

## A Glimpse of Chinatown in the Marvelous Mrs. Maisel

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**Abstract:** The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel's third season focuses on the story of an American housewife who struggled to become a talk show actress in the 1950s and 1960s. Chinatown scenes appear many times in the play. This paper tries to focus on the social organization of Chinatown and Chinese women from the plot, and analyze the relevant cultural and historical background.

### 1. Introduction

The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel tells the story of an ordinary American housewife who grew up to be an outstanding talk show actor through struggle in the third season. The play was set in the 1950s and 1960s, with a total of eight episodes throughout the season, almost every episode featuring scenes from Chinatown. Starting from the plot, the author will focus on the social organization and Chinese women in Chinatown to analyze the relevant cultural and historical background, so that readers can form a more comprehensive and profound understanding of Chinatown in the United States.

### 2. Social Organizations in Chinatown

In the first episode of the third season of "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel", it was mentioned that Joel, the ex-husband of the heroine, was going to open a bar and found an abandoned warehouse in Chinatown by chance. He exclaimed that the rent was "really affordable". But when he rented the warehouse and began to decorate it, he unexpectedly found that "there is a terrible mysterious door in this place" and this door leads to an underground casino! But when he asked Lin Mei, a girl who seemed to be in charge, she said it was just a "family gathering". Joel said anxiously, "I don't want to be associated with illegal things". Even funnier is the middle-aged and elderly couple who appeared in the second episode and looked like the landlord. They wanted to use the money to make Joel "forget what you saw" as soon as they came up, and when Joel refused the money and asked if the casino was legal, they pushed the money back to him again. This is tantamount to a disguised admission of the illegality of this underground casino. Joel flustered and frustratedly asked, "I just need to know if there will be a surprise inspection, or if there will be someone from the FBI knocking into the door or something." Lin Mei said calmly, "Don't worry about that. That won't happen. The police in this area don't care about us. They will come only if there is murder or something like that" (YOUKU, 2019).

The above plot will give people some impressions of Chinatown: there are illegal activities such as "underground casinos" and the police do not manage them very much, which seems to be a "lawless" legal vacuum zone. After combing the relevant literature, the author finds that these characteristics are related to the unique social organization of American Chinatown.

From the day of its birth (the word Chinatown was coined by Cantonese and overseas Chinese in 1872), American Chinatown has a strong regional color in language, culture, social organization and lifestyle. As early as the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Chinese immigrants were forced to retreat to poor slums and engage in low-end service jobs that white people were unwilling to do, forming their own unique cultural and economic characteristics and gradually making Chinatown a "racial island" in the United States. In the Chinese communities of big cities like San Francisco and New York, traditional Chinese social organizations, such as clans, guilds, secret societies and guilds, play an extremely important role. They provide protection and

services to Chinese immigrants, help their compatriots survive in the new environment and expand their personal and collective undertakings.

One of the social organizations is called “Tang”. Its original purpose was to unite small clans to fight against the oppression and exploitation of big clans. However, it later evolved into a violent organization, not only fighting for power and profits within Chinatown, but also controlling illegal business. This kind of secret social organization is based on seeking common interests, with a wide range of influence, many members and great influence. Behind the illegal casinos in the play should be such a social organization.

In addition, Chinatown has its own industry organizations in various industries, the largest of which are laundry and restaurants. In the 1930s, laundry workers' organizations also established headquarters in major cities to enhance their influence. These different social organizations are not necessarily distinct, and sometimes the membership of their members may overlap. They rely on blood ties, history and economic ties to control Chinatown.

In the process of seeking cooperation among various social organizations, the Chinese guild hall jointly built by clans, guild halls, churches and guilds has played a positive role and played the role of administrative organization in Chinatown. The Chinese Guild Hall controls almost all Chinese restaurants and shops at home and actively strives for equal treatment of Chinese abroad. It has spared no effort to change the image of Chinatown in the eyes of Americans. Before World War II, the Chinese Guild Hall also had a quasi-judicial power to settle criminal and civil disputes within the community. U.S. courts barely care about China's affairs. As long as there is no serious violence, U.S. police are willing to settle disputes among Chinese themselves.

After the vigorous civil rights movement in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, Chinese people are still struggling to get rid of racial discrimination. The New York Police Department, out of discrimination and indifference towards the Chinese, handled the murders in Chinatown perfunctorily and carelessly. After a little investigation, it closed the case hastily. It turned a deaf ear to other criminal cases that had nothing to do with human lives. Considering that the heroine of the play is from new york, the author speculates that the Chinatown in the play is probably in new york. We can also better understand why Lin Mei mentioned above said that the police in this area will come only when there is murder or whatever. Until the 1970s, Chinatown in New York was a highly autonomous community. If there were conflicts among Chinese, they would find their own guild halls to reach a compromise.

