

**THE LOCALIZED
HISTORY PROJECT**

@AAARI-CUNY

EDUCATOR GUIDE

***Youth Social Consciousness and
Place-Based Education in 1970s
Chinatown***

A NOTE FROM THE YOUTH RESEARCHER: *WHY TEACH THIS HISTORY*

Hi, my name is Ruiyu!

From making my first visit to a physical archive, combing through newspapers, and conducting oral history interviews, I had such a valuable and transformative experience researching the Basement Workshop and the history of District 1. I hope that within my exhibit, you'll find primary sources and underrepresented stories that you'd love to add to your curriculum.

My exhibit centers how youth develop deep connections with community, and how education can and has played a critical role. I believe a comprehensive analysis of local history is not only important for case studies illustrating larger historical trends and events, but also, learning about proximate stories can be especially engaging and meaningful. While traditional school curricula and standardized classes like AP U.S. History may lack some local specificity, I hope that we can make progress in telling the often underrepresented histories of the communities closest and most meaningful to us.

Researching the Basement Workshop and youth social causes in District 1 really strengthened my personal connection to Chinatown. For almost 15 years, I lived in the Lower East Side, frequenting Chinatown's parks, libraries, and supermarkets. Although my family moved away from my childhood neighborhood after the pandemic, I immediately realized how much I missed Chinatown's tight-knit community, familiarity, and cultural food scene. Exploring the history of neighborhood organizations, activism, and creativity, I saw the origins of the vibrancy and love I've witnessed in each corner of Chinatown.

The stories included in this exhibit cover contemporary tenant organizers, lifelong public educators, 1970s youth activists and journalists, and those of immigrants refining the American Dream. Although I feel strongly connected to Chinatown, exploring local history exposed me to new perspectives. I frequented new streets to track Basement Workshop's movements, visited community organization offices, and loved the intergenerational connections I made through oral history. For students in NYC schools, this history can strengthen multicultural empathy and inspire students to apply their learning in the classroom to community service and everyday life.

I also hope my exhibit's coverage of place-based education and youth social consciousness can motivate students to see additional value in their learning. Learning about how youth—albeit in the 1970s—applied what they learned in schools and community organizations to social causes, I hope students can see that education and lived experience can make significant and long-lasting impacts in their community. For schools like mine with community service requirements, these stories showcase that participation can be so much more than checking off an obligation.

Thanks again for visiting my exhibit! I was so deeply inspired by the stories and people I encountered in my research. I hope my exhibit played a role in you learning something new, finding a new appreciation for NYC neighborhoods, or envisioning place-based education in your classroom! :)

Ruiyu Tang is a senior at Hunter College High School in New York City. His research interests include Asian American history and literature, community organizing in ethnic enclaves, and urban revitalization. In addition to archival and oral history research, Ruiyu enjoys documentary filmmaking and other creative outlets like drawing and photography. In Ruiyu's childhood neighborhood, Manhattan Chinatown, he works part-time at Chatham Square Library, and has organized the Hate Crimes Prevention Art Exhibit and the 2024 & 2025 Chinatown Beautification Day. As a 7th grade Social Studies Teaching Intern, Ruiyu hopes to amplify underrepresented histories and implement critical pedagogy as a Leadership Team member of the Localized History Project :)

PEDAGOGICAL REVOLUTIONS

HOW TO TEACH THIS HISTORY

Neighborhood Walking Tour!



Encourage students to explore a neighborhood meaningful to them. On this walk, students can be intentional in taking notes of what they notice. For example, seeing what types of public space the neighborhood offers, what distinctive features they have, and what places seem to be popular for residents. Is the neighborhood more residential or business oriented? What sights, smells, and sounds are prevalent? After their personal explorations, students can share with each other, stimulating both cross-cultural and cross-spatial connections!

Community Organization Deep Dive!



So many community organizations do impactful service for New York City, and students may even be connected or have done work with a few. Instead of taking their work at face value, students can more deeply investigate the history and purpose of these organizations! Why were they founded? By whom? What historical or social contexts have informed how these organizations have developed? Have their priorities shifted throughout time?

Creative Activism!



