



Chinatown Beat

Henry Chang

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Detective Jack Yu is assigned to the Chinatown precinct as the only officer of Chinese descent. He investigates a series of attacks on children and a missing mistress, shifting between the world of street thugs and gangs and the Chinatown of the rich and powerful.

Detective Jack Yu grew up in Chinatown. Some of his friends are criminals now; some are dead. Jack has just been transferred to his old neighborhood, where 99 percent of the cops are white. Unlike the others, confused by the residents who speak another language even when they're speaking English, Jack knows what's going on.

He is confronted with a serial rapist who preys on young Chinese girls. Then Uncle Four, an elderly and respected leader of the charitable Hip Ching Society and member of the Hong Kong-based Red Circle Triad, is gunned down. Jack learns that benevolent Uncle Four had a gorgeous young mistress imported from Hong Kong. And she is missing.

To solve these crimes, Jack turns to an elderly fortune teller, an old friend of his, in addition to employing modern police methods. This debut mystery powerfully conveys the sights, sounds, and smells of Chinatown, as well as the attitudes of its inhabitants.

Chinatown Beat Details

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From Reader Review Chinatown Beat for online ebook

ReadForDessert says

*****Scorri per recensione in italiano*****

A nice detective story set in New York's Chinatown. Our protagonist is detective Jack Yu, a chinese american policeman who has to deal with the criminal side of the chinese community and the problems with his white colleagues. A story that maybe it's not so original, but I liked how the author handled it. I also like the style and the structure of the story, almost cinematic: the story is divided into short chapters (some of them are incredibly short!) because, exactly like a movie, the reader jumps to one character to another that is involved in a key moment, and then back to Jack's story.

The only thing that I just didn't like is how the author manage the two main investigations: during the first chapters one of them seems to prevail, but we forget it very soon, and the author solve it in one page at the end of the book....probably it was an attempt to make a *MacGuffin*, but it doesn't work completely.

Bel poliziesco ambientato nella Chinatown di New York, il cui protagonista è Jack Yu, poliziotto cinese alle prese col sottobosco criminale della propria comunità che lo considera un traditore e i difficili rapporti di lavoro in un mestiere a maggioranza bianca, una storia non originalissima ma ben gestita.

Mi è piaciuto lo stile dell'autore e anche la struttura, quasi cinematografica, del romanzo: la storia è suddivisa in capitoli abbastanza brevi, alcuni brevissimi (un paio sono lunghi una manciata di righe) proprio perchè, come in molti film d'azione, il punto di vista del lettore salta da un personaggio all'altro descrivendo scene o avvenimenti salienti per poi tornare a seguire il personaggio principale.

L'unica cosa che mi ha fatto storcere il naso è stato il modo in cui l'autore ha gestito una delle due indagini principali che danno il via alla trama: all'inizio uno dei due crimini sembra prevalere sull'altro filone investigativo, ma ben presto quest'ultimo ruba la scena e ci si dimentica completamente dell'altra indagine finchè l'autore non liquida la questione in due paginette verso la fine del libro.

Credo che l'intenzione fosse di usare la prima indagine come una specie di *MacGuffin*, ma purtroppo ci riesce solo in parte, lasciando un pò di amaro in bocca.

Per quanto riguarda l'edizione italiana ci sono due cose che mi hanno molto infastidito (avevo intenzione di dare 3 stelle al libro, ma non essendo colpa dell'autore ho deciso di non considerarle):

Cominciamo dal titolo: il titolo italiano è stato inventato di sana pianta (il titolo originale è *Chinatown Beat*) e svia in modo fastidioso la lettura: pensando all'appellativo "diavolo bianco", spesso riferito a uomini malvagi di etnia bianca, per buona parte del romanzo mi sono aspettata l'entrata in scena di un antagonista occidentale che non è mai arrivato. Inutile dire che mi sono sentita abbastanza trollata quando ho scoperto il titolo originale.

L'altro difetto è l'abuso di espressioni come "scese giù", "salì sopra", ecc ecc... sto cercando di non fare la grammar nazi, però nel libro queste espressioni ricorrono di continuo e a lungo andare diventa davvero fastidioso.

Una bella lettura anche se devo ringraziare l'editore per non essere riuscita ad apprezzarlo al 100%.

Ed says

Six-word review: Chinese cop uses background, solves murder.

