



Name in English: Jade Snow Wong
Name in Chinese: 黃玉雪
Name in Pinyin: Huáng Yùxuě
Gender: Female
Birth Year: 1922-2006
Birth Place: San Francisco, California

Author of “Fifth Chinese Daughter”

Profession(s): Author, Ceramist

Education: A.A., 1940, City College of San Francisco; B.A., Economics and Sociology, 1942, Mills College

Awards:

1942, Phi Beta Kappa, Mills College; 1947, Silver Medal, Mademoiselle Magazine; 1947, Pottery Award, California State Fair; 1949, Award for Enamel Work, California State Fair; 1951, Silver Medal for Non-Fiction, Commonwealth Club; 1976, Honorary Ph.D, Mills College; 1992, Pioneer Award, Asian American Teachers Association

Contribution (s): The fifth daughter in a family of seven children, Jade Snow Wong, also known by her Christian name as Constance Ong, shot to national and international fame in her debut award-winning autobiography “Fifth Chinese Daughter” in 1950. She was raised in a strict Chinese family that valued sons more than daughters and emphasized the importance of family over the individual. Wong’s book chronicled her years growing up in San Francisco’s Chinatown and her struggle to succeed as an American woman while being a daughter of an immigrant family. In its early years of publication, Wong’s memoir was one of the few sources informing the American public about Chinese culture and Chinese American society, until then a complete mystery that was feared and treated with suspicion by many Americans. Through the years, readers across different generations and translated into multiple languages in different countries have felt the impact of the timeless story of a girl growing up in a strict family bound by tradition. Wong’s book has become an early classic and a fixture in college and high school reading lists for decades. “Fifth Chinese Daughter” was a Book of the Month Club selection in 1950 and made into a PBS special in 1976. It has the distinction of never having been out of print since its original publication.

Wong’s success attracted the attention of the U.S. State Department which sent her on a four-month tour of Asia in 1951 to promote American democracy and to show that a female born to poor Chinese immigrants, or any racial minority in the U.S., could attain success through hard work. In 1975, Wong wrote her second book “No Chinese Stranger,” chronicling these experiences as well as the visit she made with her husband, Woodrow Ong, to the People’s Republic of China in 1972, right at the dawn of renewed relations between the United States and mainland China.

Traditional in his way of thinking, Wong's father had disapproved of her pursuing college, but she persisted without the financial support of her family and eventually attained an A.A. degree from City College of San Francisco and then double BA degrees with honors in two majors from Mills College. An art class in her final semester in college ignited Wong's lifelong passion for pottery. Working in a shipyard office as a secretary during World War II, she applied her knowledge of economics and sociology to the problems of the war industry, and published her first writing. In 1945, she decided to continue her pottery work because "I thought that pottery would give me more time to write, and that writing was one way to lift oneself from the mediocrity that so many lives fall into." With no money to rent a studio, she convinced a Chinatown shop owner to let her work her pottery wheel in the front window of the merchant's store. Her family found her workplace embarrassing and passersby mocked her. Wong ignored the critics and her family and soon her pottery and enamelware became hugely popular. Within a few years she became an award-winning ceramist with national and international acclaim. The Art Institute of Chicago asked her to do a one-woman show and her works were then featured at major art museums nationally. Today her works are in the permanent collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, and the International Ceramic Museum in Faenza, Italy.

Publications/Patents:

1945 Fifth Chinese Daughter

1975 No Chinese Stranger

External Links:

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/03/19/BAGNDHQOO31.DTL>

Kim, Hyung-chan. (1999). Distinguished Asian Americans. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group.

http://www.mills.edu/news/2006/newsarticle03222006jade_snow_wong.php

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/03/19/BAGNDHQOO31.DTL>