Organizations like Basement Workshop were especially effective because they used creative methods like art, poetry, and publication design to bolster their activism! In immigrant communities, activism methods that transcend language barriers are especially important. Encourage students to write a poem, create a song

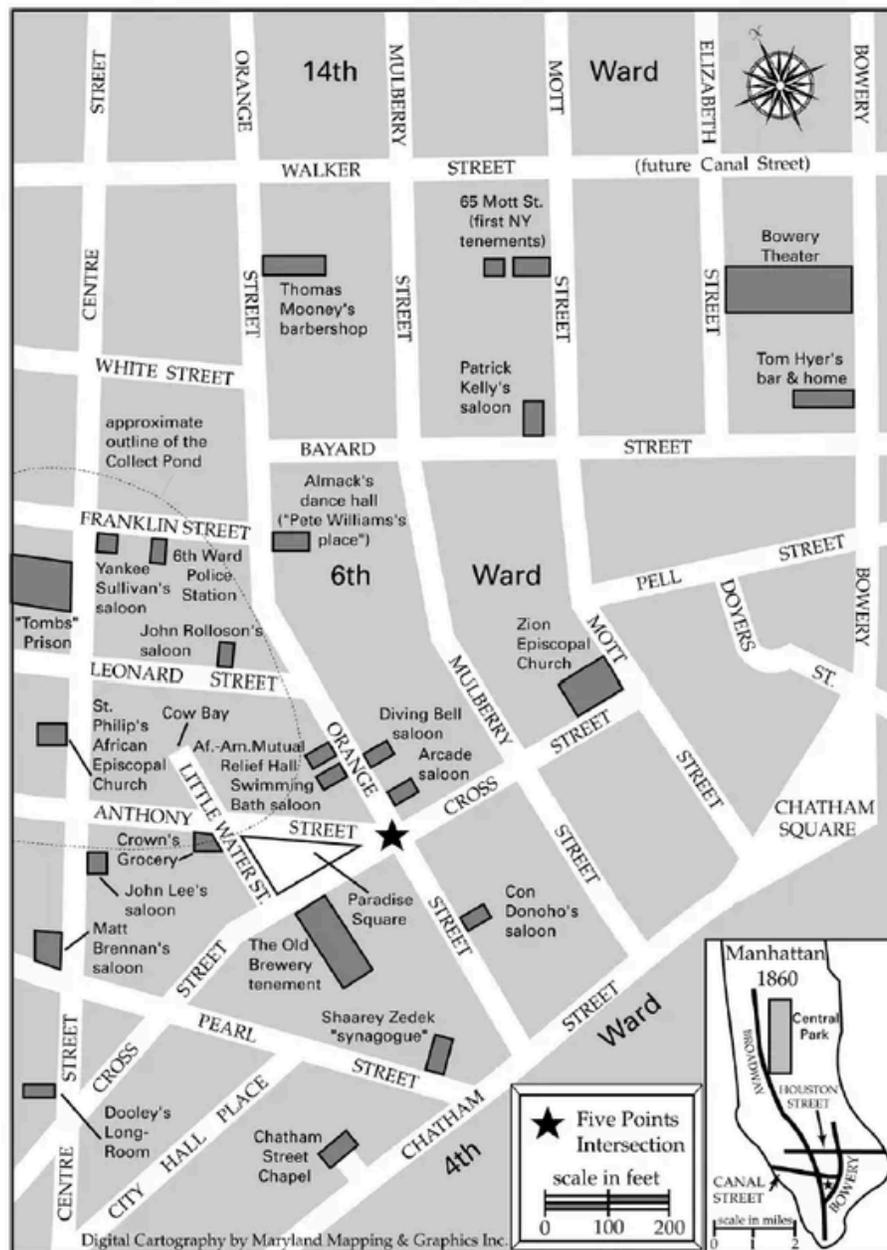
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RESOURCES FOR THE CLASSROOM



primary sources:



FIVE POINTS, 1830-1854

A map of key landmarks in New York City's Five Points, 1830-1854, compiled by historian Tyler Anbinder.

Included in *Five Points: The 19th-Century New York City Neighborhood that Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum* (2011). All rights reserved by Tyler Anbinder.



A street scene of New York's Chinatown around the turn of the century, c. 1899.

Photographer unknown. Made available by the The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, New York Public Library. No known rights restrictions.

