

TOP NEWS

Book toasts Chinese who helped grow Napa Valley

Laborers played crucial role in building \$34 billion wine industry, but their contribution to the US economy has been mostly forgotten

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
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“You worked so hard, and we should have treated you much better,” John McCormick says in the dedication page of his new book, *Chinese in Napa Valley: The Forgotten Community that Built Wine Country*.

Napa Valley, the world-famous wine-growing region of California, has almost 500 wineries that draw 4 million visitors a year and contribute more than \$34 billion annually to the US economy.

Without Chinese laborers Napa would not be what it is today, but the history and even the presence of Chinese workers were largely erased, according to McCormick’s book, which explores the contributions that Chinese laborers made and the hardships they faced in Napa Valley from 1870 to 1900.

His book fills a 30-year gap in the region’s history, which local historians said helps remind people of the forgotten stories when they drink Napa wine, and which one said “forever changes the heritage we celebrate”.

McCormick had never heard of this history until recent years when he took a US-China relations class at Harvard University and came across an article on Chinese vineyard workers in Napa Valley.

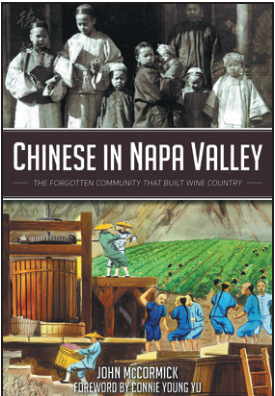
“It was amazing, and I was angry that I was not taught that,” the fifth-generation Napa Valley native said. “We learn about George Young (a Napa Valley founder); we learn about Native Americans (who used to work in the fields there), but we never learned about Chinese laborers.”

He then tried to find out more about this history, but records are scant, so he decided to “bring it more to light”.

After two years of research and writing at a time of rising anti-Asian hate during the COVID-19 pandemic, he published the book last month.

In the late 19th century, Chinese workers were the main labor force for the wine industry that was just getting started in Napa, and they were indispensable in the development of the early wine industry, the book says. By the 1880s, they comprised up to 80 percent of the labor force working in the vineyards.

At that time, many Chinese laborers had just finished working on the transcontinental railway. Just as they built tunnels in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, using hand tools and explosives, they were willing to do the back-



The book *Chinese in Napa Valley: The Forgotten Community That Built Wine Country*

breaking and dangerous work of excavating the wine caves.

The wine caves dug by Chinese laborers at Schramsberg Winery are still in use today. It is one of the few places providing direct evidence of Chinese contributions to the region.

Apart from working hard, Chinese workers were more successful than other workers for several other reasons, McCormick said.

While Chinese workers were renowned for being extremely reliable, other workers had a reputation of abandoning their tools in the middle of fields whenever news of a gold strike reached town, said McCormick.

“The Chinese didn’t do that. If they entered into a contract, they completed the job. So this was perceived as being loyal. They stuck to their word,” he said.

The Chinese also helped with a large labor shortage at the time, because other laborers disdained working in vineyards.

Unlike with today’s vineyards, in the late 1800s, grapes were planted close to the ground, so workers had to stoop over to harvest them, which was called stoop labor, McCormick said. “The white agricultural workers felt that it was demeaning to do anything in a farm that required stooping over.”

Despite the Chinese laborers’ success, they were paid much less than others. For example, a large winery owner of the time paid Chinese laborers \$1 without food and board, but he had to pay other workers \$1.50 a day. During harvest season the Chinese laborer picked an average of 680 kilograms of grapes a day for \$1, the book says.

“It was almost 50 percent more

to employ white workers,” McCormick said. “So that would make sense that it would be a big deal.”

Chinese immigrants also worked on hop farms, in quicksilver mines and leather tanneries, and on railways, and as domestic servants. They had a common purpose: earning enough to be able to send money home to their families in China.

Yet, despite their critical role in the Napa Valley economy and community, they were despised and feared and threatened by many locals, especially white men who felt that well-paying jobs were being taken away from them.

