Gum Saan Journal

MAY, 1979 VOL. III, No. 1

CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

CHINESE WOMEN IN CALIFORNIA – PAST AND PRESENT

The Society's annual fall dinner-meeting was dedicated to the Chinese woman's unique role in California's history, both past and present. Guest speaker was Dr. Lucie Cheng Hirata, Director of the Asian American Studies Center at the University of California at Los Angeles. Dr. Hirata's topic of discussion was: "Hidden from History: Chinese Immigrant Women in 19th Century California," complete with slide presentation. In the latter half of the 19th century, a large number of Chinese women were brought into California for various reasons. Narrating the history through the late 1800's to the present, Dr. Hirata related how the roles played by these women evolved from prostitutes in mining camp bordellos to domestic servants for wealthy families; from seamstresses and laundry workers to their present status as career women and leaders in professional, cultural, and community-related fields, placing themselves on equal footing with their Caucasian counterparts. Through these years of progress, many Chinese women became pioneers in various fields, not only in California, but also throughout the United States. Five of these pioneers from southern California were honored by the Society on Oct. 14, 1978. California's Secretary of State March Fong Eu, a pioneer in her own right in the field of politics, welcomed the honorees with words of admiration and praise for their courageous efforts in breaking down the barriers which existed not only for the Chinese, but particularly for the Chinese *woman.* Presenting the awards was Superior Judge Delbert Wong.

CAROLINE CHAN .... EDUCATION

At the turn of the century, it was totally unheard of for a Chinese woman to consider attending college or entering a profession. However, Caroline Chan was fortunate in having a father with long-range vision, who not only provided for her education at the University of Southern California, but also encouraged her to select the teaching profession. Graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and receiving a secondary credential, Ms. Chan was qualified to teach English at the high school level. However, in the 1920's there were no opportunities for a Chinese person, and certainly not a woman, in the public schools system. Ms. Chan was offered a position teaching English at the Ninth Street School to Chinese women newly arrived in the United States. Eventually, she received a permanent position teaching first and second grade students of various racial backgrounds — Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, Italian, Black and Gypsy. Throughout her thirty years of teaching, Ms. Chan earned

for herself an enviable position — she was highly respected by her fellow teachers, and greatly loved by her students.

The Society proudly salutes Caroline Chan, the Los Angeles school system's first Chinese teacher, and a true pioneer.

LILY LUM CHAN .... COMMUNITY SERVICE

As a dedicated volunteer worker in the Chinese community, Lily Chan had a special guiding light — her father, Walter Lum. Mr. Lum, during his lifetime, was well-known in San Francisco's Chinatown as the co-founder of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance; the founder-editor of The Chinese Times; ardent community participant, and a "righter" for good causes. Following in her father's footsteps, Mrs. Chan has also been actively involved in the Chinese community for many years. Her achievements include the establishment of the Chinese Catholic Center (also known as St. Bridget's Chapel); active participation in the Chinese Culture Society as a member and lecturer; outstanding ability as a court interpreter; the organization of a group of Chinese women into a "New Life" movement; participation in numerous civic, cultural and educational programs.

Mrs. Chan also has a number of "firsts" to her credit:

... first native-born Chinese woman to teach in San Francisco's Hip Wo Chinese language school.

... one of the first "woman-libbers," long before the word came into being, speaking out for Chinese women's rights.

... in the 1940's, she was the first woman to be seated with the all-male officials of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, having been elected to the Board of Directors, a position held by Mrs. Chan for several decades.

GRACE WONG CHOW .... BUSINESS

Born in Fresno, California, of parents who were third generation Chinese Americans, Grace Wong Chow has earned the enviable reputation as the most prominent Chinese businesswoman in southern California. She and her late husband Emory operated a small market in the Fresno area for a number of years, beginning in 1918. Due to the Great Depression, which began in 1929-30, the Chows lost their business. With a mere $250 which they managed to salvage, the Chow Tea Company was started. Mrs. Chow travelled throughout the country selling tea and ginger. This venture was the beginning of her phenomenal climb to success in the business world.