"MAYOR"

**Chinatown's Leading Citizen Is
Plain "Brother"**

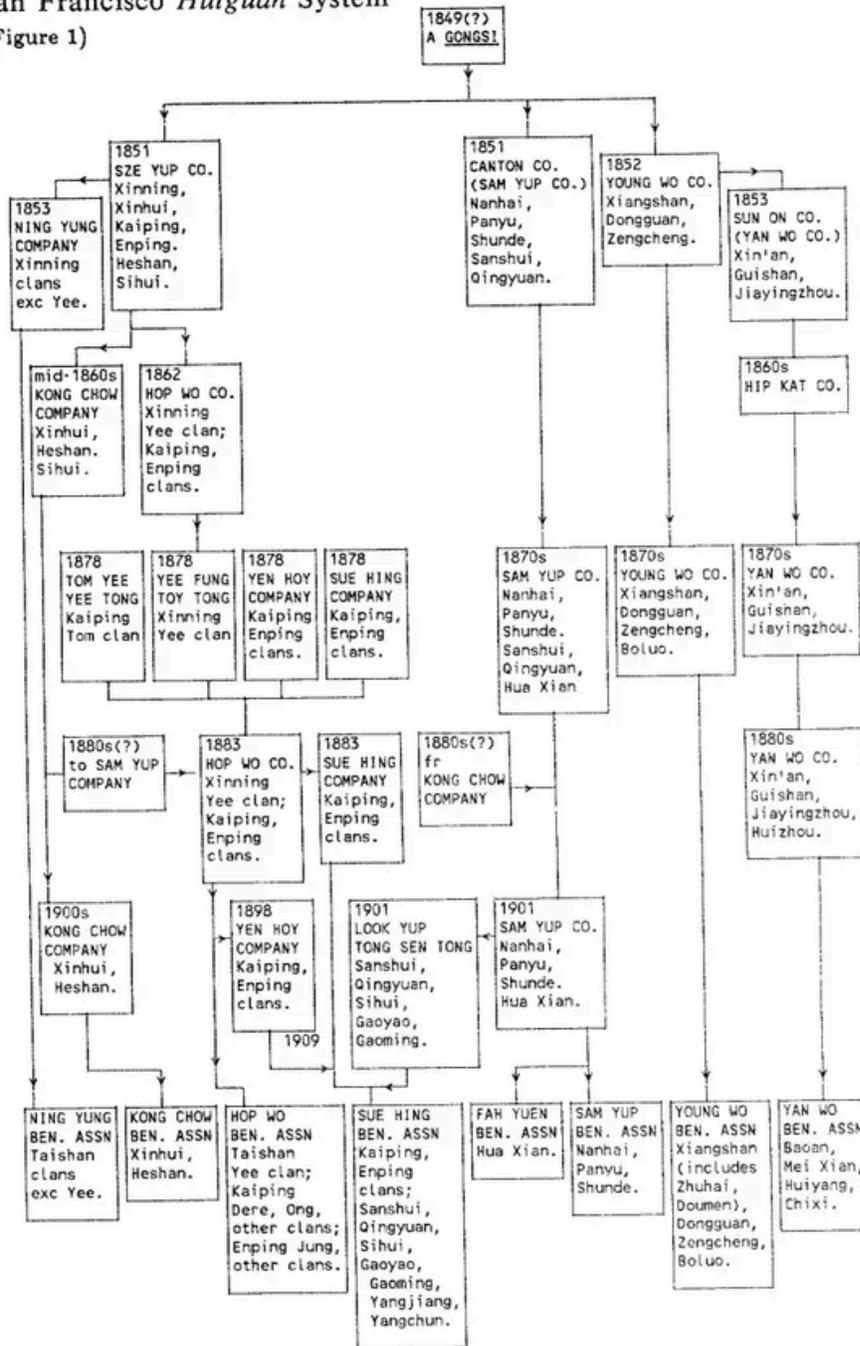


ALTHOUGH THE "MAYORS" and other titled monarchs of the district have long since become a memory, Lee To, head of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, is known to the mercantile world of New York's Chinatown as the "Chinese Mayor." He himself prefers to be addressed as plain "Brother" Lee To, for he is an ordained minister. Under his direction, charities to Chinese children are distributed, and often the fifty merchants of his association meet at his office, 16 Mott street, to thresh out their problems over the pacific cup of tea, which Lee To declares to be much superior to any liquor ever invented.