This is my first Henry Chang book. It is the first in the five-volume, Detective Jack Yu series. It will not be the last one I read.

The story opens with the rape of a young Chinese girl. she is not the first and it's clear that a serial rapist is operating. Jack Yu, a Chinese American detective recently assigned to the 05 precinct is put on the case. The 05 is one of the oldest precincts in the city. Yu was brought up in New York's Chinatown so he has both contacts and a feel for the culture, something sadly lacking in his fellow cops most of whom are white with a few blacks thrown in.

The rape case is soon put on the back burner after an influential leader of the Red Flag Triad, Uncle Four, is assassinated. Jack knows enough to see that it had to be someone Uncle Four knew so his limo driver Johnny and his mistress Mona come under suspicion. Chang does an excellent job of introducing each of the main characters in separate point of view vignettes allowing us to know what they are thinking and plotting.

This is not a classic mystery by any means since we know who the killer is. Rather it is a noir style procedural as Jack figures things out and pursues a solution in his own way. One of the major characters is Chinatown itself and it's denizens. That Jack knows the underbelly of the area allows him to figure things out in a way no outsider could. It also gets him in trouble with Internal Affairs as he must talk to known criminals in order to get the information he needs.

Though I am not familiar with New York's Chinatown, having lived for a while within a couple blocks of San Francisco's Chinatown, at one time reputed to be the largest Chinese neighborhood outside of China, I could relate easily to Chang's descriptions. Both of these areas are populated by mostly Cantonese. I lived in Hong Kong for 20 years, a Cantonese City, so I enjoyed Chang's adding italicized Cantonese words where appropriate. He reminded me constantly of how things work in the Cantonese culture.

The conclusion of the story is satisfying even though the reader is left with a couple loose ends. Perhaps Chang is setting up succeeding volumes. I plan to read more books in the Jack Yu series.

Molly says

Henry Chang is a good writer. He has a gift for drawing you in. When/if he gets over writing about cliches (downtrodden hooker, rogue cop, sneering punk) he could write some really great books. Oh and please, Mr. Chang, read some other books in which people deal with another language and how they handle it. It is NOT necessary to define every foreign word in the same sentence, or define AGAIN a word you just defined six pages ago. By chapter five I could speak Chinese, almost. Great if I were reading a phrasebook, not so great in a murder mystery.

Leslie says

Not a typical detective-series whodunnit, but more of an introduction to a particular community/subculture, setting things up for a continuing story of pursuit and evasion by Jack, Chinese-American NYPD detective,

and Mona, a Chinese woman from Hong Kong with a background in exploitative and cruel sex work (not that there's really any other kind).

Sonny says

Although many did not enjoy this read....I really liked it. I admit with its flaws in character development and sometimes very short chapters, author Chang kept me turning the pages. Some did not like the ending, but I viewed it as an attempt to keep the story continuing into another Jack Yu novel without compromising the ending. Maybe because this was my first venture into "Chinatown" subject matter, I liked the book better than others, no matter the reason, I found this story very compelling.

Meredith Galman says

Interesting, gritty procedural set in the exotic world of New York's Chinatown. The writing is somewhat flat, and hero Jack Yu is a little whiny.

Maddy says

PROTAGONIST: Jack Yu, NYPD detective

SETTING: New York City, 1990

SERIES: #1 of 2

RATING: 3.5

There's a truism that an author should write what he knows best, and I'm so glad that Henry Chang followed that advice in his debut novel, *Chinatown Beat*. Henry Chang grew up in New York's Chinatown, and his experiences have provided an authenticity to the setting that could only be delivered by someone who was intimate with the nuances of the area. In addition, Chang has done an extraordinary job in rendering the cultural setting, the best job that I've seen of that in a very long time.

Detective Jack Yu is an American cop who was born and raised in Chinatown. Surprisingly, he is one of the very few members of the police department who are of Asian ethnicity. In fact, he is the only Asian in his precinct, which is responsible for maintaining law and order in Chinatown. Obviously, this leads to many problems, as the cops on the beat don't understand the language, culture and attitudes of the people they are supposed to be helping. Surprisingly, there is a high degree of racism as well, with the Chinese the lowest in the racial pecking order, beneath blacks and Hispanics. Jack has a delicate juggling act every day of his life, being part of a mostly white police force that doesn't really care about the Chinese it is entrusted to protect, and being a member of the Chinese community. In addition, Jack is coping with the death of his father and the realities of childhood friendships gone awry. Many of his former friends are either dead or deeply engaged in criminal activity.

