's been around for thousands of years, as a lot of ancient literature mention it, such as the famed Journey to the West, whose background was set back in the Tang Dynasty. Ms. Chang's point was that the Manchurians used the Imperial Exams to control the Chinese people, and her attitude towards them is clearly hostile. But the Manchurians are also considered Chinese these days, so it seems ludicrous that a historian should be incensed about a 400 year old injury. Throughout the book, Ms.

Iris Chang's "The Chinese In America: A Narrative History" may not be the first book about Chinese immigrants in America, but it is perhaps the most reader accessible. There is no doubt that Chang's prose makes the book not only easy to read, but also incredibly easy to grasp - a quality which makes it in some ways superior to the academic jargon that plagues most ethno-scholarly works. But at what point do things become over simplified? At what point is it too regressive? Chang's thesis is a simple one - that the Chinese in America have lived in a cyclical state of love and hate. While the Chinese are admired for their hard work ethic and their entrepreneurship, they are also consistently chastised as being outsiders and have at times, become convenient scapegoats at the whims of the frustrations of the larger American public. Chang seeks to illustrate this dynamic with a variety of historical examples, from the days of the California Gold Rush to the recent Wen Ho Lee affair. Chang makes a compelling argument - there is no doubt that the Chinese in America have suffered at the hands of racial oppressors, much like other minority races and ethnicities in America. The Wen Ho Lee case, in particular, is a sobering reminder that the image of the accepted model minority is very easily retracted, especially when it comes at the convenience of people like Rep. Christopher Cox (R-CA), a leader among anti-Chinese conspiracy theorists. There is no doubt of Chang's bias. Like her previous work, "The Rape of Nanking," Chang is deeply personally invested in this book. Whether or not this detracts from her credibility as a writer is up to you. I personally found most of her analyses truthful, but her one-sidedness will inevitably turn many off.

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