They faced the anti-Chinese movement of the 1880s, led by powerful white labor and political forces at national, state and local levels.

The movement made their life miserable. They would never be allowed to be citizens, own land and settle down in Napa. The Chinese were harassed and bullied going about their daily lives.

By the early 1900s most Chinese workers had been driven out of Napa Valley. Their once vibrant Chinatowns had been destroyed, and their contributions — even their very presence — were largely forgotten.

They provided the only possible source of labor that could have made any of those industries successful in those crucial early decades, McCormick said, yet xenophobic locals and anti-Chinese policies drove them away in favor of white Italian workers.

Today there are almost no wineries, places or monuments acknowledging and explaining the Chinese presence or contributions. “Their story is one of a strong entrepreneurial spirit and tenacity that should not be forgotten,” McCormick said.

His book has drawn plaudits from historians as well as readers. Sheli Smith, executive director of the Napa County Historical Society, said the book “enriches the tapestry of Napa Valley history” and “forever changes the heritage we celebrate”.

Connie Young Yu, a Chinese-American writer and historian, says in the foreword, “No one who reads this book will ever again sip a glass of Napa wine without being reminded of the Chinese who planted the vineyards and harvested and processed the grapes, but were denied a place at the table.”

Matt Pease, chair of the Chamber of Commerce in Lafayette, California, said in his review of the book, “How the immigrants were treated was terrible, but it is a great reminder of the positive impact immigrants make on our communities.”



Newlyweds dressed in Han-style clothing pose for a photo after receiving their marriage license in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Tuesday. The marriage registration office of the Weiyang District Civil Affairs Bureau welcomed many couples on Tuesday, also Valentine's Day. GAO CHENG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Provinces discover couples are marrying later in life amid declining fertility rate

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31.04 years old

The average age of people getting married in Jiangsu province

Many men and women across China are marrying later in life, prompting provincial governments to adopt various measures to reverse the trend, according to data released by civil affairs departments on Monday.

In Jiangsu, a province with a population of over 85 million, a total of 412,286 couples were married in 2022, down 11.7 percent year-on-year. The figure has been declining for five consecutive years, according to the provincial civil affairs department.

Last year, the average age of people getting married in the province was 31.04 years, with the average ages for men and women 31.68 and 30.4, respectively.

In Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, the average age of men registering their marriage was 31.7 in 2022, while for women it was 30.

Other cities that recorded late marriages among their residents last year include Guilin, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, and Sanmenxia, Henan province.

According to the China Census Yearbook 2020, the average age of Chinese adults getting married for the first time rose to 28.67 that year. The average age of men getting married for the first time was 29.38 and for women 27.95. The figures were in stark contrast with 2010, when the average age for both men and women was 24.89.

Late marriages have become a matter of concern amid China's declining fertility rate. In 2021, the

average number of children women planned to have was 1.64, down from 1.76 in 2017, according to data from the third China Population and Development Forum held in Beijing recently.

For people born in the 1990s, the number of children people wanted averaged 1.54. For those born in the 2000s, the average was 1.48. Also, the percentage of women who did not have children increased from 6.1 in 2015 to nearly 10 in 2020, according to the forum.

In 2010, the average age of men in China getting married for the first time was 25.75 and for women 24.

Yu Xiaoxin, director of the Jiangsu Civil Affairs Department's social affairs office, said that a range of factors — from better education to a broader mindset and maturity — contributed to decisions to marry and have children late.

“China's population in the 25 to 30 age group is declining. That has also led to a decline in the number of marriages of young people being registered,” she said.

Gender equality allows women to pursue the life they want, according to Yu. “Women today have higher expectations, and many of them are not willing to settle for anything (less than what they deserve). Conventional

views, such as one must raise children so that one has someone during their old age, have changed”.

All the above factors, together with the rising costs of marriage and childcare, have made it harder to increase the marriage rate, she said, adding that the department has rolled out measures to reverse the downward trend.

In Jiangsu, more than 209,000 couples filed for divorce in the past 12 months, while over 116,000 couples completed the procedure and received their divorce certificates. The average age of people divorcing in Jiangsu is 38.4, with the average ages for men and women at 39.28 and 37.52, respectively.