His current case involves a serial rapist who is preying on young girls in the neighborhood. In addition, the entire area is under tension as the result of the assassination of one of the local Triad leaders, Uncle Four. The former investigation pits Jack directly against some of his childhood friends; the latter leads him to a series of puzzles involving Uncle Four's beautiful mistress who has disappeared. These two cases provide a stark contrast between the world of street thugs and gangs and the Chinatown of the rich and powerful.

Chinatown Beat provided an astonishingly different view of a community that is generally seen as a vibrant and thriving enclave where tourists revel in its eccentricities. Instead, we are exposed to all of its darkness, its perversities and violence. Chang shows us every alley, every gambling joint, while enveloping the reader in the sights, sounds and smells of a totally unique world. He doesn't immerse us in a Chinatown that is sunny and bright, but he does shine a light on a place that the average reader has never seen before. The overt racism was particularly unsettling to me.

Chinatown Beat is noir at its best, a book that shakes you to the core as you look at a world where evil has so much more chance of prevailing than good.

Juha says

As they say, in detective stories the most important thing is atmosphere. Henry Chang captures the atmosphere of New York's Chinatown very well and informs the reader of the many things going on there in secret. I live quite close to Chinatown and go there often for dinner and shopping. From now on, I will observe the characters hanging out on the street corners with new interest.

Sep says

"Chinatown Beat" was a great book to be reading during my visit to New York. The last third was VERY EXCITING. I just raced through it.

Jack Yu's life is filled with conflict. between him, American born, and his immigrant father, between him, a cop, and his boyhood friend who made different choices, between him, a Chinese man, and the other cops in his crew. Between him a representative of American law and a Chinatown who suspects all police and prefers a different route to justice.

Mysteries abound. Some are settled conventionally and some are not. This is the first book of the series and closed with some threads are hanging loose. I can't wait to see how Mr. Chang deals with them in later books.

The multiple points of view aid in understanding the motivations of different characters.

Ed says

"Chinatown Beat" isn't a mystery--we watch the murder that is central to the plot take place from the point of view of the killer. It is a very gritty crime novel that features New York Police Detective Jack Yu, and American Born Chinese (ABC) who is (as so many cop heroes seem to be) caught between two worlds. The friend he ran with as a teenager is gangster with a crew working for one of the many Triads with links to organized crime in Hong Kong, Shanghai and in every Chinatown in North America.

There are elements of police procedural here as we follow Jack Yu on his Chinatown rounds although the Henry Chang is most interested in making sure the reader knows how undocumented Chinese immigrants live, suffer and die in the gang controlled urban wilderness that is the Lower East Side, Chinatown and

Alphabet City in Manhattan. They are taken advantage of by the "snakehead" immigrant smugglers, the Chinese owned businesses where they work to pay off the cost of their trip. They are preyed upon by Black and Latin gangs from the Riis Homes and other projects but are afraid of the police and the white power structure.

Despite the axes he obviously grinds, Chang develops his characters very well--we are interested in what is happening to Jack and those around him, feel some of his pain at the lonely death of his father and wonder if he will get anywhere with the attractive Chinese American attorney who sees him as just another person out to harm her clients.

"Chinatown Beat" rings very true--its details and descriptions seem as real as anything I have read. There are problems at the very end of the book once the characters leave Manhattan and the last page might as well have "to be continued" stamped on it. Other than those quibbles it is a fine book well worth reading.

J.R. says

Jack Yu is a man haunted by his past and uncertain in his place. A New York City detective assigned to the Fifth Precinct in Chinatown, he faces daily prejudice from his brother officers and contempt in the community he serves.

He is a man tormented by anger—anger over the sudden death of his father who never accepted the son's choice of career, anger at those who prey upon the people least able to defend themselves, anger at those who accept things as they are.

But he is a good detective, and this is most ably demonstrated when he takes the lead in a case where a serial rapist is targeting young Chinese girls. This plotline is subsumed when Jack is drawn into another case where the mistress of a Tong leader takes drastic action to gain her freedom, resulting in a cross-country chase and a life-changing conclusion.

There are rich characters and exciting plot elements here, though the story does meander a bit. I hope to read more about Jack Yu in other books in Chang's series.