Lee To, head of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, known colloquially as the "Chinese Mayor" within New York's Chinatown.

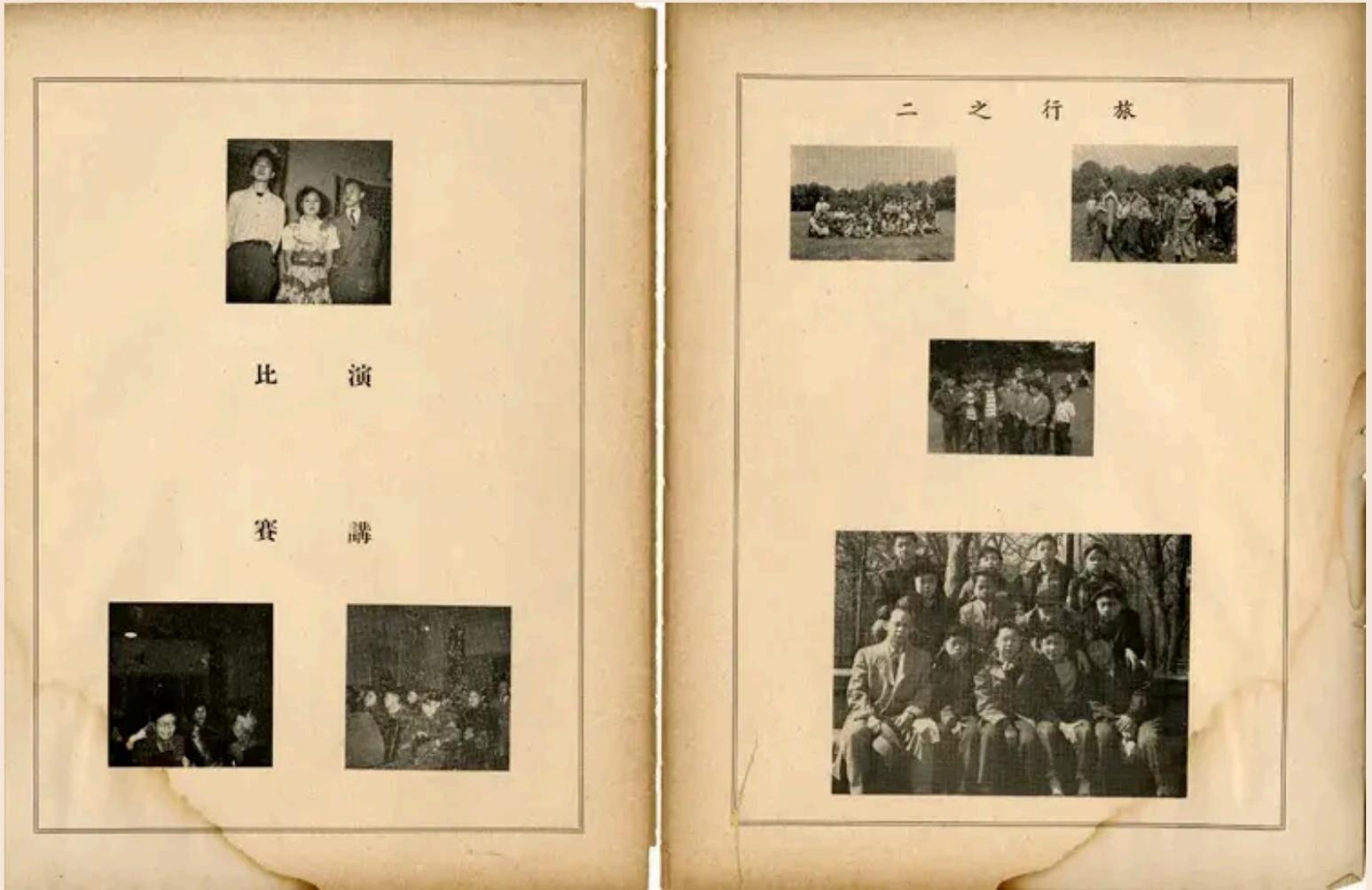
Originally published in *The Daily News*, December 5, 1919. Made digitally available for Fair Use on newspapers.com.