Wang Youqin, director of the marriage counseling office at the Jiangning district marriage registration service center in Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu, said the center has been counseling couples in need.

“We can help them with problems related to marriage, divorce, family conflicts and parent-child relationship. Our employees, social workers, lawyers and professional counselors offer these services,” Wang said.

In Jiangsu, 40 percent of marriage registration centers provide online counseling. The service will be extended to people across the province by the end of this year, Yu said.

“About 30 percent of people who had filed for divorce chose to give their marriage a second chance,” she added.

Guo Jun in Nanjing contributed to this story.

Colorful celebration

Traditional dancers celebrate Basanta Utsav, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on Tuesday. Basanta Utsav is a colorful festival held every year to mark the beginning of spring in Bangladesh.

MUNIR UZ ZAMAN / AFP



Ties: Raisi praises nations’ partnership

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Xi also called for strengthening communication and coordination between China and Iran within multilateral frameworks, including the United Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, practicing true multilateralism and jointly safeguarding the common interests of developing countries.

China will continue to participate in the negotiations on resuming the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iran nuclear issue, support Iran in upholding its legitimate and lawful rights and interests, and advance the proper

settlement of the Iran nuclear issue at an early date, he said.

Raisi said that Iran-China relations are based on the spirit of mutual respect, and the two countries are sincere strategic partners who trust each other.

Iran remains firmly committed to deepening and improving the comprehensive strategic partnership with China, and its resolve in this regard will not be affected by any changes in the international and regional situations, said the Iranian president.

Raisi said that he appreciates China's assistance in fighting COVID-19 and its impartial position on the Iran nuclear issue, and

said that Iran firmly supports and will actively participate in the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiative.

The Iranian president assured Xi that Iran resolutely supports China in upholding its national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and stands ready to work with China in upholding regional and global peace and security.

Before the talks, Xi held a grand welcoming ceremony for Raisi.

On Tuesday, Raisi also met with Premier Li Keqiang and Li Zhan-shu, chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature.

Trade: British firms must seize opportunities

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While we are very much focused on trade and investment, it is not only about economics. As we begin to address the challenge of climate change, China will be our indispensable partner in the battle against global warming, a battle that cannot be won without China's wholehearted commitment. So let us recognize honestly and openly that there are political differences between our two nations. And then let's redouble our commitment to growing our bilateral trade and investment, working together to address climate change and energy security, and building our people-to-people contacts to increase mutual understanding of our very different cultures.

The basis of all sustainable trade is, of course, mutual benefit. China's entry into the global economy four decades ago had a profound and beneficial effect on the living standards of ordinary people across the developed world,

including in the UK. Foreign direct investment in China, including from the UK, helped China deliver a growth miracle that in turn has fueled an unparalleled noninflationary boom in consumption in the developed world.

Today, British companies seek opportunities in China's gradual opening of its financial services sector to foreign capital and know-how. It is Chinese consumers of Chinese businesses that will revamp the benefit of competition, thereby driving productivity and raising the game of domestic financial services and disciplines — genuinely a win-win formula.

China's middle-income group has resumed its meteoric expansion, creating sustained growth in demand for imported high-end consumer products and retail financial services. British businesses must seek out and fulfill that demand and seize those opportunities, and they must be encouraged to do so by those in positions of power and influence.

Post-Brexit Britain has not yet set out its plan for the future and has not yet articulated how it will earn its living and maintain its prosperity. But I do know this: There is no credible plan for a prosperous future for a trading nation the size of the UK that involves turning its back on the world's second-largest economy.

Let us focus not on what divides us but on what unites us — making the case for free and fair trade, encouraging mutual openness to investment, and working together to combat climate change. Let us commit again so that UK-China trade will flourish in the post-Brexit era, and also reconnect to the openness, fairness and stability that have attracted so many foreign investors in the past — Chinese and others — to our shores.

The author is former chancellor of the exchequer of the United Kingdom. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.