

**Southern Fried Rice: Life in a Chinese Laundry in the Deep South**

John Jung, Ph.D. 2005

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Dr. John Jung's Southern Fried Rice: Life in a Chinese Laundry in the Deep South provides readers with a fascinating look into Chinese immigration history and into Jim Crow southern living from a unique perspective. The author, a second-generation Chinese American, considers the geographical and cultural shifts of one nuclear family and, by extension, an ethnic group central to national development but peripheral to national consciousness. Through painstaking documentation, Jung provides details about how one group of "Asian Americans" was created and how deeply the experiential and psychological variances are within one ethnicity. Southern Fried Rice, an incredible living document, demonstrates the fluidity of regional and national identity and is both a construction and deconstruction of "Chinese-ness." This account of a Chinese family's laundry business in the segregationist South is truly an American story: it defies simple or static definition and is filled with intricate, bitter ironies that separate reality from myth.

John Jung's parents' immigration in the 1920s, as was the case for many others during the 61 years of the Chinese Exclusion Act, was an agonizing affair contingent on creation of a "paper" family. The legal dance of citizenship that Jung reveals in his inside account of historic U.S. immigration procedures matches the complicated steps the Jung family participated in when hopping the line between Black and White in the Jim Crow South. Jung depicts his family's identity shift from China to the U.S. and then from the South to the west coast. After being born and raised in Macon, where his was the only Asian family for 100 miles, John moved to California at the age of 14, where he was subtly schooled in San Francisco's Chinatown on how to "become" Chinese. The individual stories of his mother, father, two sisters and one brother and how each adjusted differently to their social roles in shifting locations are intriguing. The background story of historic waves of access to the U.S and the larger narrative of national development between WWI and the 1960s is also interesting. Outside of the smaller story of a nuclear family, and the development of extended families through his sisters' marriages, Jung

traces the regional immigration history of Guangzhou (formerly known as Canton) in southeastern China. These intertwining stories offer much toward confirming and complicating popular notions of what it means to be "American" just as it traces the slippery identity shifts of what it means to be "Chinese" or "Asian."

Jung's rendition of schools, business, and social life in segregated Macon, is punctuated by vivid reflections of popular culture, technology, political shifts, and legal evolutions in the nation. The flowing narrative takes readers to the back areas of family-run Chinese laundries and offers an occupational and economic genealogy of how first generation immigrants created a legacy for their children that saw a transition from laundries to restaurants but that also saw an integration of Chinese people into American fabric beyond stereotypical definitions. John Jung graduated from Berkeley, earned a psychology Ph.D. from Northwestern University in 1962, married a Jewish woman and had two sons, one of whom was adopted from Korea. His personal story is intimately linked to his mother's who navigated her gender roles and racial construct in vastly different arenas, and eventually ventured back to China to visit her 90-year old mother across unfathomable distances of time, place, and experience. The ongoing story of generational conflict, (as second-generation children became more American and less Chinese), begs imperative questions about identity development on individual, national, and international levels.

John Jung's Southern Fried Rice is a treasure trove of material culture ripe for comparative analysis. It is also a valuable mirror that will help move the history of those who are neither Black nor White towards a more deserving central role in the national and international human story.