

John Kuo Wei Tchen brief biography

John Kuo Wei Tchen is a historian and cultural activist. Since 1975, he has been studying interethnic and interracial relations of Asians and Americans, helping to build cultural organizations, and exploring how inquiry in the humanities and society can help deepen the quality of public discourse and policy.

Dr. Tchen is currently the founding director of the A/P/A (Asian/Pacific/American) Studies Program and Institute at New York University. He is an Associate Professor of the Gallatin School for Individualized Study and the History Department of the Faculty of Arts & Sciences. At NYU he has been hiring a new core faculty, developing an undergraduate major and minor, setting up an institute which sponsors conferences and events, and initiating a major new multi-media web site in their new offices designed by architect/sculptor Maya Lin.

In 1980, he and Charles Lai co-founded the New York Chinatown History Project that has enabled the largest Chinese settlement outside of Asia to document and explore its 160-year-long history and share it with hundreds of thousands of non-Chinese New Yorkers and visitors. Recently renamed the Museum of Chinese in the Americas, the museum has broadened its scope to document, analyze, and compare the diaspora of settlers and sojourners in the Caribbean, along with north, central and south America.

Dr. Tchen's most recent book is the award-winning *New York Before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). He has authored *Gentle's Photographs of San Francisco's Old Chinatown* (1984) which won an American Book Award (Before Columbus Foundation) and he has edited and introduced Paul C. P. Siu's classic study *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation* (1987). He has also written and spoken on museums, immigration, race relations, New York City, and cross-cultural studies.

Tchen is the chair of the Advisory Committee of the Center for Folklife and Cultural Studies, SI. He also serves on the Board of Trustees of the New-York Historical Society and has just been appointed on the Editorial Board of *the Journal of American History*. He also serves on the Blue Ribbon Commission, National Museum of American History of the Smithsonian Institution. He has also served on the Smithsonian Council, the primary intellectual advisory body to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and on the Visiting Committee of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, SI. He has also served as a board member of the New York Council for the Humanities he chaired for two years. In addition, Dr. Tchen has spearheaded the formation of the first Asian/Pacific American office at the Smithsonian Institution that now engages in various regional, national, and international projects. He has also helped initiate the formation of the Asian/Pacific caucus of the Association of American Museums and the networking of local and regional Asian/Pacific American museums, historical societies, and archival collections.

Dr. Tchen has consulted for a range of museums, including The Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation (SF), The Field Museum (Chicago), the Jewish Museum (New York), the Chinese Historical Society of America, the Japanese American National Museum (Los Angeles), the Center for the Preservation of Democracy (Los Angeles), the Old Town/Chinatown History Project (Portland), and the Minnesota Historical

Society. At the same time he has worked on cultural funding and policy issues with the Rockefeller Foundation, ITVS, New York State Council on the Arts, the Ford Foundation, the New York Council for the Humanities, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

He also serves on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of American History*, the publication of the Organization of American Historians. He was also elected onto the Nominations Committee of the American Studies Association (2000-03)

In addition to receiving an American Book Award, in 1991 Dr. Tchen was awarded the Charles S. Frankel Prize from the National Endowment for the Humanities (renamed the National Humanities Medal), and in 1993 he received the City of New York Mayor's Award of Honor for Arts and Culture. In 1999, Tchen was named one of the "A 100 List" for *A Magazine's* list of the hundred most influential Asian Americans in the past decade. In 2000, *New York before Chinatown* received the John Hope Franklin Prize, Honorable Mention, American Studies Association; the Best History/Social Science Book, Association of Asian American Studies, and the Brendan Gill Award, Honorable Mention, Municipal Art Society, New York.