In 1941, Mrs. Chow entered the insurance field. Eight years later, she became the very first Chinese, man or woman, to sell one million dollars' worth of insurance in a single year, thus qualifying her as a member of the Million Dollar Round Table. By repeating this extremely difficult feat for six consecutive years, she became the first woman to become a Life Member of this prestigious group of insurance salespeople.

Mrs. Chow's sharp business acumen has brought her various honors — she was the only Chinese mentioned in the first edition of "Who's Who in California" (1965) and "Who's Who of American Women" (1968); she has been the subject of two books, "The Selling Power of a Woman," and "The Women in Our Life Insurance" as well as newspaper articles in the U.S. and abroad. Unquestionably, she can be considered a true pioneer for Chinese women in the business world.

Throughout the years, Mrs. Chow has devoted much of her time and abilities to civic and community service. In 1968, she was the first Chinese woman appointed to serve as a member of the Commission on Human Relations for the city of Los Angeles; she was the co-founder of the Chinese community's First Baptist Church; she has been active for many years with the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, the YWCA, and is a member of the Friends of the Chinatown Library.

LOUISE LEUNG LARSON .... JOURNALISM

In the late 1920's, women reporters were a rarity — and a ***Chinese woman reporter was even more rare — in fact, non-existent. However, Louise Leung Larson was able to realize her ambition as a journalist. She became the first Chinese woman reporter to be hired by a metropolitan daily newspaper.***

Born in Los Angeles and living in a quiet residential area which is now Ninth and Olive Streets, Mrs. Larson was fortunate in having parents who believed in providing a good education for both sons and daughters, a theory traditionally ignored by the majority of Chinese parents in the early part of the century. With a great desire to be a writer, Mrs. Larson enrolled in the University of Southern California, majoring in English and journalism. In 1926 she graduated magna cum laude, and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, the national honor society.

Realizing that there would be obstacles to overcome as a Chinese woman reporter, Mrs. Larson was determined to become a journalist. At that time, Los Angeles had six daily papers. Mrs. Larson applied at the various newspaper offices, hoping to sell some of the articles she had written in her journalism classes. The then Los Angeles Record not only bought one of her articles, but hired her on the spot! As a reporter, she was assigned to cover the Hall of Justice, the various courts, the county, state and federal offices. In subsequent years, Mrs. Larson worked for the San Francisco News, the Chicago News, the Los Angeles Daily News, and the Santa Monica Evening Outlook. In Chicago during the 1930's, she met Al Capone and wrote articles covering the racketeer's trial. In the 1940's, she reported on Madame Chiang Kai-Shek's tour throughout the United States to seek aid for China during the war with the Japanese. Other prominent stories include the Aimee Semple McPherson case, the William Hickman murder trial, and the Charlie Chaplin divorce.

Although officially retired since 1971, Mrs. Larson occasionally writes for the Los Angeles Times, proving that her love of journalism is still an exciting part of her life.

(Editor's note: Since retirement, Mrs. Larson has found time to indulge in a favorite hobby: Chinese cooking. In this issue, she has given us her kind permission to reprint one of her articles on this famous art.)

BESSIE SUE LOO .... MOTION PICTURE INDUSTRY

Farm girl, movie actress, casting director, actor's agent, state commission — all are important experiences in the life of Bessie Loo, Chinese woman pioneer in the motion picture industry.

Born in Hanford, a farming community in central California, Mrs. Loo left the small town after graduating from high school, going to the "big city" to enroll in the University of California at Los Angeles. She became one of the first Chinese coeds of her generation.

