Chinese Family History Group - April 11, 2026

Image Sleuthing: Mining Old Family Photos for Deeper Stories of Chinese America

Feel free to contact me with any follow-up questions or comments.
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More stories at www.quonquon.com

Books with Information on Early 20th Century Life in South China

- *American Exodus: Second-Generation Chinese Americans in China, 1901-1949* by Charlotte Brooks (2019)

- *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* by Madeline Y. Hsu (2000)

- *Social Organization in South China, 1911-1949: The Case of Kuan Lineage in K'ai-P'ing County* by Yuen-Fong Woon (1984) https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.22799

Simple Tips for Looking at Photos

- Printing photos at a big size may reveal details or inscriptions you hadn't noticed before.

- Think about what it's in the photo - and also what's NOT in the photo.

- To determine if people appearing in separate photos are the same person, scan or screenshot the photos so that you have digital images that can be easily cropped and resized until the two faces sit right next to each other and are as similar in size and angle as possible. Facial features are much easier to compare this way - and often difficult to compare if you don't do this.

- How to take a screenshot: all or most devices have options to screenshot either the whole screen or just a selection using a pointer to grab the relevant area. For help with your specific device, ask Google or another assistant!

  Mac OS:
  - Whole screen: SHIFT + COMMAND + 3 (hold down these keys at the same time)
  - Selection: SHIFT + COMMAND + 4 (" ")

  Windows:
  - Whole screen: SHIFT + WINDOWS KEY + S (" ")

  iPhone:
  - Whole screen: Side + Volume Up (or Home) (" ")

  Android phone:
  - Whole screen: 3-finger swipe (look for the image in your Photos folder)

On Unlocking the Secrets that Photos Hold

- *Old Hong Kong Photos and The Tales They Tell, Volumes 1 to 5*
  by David Bellis, www.blacksmithbooks.com/authors/david-bellis/

David is a super photo sleuth and these books are fun and fascinating (although some of the magic may be less meaningful if you don't know Hong Kong at all). David also runs a website called www.gwulo.com, which is a crowd-sourced archive of Hong Kong photos and information useful to genealogists and others, along with some nifty tools such as a map overlay resource that can help you find places from different eras. It is more expat-oriented, but still has great information for everyone. View https://gwulo.com/faqs to understand the site's features.

Essential Books on Photo Analysis & Forensic Photography
I haven't consulted these books, but Richard Le, Branch Manager, North Beach Library, San Francisco, recommends them. He's very helpful and resourceful, including re finding no-cost sources and dealing with Chinese as a non-Chinese speaker. He runs a weekly online genealogy club and sometimes runs programs specifically on Chinese American genealogy.

- ***Handbook of Forensic Photography* — Sanford Weiss (2022)**
  This is one of the most comprehensive modern references on forensic photography. This book is repeatedly described as *the* definitive reference for forensic image work.

- ***Forensic Photography: A Practitioner's Guide* — Nick Marsh**
  A practical introduction to photographing evidence and understanding what details matter.

- ***Photo Forensics* — Hany Farid**
  A deep dive into digital image analysis, manipulation detection, and the science behind spotting inconsistencies.

- ***The Forensic Photographer's Field Guide* — Edward Robinson**
  A compact, field-ready guide for capturing and interpreting photographic evidence.

- ***The Visual Detective* — Bruce Fraser (conceptual, not strictly forensic)**
  Focuses on training your eye to notice subtle visual cues—useful for developing observational skill.

- ***Practical Crime Scene Analysis and Reconstruction* — Ross Gardner**
  Not strictly about photography, but excellent for understanding what clues investigators look for and how photos fit into reconstruction.