

# People of Chinatown

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H	N	M	O	C	B	M	A	M	A	Q	U	O	N
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Anna May Wong  
Fung Chow Chan  
Mabel Hong  
Mama Quon  
Peter Soohoo

Philippe Mathieu  
Soong Mei-ling  
Tyrus Wong  
Y.C. Hong

## **Anna May Wong**

Anna May Wong was the first Asian American movie star and style icon in Hollywood. Wong grew up near Los Angeles's Old Chinatown, located where Union Station is today. Despite facing racial discrimination and being cast in minor roles in her early career, Wong persevered and starred in nearly sixty films, making her a well-known actress all over the world. When New Chinatown, now referred to as Chinatown, opened in 1938, Wong dedicated the Seven Star Cavern Wishing Well in the Central Plaza.

## **Fung Chow Chan**

Fung Chow Chan founded two businesses in Chinatown: Phoenix Bakery and East West Bank. Opened in 1938, Phoenix Bakery provided a space for a growing Chinese community to gather and eat delicious Chinese pastries and cookies. Today, the bakery is managed by third-generation family members. People visit Phoenix Bakery year-round to eat their delicious pastries, including their famous fresh strawberry and whipped cream cake!

Chan was also one of the founders of East West Bank, which provided banking services for Chinese immigrants who were often denied access to other banks. East West Bank helped many residents of Chinatown receive loans so they could start small businesses and purchase homes, thereby investing in the growth of the Chinatown community.

## **Peter Soohoo**

Peter Soohoo was a businessman and engineer who pioneered the development of New Chinatown. In 1937, he founded the Los Angeles Chinatown Project Association, a group made up of prominent Chinese American community members. Using funding from twenty-five Chinese American investors, the Association purchased land to develop a neighborhood managed and owned by Chinese Americans. The Central Plaza in New Chinatown was designed as a tourist attraction to boost the economy of the neighborhood. Today, Central Plaza serves the same purpose; the brightly colored buildings with Asian-inspired designs attract visitors from all over.

## **Philippe Mathieu**

French immigrant Philippe Mathieu founded Phillippe the Original in 1908, a few blocks south of its present location, in an area then known as Frenchtown. Displaced for construction of the Hollywood Freeway, Phillippe's has served its legendary French Dipped sandwiches at its Chinatown location since 1951. Phillippe's is one of L.A.'s oldest continuously running restaurants. On a busy day they serve around 4,000 sandwiches!

## **Soong Mei-ling**

Soong Mei-ling, also known as Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, was the First Lady of the former Republic of China and a vocal political activist who spoke up against the injustices facing Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans. In 1943, around the time of World War II, Mei-ling visited the United States and spoke in Washington D.C. Mei-ling largely influenced the United States' decision to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act, a discriminatory piece of legislation which limited the amount of Chinese people who could immigrate to the United States. Her efforts motivated many Chinese American women to take up political activism in their communities. Mei-ling Way, one of the pedestrian walkways in Chinatown's Central Plaza, was named in her honor.

## **Tyrus Wong**

Artist and Illustrator Tyrus Wong was one of the most influential Asian American artists in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He was one of the first Chinese Americans to be employed at Walt Disney Studios. Though Wong created the water color paintings and pastel artworks that were used in, and ultimately inspired the entire look for the animated movie *Bambi*, he was not acknowledged for his contributions until recently. In 2001, Disney finally recognized his work, naming him a Disney Legend.

In 1941, Wong painted a beautiful Chinese Celestial Dragon mural in Chinatown's Central Plaza. In the latter half of his career, Wong designed greeting cards, painted ceramics, and made unique kites. Wong's artistry continues to inspire animators and artists today.

## **Y.C. and Mabel Hong**

Y.C. Hong was the first Chinese American to pass the California Bar exam in 1923 and to graduate from USC's law school. He specialized in immigration law and devoted his career to Chinese American civil rights. Hong and his wife, Mabel, were two of the founders of New Chinatown. They commissioned multiple buildings and structures in Central Plaza, including the Gates of Maternal Virtues and the Y.C. Hong Office Building, which housed Y.C.'s law offices.

The Gate of Maternal Virtues on Broadway was built to honor Y.C.'s mother. There are also gates at the Hill Street entrance to the plaza. Following a nomination by the Los Angeles Conservancy, both gates were designated as Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monuments in 2005, recognizing their historic importance to protecting them from alteration and demolition.

## **Yiu Hai Seto Quon / "Mama Quon"**

Yiu Hai Seto Quon, affectionately known as "Mama Quon," was one of the founders of New Chinatown. She also established a popular restaurant in Central Plaza. Prior to doing so, Quon worked at her father-in-law's restaurant Tuey Far Low in Old Chinatown. This was the restaurant where Peter Soohoo held one of the first meetings to discuss the development of New Chinatown. In 1946, Mama Quon opened Quon Brothers Grand Star Restaurant, a restaurant that served popular "Chinese Soul Food" delicacies, often cooked by Mama Quon herself. In fact, she worked at the restaurant until she was 95 years old! Quon's children continue to manage the restaurant, which is now called the Grand Star Jazz Club.