Historical Development of the San Francisco *Huiguan* System (Figure 1)



A chart tracing the historical development of the San Francisco *huiguan* system, compiled by scholar Him Mark Lai in 1987.

Created by Him Mark Lai and included in "Historical Development of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association/Huiguan System." Rights status unknown, but likely falls under Fair Use.



A yearbook spread from the New York Chinese School, featuring coverage of activities and student groups, c. 1951.

Created by the New York Chinese School, donated to the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) by Jeffry Lee.
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A pinback button advertising the logo of the AAPA (Asian American Political Alliance), October 1969.

Created by AAPA. Made available in the public domain in the "Asian American Movement 40th Anniversary" collection from the Archives of the Asian Community Center.



ASIAN-AMERICAN POLITICAL ALLIANCE

We Asian-Americans believe that American society has been, and still is, fundamentally a racist society, and that historically we have accommodated ourselves to this society in order to survive.

We Asian-Americans believe that heretofore we have been relating to white standards of acceptability, and affirm the right of self-definition and self-determination.

We Asian-Americans support all non-white liberation movements and believe that all minorities in order to be truly liberated must have complete control over the political, economic, and educational institutions within their respective communities.

We Asian-Americans oppose the imperialistic policies being pursued by the American government.

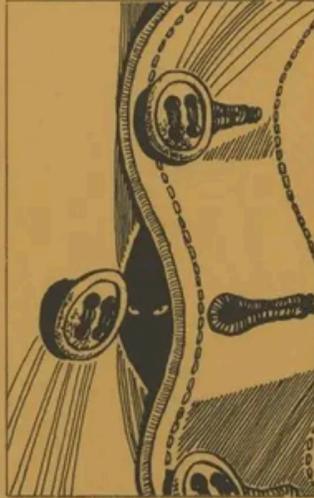
The student-authored founding statement of the AAPA, an influential political formation for Asian-American activism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, c. 1969.

Created by AAPA. Included in the Third World Strike at University of California, Berkeley Collection, 1968–1972, held in the UC Berkeley, Ethnic Studies Library. Made available for Fair Use.



"A Grain of Sand: Music for the Struggle of Asians in America," a politically and culturally influential album regarded as the first album of Asian American music, c. 1973.

Album created by Chris Kando Iijima, Joanne Nobuko Miyamoto, and William "Charlie" Chin. Donated to the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) by Henry Chu; permissions for use granted by MOCA.



I'm happy now,
having faced the deadness and
bankruptcy of my previous life,
accepting, fully
what it means to be
a bad Japanese in the
white imperial
Amerika.
Living the way I want to,
living and fighting for myself,
daring to be me.

What would my father think of me?
He, whose death weighed so heavily on all of us.
He, who tried to fight for tragic Japan?
(Japan, whose only way to save herself from
the greedy, presumptuous, brutal, devilish,
smelly hakujin was to become
devilish and imperialistic herself)
what would he think of me,
like this?

I don't know.
It doesn't matter, really.
As long as I am me.
As long as I keep on feeling the Japanese
and the Vietnamese inside me.

Inside us. With all my brothers and sisters
out there.
Our history.
Our biography
Keep on
feeling
the sadness of that.
the power of that.

Shin'ya Ono



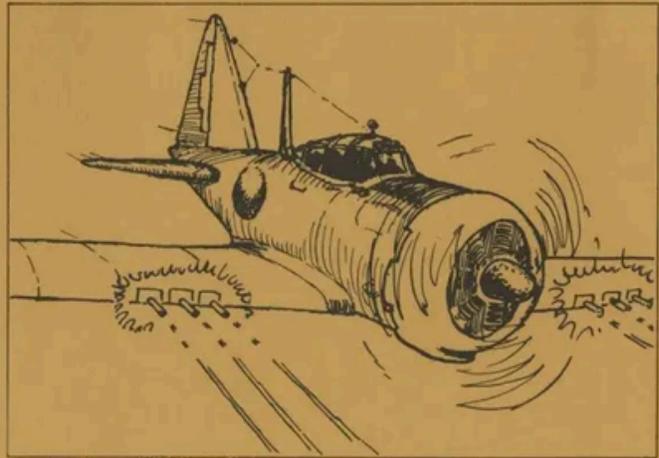
When I was 5,
GI's used to laugh
in that Amerikan way
watching us scramble for chewing gums
thrown from their jeep.
Elders used to say:
"Have a pride. You're a Japanese."