Rosa says

I wasn't going to write a review for this book because I don't have much to say that isn't an echo of previous reviewers' comments - like many before me, I found the book entertaining and gritty-realistic enough, but somewhat flat in characterization and in the execution of its prose. The main reason I'm adding my two cents is because it seems no other Chinese American with some familiarity with Cantonese slang has done so up to this point, either here or on Amazon (or if they have, they didn't "cop" (ha!) to their background). I did appreciate the fact that Chang inserts Cantonese words and profanities throughout the novel without worrying about alienating audiences, and that the book doesn't just come off seeming like a Lonely Planet guide to Chinatown and its inhabitants (which is how a lot of novels that provide an "insider's look" into a supposedly closed-off culture come across). In fact, I sometimes wondered if he weren't writing for Chinese Americans; along the same lines, though, I sometimes wondered if he were writing specifically for Chinese

American men. Some of the things the protagonist gripes about (Chinese American women who think landing a white man is the ultimate symbol of success, the invisible status of Asian American men) are familiar grievances to anyone who follows Asian American issues, and some of those grievances often start going in a direction that I as a Chinese American woman find a bit misogynistic for comfort (the fact that Chang opens the book by paying tribute to Frank Chin, who actually griped about the multitude of female writers representing the Chinese American experience, is illuminating). But it's Chang's book, Chang's ideas - if he wants it to be a forum for all that, so be it. My main point is that whether or not I agree with the ideas, I can admire the fact that they're presented well, but Chang's presentation leaves much to be desired. The prose is so uneven that I could never really tell what he was really trying to say - there's little separation between the protagonist's voice and the omniscient voice of the novel. But the novel isn't written from a limited omniscient viewpoint - we follow all the characters and know all their thoughts, whether or not the protagonist knows them. So are all these gripes just Jack's issues, and are we supposed to be critical of him for these grievances (at the very least, they make him come off as incredibly whiny when he's supposed to be this tough, jaded detective), or is Chang making a bigger statement? EW describes Chang's works as "The Wire set in Chinatown," but I don't think his abilities are anywhere near the level of artistry or basic proficiency that the writers of *The Wire* demonstrated in the even the weakest episodes... I much prefer Chang Rae Lee's *Native Speaker*, which, while admittedly a bit on the artsy-fartsy side (I've recommended it to countless friends who haven't been able to finish it), explores the whole idea of Asian American male identity via the conventions of the private detective genre much more brilliantly than this novel ever comes close to doing.

Bill says

What a great introduction to the Detective Jack Yu mystery series, *Chinatown Beat* by Henry Chang is. Jack Yu is a detective in the 0-Five Chinatown precinct. He is adjusting to the death of his father, leaving Jack without any other family members.

The story develops very nicely, introducing us to the setting, Chinatown in New York, and to the main characters; Mona, mistress to a Chinatown gangster, 'Uncle Four', who desperately wants to escape; Johnny Wong, the limo driver who loves Mona; and others such as Lucky Tat, an old acquaintance of Jack Wu's who now leads the Ghost Legion, a gang of killers.

Jack Wu first gets involved in the rape of a young Chinese girl. Mona is sorting out a way to get away from Uncle Four, who is very abusive. Johnny Fong also has dreams of escaping his life and becoming successful.

The way I've described it, makes it seem a very simple story. But there is an intricate richness and many intriguing sub-plots that tie the various stories together. The story, itself, is very gritty at times and as it develops, builds up a great head of steam to the ultimate ending. I like Jack Yu very much and enjoyed how his character and relationships grew over the course of the story. It's such a unique world for me and made the story even more fascinating. Well - written, excellent first story. (4.5 stars)

Katie says

This is like the single most boring episode of *L&O:SVU* ever. It's a mystery... kind of. It's a thesis on the diversity of Asian culture... kind of. It's about a pedophile rapist... kind of. It's about sex slavery... kind of.

This book was so confused, I couldn't finish it. Primarily because I never got a handle on what any of the

characters had to do with the plot. It was just SO BORING after a while to read about someone's awful life when I wanted to know HOW THEY WERE GOING TO CATCH THE PEDO RAPIST.

Alisa says

More interesting for the well-drawn portraits of Chinatown characters and environs, and for the melancholy viewpoint of the American-born child of immigrants (the perfect noir outsider, really), than for the murder and detective work. Still, an enjoyable read.