Settling in Los Angeles during the 1930's, Mrs. Loo became interested in movie acting. While under contract to MGM Studios, her acting assignments included roles in "The Good Earth" and several of the Boris Karloff films. When the Screen Actors' Guild was established in 1939, she was offered a position as casting director for the various war movies which required Asian actors and actresses in minor roles. When screen-writers began writing larger parts for Asians, Mrs. Loo decided it was time to change from casting director to actor's agent. For forty years she was the agent for most of the Asian talent in Hollywood. In her role as actor and agent, Mrs. Loo was the first Chinese woman to break the racial barriers in the film industry.

In addition to her part as pioneer in the motion picture business, Mrs. Loo has contributed greatly to the city of Los Angeles and to the Chinese community. Her volunteer services include participation in organizations such as China Relief (in World War II), the Jewish Home for the Aged, the Committee to Preserve Chinese Culture, and the Motion Picture Relief Fund. She was a former president of the China Society and the Los Angeles Chinese Women's Club. In February 1978, Mrs. Loo became a member of the State Economic Development Commission, an agency created to assist in the development of new industries and new business enterprises.

A PROFILE OF CHINESE FAMILIES AND WOMEN IN LOS ANGELES, 1860-1900**

by Suellen Cheng Kwok

Studies of Chinese American history have all encountered the same problem: a lack of source materials on the subject. In the past years, I have had a chance to view the U.S. Census manuscripts for Chinese in Los Angeles and found that the Census could be a valuable source for learning about the Chinese American community or a special group in the community. Since the Census recorded every respondent's address, name, sex, age, birthdate, birthplace, parent's birthplace, education, occupation, marital status and his/her relationship to the head of the household, it enabled me to learn more about the Chinese family structure in Los Angeles. This article is a study on Chinese women in Los Angeles based on Census manuscripts for 1860, 1870, 1880 and 1900

In the early years, the imbalance in sex ratio was always the most significant feature of a Chinese community. The census does reveal that the Chinese community in Los Angeles, like other Chinese communities in the United States, was overwhelmingly a male society in the years between 1860 and 1900. In the 1860 Census, there were recorded only two Chinese women in Los Angeles, Sa So and Atone. Of the 172 Chinese in the 1870 Census, only 38, or 22% were women. By 1880 the imbalance in the sex ratio among the Chinese in Los Angeles had grown again; only 8.5% of the Chinese population were women. In 1900, the male Chinese in Los Angeles still outnumbered the female Chinese. Only 5.6% of the Chinese in Los Angeles were women.

The reasons for the scarcity of women before 1900 was due to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the fact that the early group of immigrants were mainly male laborers who did not bring their families with them. When they started bringing wives and relatives, they failed to bring in daughters. A Chinese daughter in a Chinese family was not considered to be an important member of the family in building up the family fortune. Chinese girls raised in the United States were sent back to China to marry. The male population in Los Angeles at that time, moreover, was of a nomadic nature and few of them could support a family.

Because of the scarcity of Chinese women in Los Angeles, there were very few Chinese families containing females in Los Angeles before the turn of the century. Only two such Chinese families are listed in the 1860 Los Angeles Census, and 18, 39 and 59 such families in 1870, 1880 and 1900 respectively. What the nature of these few pioneer Chinese families in Los Angeles was, and what these Chinese women did in those years can be determined from the date of the Census.

WIVES

Although the 1860 and 1870 Censuses do not indicate the respondent's marital status or his/her relationship to the head of the household, one can use the occupations and make educated guesses. In the 1860 Census, two Chinese women with no occupation lived with two Chinese laundrymen in different households. If we assume that they were couples, then the structure of these families is rather simple: one husband and one wife.

In 1870, we can again use occupation as an indicator of the nature of the Chinese families. Among 18 Chinese households which had women, 4 households had no male in residence. In the other 14 households, wives were listed as "At Home" or "Keeping House" if they did not hold any job. Two women listed as "Washman" lived with one or more Chinese washmen. It is possible that they were the wives of the washmen. The only Chinese female laborer in the 1870 Census shared the household with one male washman and three male laborers. It is hard to guess whether she was married or not.

