

FOUNDER TED WONG

Teacher at Marina Junior High School, 1963-1982

Galileo High School, 1982-1999



I was at Marina Middle School at the time of TACT's founding. In those days, a few people had to be cautious and remain anonymous because they were afraid of repercussions. In general, our level of self-awareness was low. We had no platform or awakening of ourselves as Chinese Americans. There was a lack of understanding of the needs of Chinese students. Even I didn't think about it at the time. I felt that all students were the same, and you could teach Chinese students just like any others. That the methodology had to be different never entered anyone's mind. We were all Americans; we did not make distinctions on the surface. I am one of those who told my students, "Don't speak Chinese."

At the TACT meetings, not everyone was on the same page initially. Some were for, others against busing. Some welcomed the independent schools that arose as an alternative to busing; others wanted to support the public schools. Some supported English as a Second Language (ESL); others preferred bilingual methods. TACT provided us

a certain freedom to speak our minds. TACT gave people the idea that it was important to express differing opinions—and then we explored the issues.

TACT helped Chinese Americans find their voice. Those meetings gave us a firm foundation to advocate for Asian American hiring/Chinese American culture and history. We formulated our ideas more clearly. One of the first was a bilingual forum held at the First Chinese Baptist Church. Because we examined issues together, it was harder for administrators to pick us apart one by one and quiz us until they found someone who agreed with them. Then the administration would use that person and say "see, the community agrees with us." Suddenly, the battles and issues had a Chinese American face on them.

Being TACT president took a lot out of me personally. I was constantly reaching within myself all the time. I had TACT meetings but I also attended organizational meetings with Ethnic Minority Educators (EME). The task of organizing EME was much harder because of its diverse groups and concerns. Once I had wanted a single ethnic teacher's organization, with TACT absorbed within it. I lobbied TACT to no avail. Ultimately, TACT's efforts were more effective because of the presence of other ethnic groups.

Can students identify with railroad workers, gold miners, agricultural laborers, laundry workers, and waiters? Manual labor bought them their place in society, but students often have disdain for their labor. We still have to bring these struggles to the students. The battles of Black and Latino students recall the attempts of early Chinese Americans who had to fight to build their communities. Today there are many different dimensions to the Chinese community because it has become so much more diverse. We can't only think about Cantonese or Mandarin speakers. We have to fight preconceptions and prejudices against other ethnic Chinese groups as well.

Personally, I am grateful for all the acquaintances I have met, the lasting friends I've made, the support I've had. TACT members brought me into the Chinese Historical Society and those concerns and friendships were also interwoven into my life.

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