### **3. Chinese Women**

In the third episode of the third season of “The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel”, Lin Mei mentioned that she was “in medical school” when she met Joel at a Chinatown restaurant. At the same time, the episode also saw the heroine's best friend learn typing and prepare to enter the workplace. In the sixth episode, the heroine, Mrs. Mather, also lamented on the talk show, “1960, changes are coming. I believe there will be a new generation of women's politicians who will ride on horses in pink one day.” Unmarried women, on the other hand, will be able to take birth control pills so that they can have sex without conception. Married women will be able to say that they have a headache and do not want to have sex “(YOUKU, 2019). The images of Lin Mei and Mrs. Mather are reminiscent of the second wave of feminist movement after World War II, that is, the direct product of the civil rights movement. In this wave, feminists believe that all women from the top to the bottom share the same fate and interests, and they are oppressed in their own social classes, so their goal is to fight against gender discrimination and patriarchy, destroy the inferiority of men and women caused by gender differences, and strive for women's rights in politics, economy and other aspects. In the play, “women's changes, black rights, freedom of speech and even a long tour, which are a new way of life divorced from traditional family relations, have emerged. All the roles are actively changing and striving for a new position in the new era.” All the personal choices and development of all the roles finally depict a vivid picture of history “(Tao Tao Tao movie, 2019).

Next, let's focus on the immigrant history of Chinese women in this historical picture scroll in order to get a deeper understanding of the role of Xie Linmei and the group of Chinese women she

represents.

The United States did not impose immigration restrictions from 1850 to 1882, and nearly 9,000 Chinese women came to the United States. However, due to reasons such as not adapting to American life and not finding a proper job suitable for women, only over one third of the women stayed. The serious imbalance of gender ratio has also become a prominent feature of the early Chinese society.

1882-1943 was the anti-China era in the United States. Due to racial discrimination, the U.S. Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which resulted in a small number of Chinese women in the United States and an extremely unbalanced gender ratio in Chinese society. For example, in 1890, the ratio of Chinese men to women in the United States reached 27:1.

The 1906 San Francisco earthquake and the subsequent fire destroyed the municipal government's archives, enabling many Chinese immigrants to claim to be American citizens and thus have citizenship rights. Since then, Chinese women have risen from 5% of the Chinese population to 25% in 1924. They began to play a crucial role in immigrant families.

The Second World War became an important turning point for the growth of Chinese immigrants and Chinese women. In 1943, a large number of Chinese were drafted into the army. 40% of the Chinese in New York's Chinatown alone joined the army. The Chinese became the ethnic group with the highest number of soldiers, which prompted the United States to abolish the Chinese Exclusion Act for strategic needs. In the following four years, various laws, such as the War Bride Act and the American Citizen Chinese Wife Act, have brought nearly 8,000 Chinese women to the United States. In particular, the implementation of the Immigration Act of 1965 has brought a large number of Chinese into the United States, and the number of Chinese women is also very significant. As a result, more and more small families have been established, and the old declining Chinese bachelor community has gradually become a family-centered community. Family life has gradually become the focus of Chinese life, and Chinese women who have become mothers have also taken the initiative to nurture their offspring. They attach great importance to the education of their children and play an important role in preserving the traditional Chinese culture and family education. The outstanding performance of Chinese children in schools and the outstanding academic performance of Chinese youth are to a large extent inseparable from their perseverance. At the same time, they also tried their best to help their children integrate into American society, greatly accelerating the assimilation process of Chinese in American society.

Compared with the Chinese women who came to the United States before the Second World War, the Chinese women who immigrated to the United States after the Second World War mostly immigrated out of their own will and received better education. This enables them to obtain more employment opportunities in the United States, have a certain social status, and be respected and recognized by the American society.

According to the statistics of American population, the proportion of Chinese women working in the 1950s was 30.8%, and it increased to 40.2% in the 1960s. The proportion of white women working in the 1950s was 28.1%, and rose slightly to 33.6% in the 1960s. The second or third generation of Chinese women are often more educated than their predecessors, showing stronger independence and autonomy, hoping and striving to integrate themselves into American society. They try hard to control their personal destiny and future, and also try to independently decide their marriage and career plans. In families built with them, couples often treat each other more equally (Chen Ying, 2008). Lin mei in the third season of "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel" is a good example. In the play, she is intelligent, resourceful and resourceful. She is like a duck to water in Chinatown. Joel's liquor license was quickly approved by her relationship. She likes the heroine's ex-husband Joel, so she shows her kindness to Joel boldly and pursues her love and happiness bravely. Growing up in Chinatown, she was determined to become a doctor and proud of it. In the eighth episode, Lin Mei introduced herself "I'll be a doctor" (YOUKU, 2019) immediately when she met a mistress, which is enough to show how respected the profession is. At the same time, it also shows that the Chinese women at this time already have the rising channels to obtain first-class jobs.

Chinese women also play an important role in family economy and even social and economic

life. For example, in the 1960s, Chinese women filled the labor gap in the U.S. garment industry, making the garment industry the starting point for economic transformation in Chinatown. A large number of garment factories have also prospered the restaurant industry, and more catering and innovation have also set off “China fever” in the United States.

Chinese women have also made great achievements in other fields, for example, they have jointly created brilliant American Chinese literature, such as Chinese American female writers Tang Tingting, Tan Enmei, Yan Geling, Yu Lihua, Zha Jianying, etc. Through their vivid works, they help readers enter the world of Chinese Americans and understand their joys and sorrows.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Starting from the scene of American Chinatown in the third season of the marvelous Mrs. Maisel, this paper focuses on the social organization of Chinatown and the Chinese women to analyze the relevant cultural and historical background, so that the readers can not only have a glimpse of it, form some new understanding and perception of American Chinatown, but also gain the unique experience of viewing American drama with a historical and cultural perspective.

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