By the time I was 6 or 7
mother, Tad and me had subsisted
for 2 whole years
on diet of pumpkins and sweet potatoes,
in the occupied Japan.

When I was 8, Tad and me hurt mom's feeling
refusing to wear Amerikan style mittens
which she spent night after night making.
We didn't like being called pum-pum-no-fo
just because we wore Amerikan style clothes
sent to us by our nisei relatives in L.A.

When I was 9
I went to Tokyo
to attend my father's funeral,
five years late.
I remember
a white box with only a piece of paper in it.
It said "The Honorable Spirit"
or something like that.

When I was 10
AMERIKA WAS
murdering
Asians
again.
The principal of my school said;
"our neighbors in Korea are
suffering a
disastrous fire".



**A poem by Shin'ya Ono published in Basement Workshop's
publication, "Yellow Pearl."**

Created by Shin'ya Ono for *Yellow Pearl* in 1972. Access and
permissions provided by christina ong.

ASIAN CHILDREN'S UNDERGROUND

education
Asian Children's Underground is ^{a Chinatown community project or} ~~one of the many programs formed by the Basement Work-~~
shop. It is a program which brings a lot of attention to the development of children's skills in our community.

There are about sixty children that are now enrolled in this program. The children are from the ages of three to ten years old. These children are interested in what is being presented to them. Each day there are lessons planned for these children to increase their knowledge and at the same time enable them to understand themselves better. It gives information to the children on why they should be proud of their own nationalities.

The program gives the children the opportunity to know each other and to learn to share and love each other. Each day there are also activities involved such as playing games, going to trips and sports games etc. Lunches and snacks are given out to the children.

There are many instructors that have been involved in this program for more than a year. They have learned to understand and communicate with these children the best way they can. This program gives the instructors the opportunity to learn more about the children and of themselves as well. Some of these instructors are volunteers from our community. One of the teachers, who had been interviewed, said that all of the teachers enjoyed working with the children not only because they shared what they have learned but they gain satisfaction from knowing that they are helping out the community.

SUMMARY
Asian Children's Underground is located at P. S. 127 between Cherry St. and Monroe St. The program starts everyday from 9:00 to 5:00. If any of the parents would like to enroll their children into this program, please contact the ~~Basement Workshop, sponsors of~~ Asian Children's Underground. The coordinators are Minerva Chin, Jenny Jui and Kittie Fong. It is an honor for us to have as many children enrolled in this program as early as possible.

The text description for Asian Children's Underground, a youth education program that met in Basement Workshop's Chinatown space, c. 1975.

Created by Asian Children's Underground and originally published in *Voice of Chinatown*. Access and permissions provided by christina ong.



Young volunteers from Brooklyn Tech and City College pose in matching shirts, Minerva Chin at bottom left. c. 1975.

Photographer unknown. Access and permissions provided by Minerva Chin.



Members of Basement Workshop's Youth Program Staff participate in Field Day activities at Columbus Park, c. 1982.

Photographer unknown. Featured in "Published in "Poster Nostalgia: Ten Years of Asian American Poster Art" in *BRIDGE Magazine*. Access and permissions provided via christina ong.



Youth participate in programming at the CAAAV office space on New Year's Day, January 1, 1998.

Photograph by Emma Griffin. Held in the CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities Digital Archive. All rights held by CAAAV; permissions for use granted by Rochelle Lin.



The interior of the CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities (formerly known as the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence) office on Hester Street, photographed in February 2026.

Photographer unknown. Image courtesy of CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities; permissions granted by Rochelle Lin.



The New York Knicks honor Minerva Chin, the Executive Director of A Place for Kids, as the 2026 Lunar New Year Celebration recipient of the Nat "Sweetwater" Clifton City Spirit Award.

Photographer unknown. Published by NBA Media Ventures, LLC. Rights status unknown, but likely falls under Fair Use.

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Interview with Minerva Chin, conducted by Ruiyu Tang, January 11, 2026.

Interview with Rochelle Lin, conducted by Ruiyu Tang, January 18, 2026.



THANK YOU FOR READING!