Fortunately, the data gathered in the 1880 and 1900 Census demonstrate a positive association between marital status, age and occupation. The relationship of each person to the head of household is also given in the Census. The complete information shows that in 1880 there were 39 households in which 52 Chinese women resided. Of these 52 Chinese women in Los Angeles,

27 were listed as "Wife," 13 as "Lodger," 3 as "Head," 5 as "Daughter," 3 as "Keeping House," and the other one as "Servant." As 1900 Census recorded, of 120 Chinese females, 48 listed as "Wife," 37 as "Daughter," 24 as "Lodger," one girl aged 3 was listed as "Boarder" in an American mission home on Pasadena Avenue, and the other three were listed as "Sister-in-law," "Servant" and "Nurse." From 1860 to 1900, not only the number of Chinese women increased, the number of wives also increased.

Almost all these Chinese women in Los Angeles were from China. Not until 1876 was there one American born Chinese female in Los Angeles. Another two Chinese females in Los Angeles were born in California in the following two years. They should be the first American born Chinese girls in Los Angeles.

Of 120 Chinese women recorded in 1900 Los Angeles Census, 63 were born in California and two in Oregon. At that time, 14 were adult married women. Of these 14 American born Chinese wives, 7 had already reared a third generation of Chinese American in Los Angeles.

AGE

The age of the Chinese women in Los Angeles before 1900 tended to be young. In 1860, the age of the two Los Angeles Chinese women were 21 and 16. The average age of Chinese women was 21.7 in 1870, 26.6 in 1880 and 32.4 in 1900. Single women were younger than married women. In 1880 the average age of married women was 27.2 years while it was 23.3 years for the single women. In 1900, the age difference between single women (25.4 years) and married women (33.8 years) was more distinguished.

In the Chinese American families in Los Angeles, the wives tended to be much younger than their husbands, with a mean age difference of 15.3 years in 1880 and 10.3 years in 1900. There are two possible reasons for the large age difference between husband and wife in Los Angeles Chinatown. It could be that the poverty the immigrants experienced in China and the United States required them to work for many years and save money before taking a wife. The other explanation is that many of the wives were concubines or second wives.

OCCUPATION

What did the Chinese women do in the early years in Los Angeles? The 1860 Census indicated that the two Chinese women had no occupation. In 1870, 92% of Chinese women stayed home and only three of them worked as "Washman" and "Laborer." These three working women could be the helpers of the Chinese male housemates who were also washmen or laborers. Out of 47 Chinese female adults in Los Angeles in 1880, seven were workers; one was listed as "Laborer," three as "Cook," two as "Seamstress," and another as "Servant." By 1900 more single women had entered the labor force. In Los Angeles 14 out of 17 Chinese single women aged over 16 years old worked as "Dressmakers," "Servant," and "Cook." The major occupation for the Chinese

women was "Sewing" and "Dressmaker." Of the 16 Chinese female dressmakers, 11 were single and 5 were married women who were not listed as "Wife." Only 8 out of 48 wives worked: two as "Salesman" and 6 as "Sewing." It is noticeable that the early Chinese immigrant women in Los Angeles gradually participated in the labor force. In 1870, 8% of Chinese women worked. The percentage increased to 15% in 1880, and 29% in 1900. But, the sharp increase did not occur among the Chinese wives. Most Chinese wives still stayed at home. Although more and more Chinese women were employed before the turn of the century, the major occupations for them still remained sewing and domestic service.

CHILDREN

The number of Chinese children in Los Angeles under age 17 was rather small before 1880: only one in 1870 and 11 in 1880. Twenty years later, the number increased to 70. Even though large families were, and still are a deeply rooted cultural tradition of the Chinese, the size of families among the Chinese in Los Angeles before 1900 has shrunk. In 1880 the Chinese women were averaging 1.4 children compared to 3 children in 1900. These figures indicate that early Chinese immigrant families in Los Angeles tended to have fewer children, probably due to the economic instability of Chinese Americans. The evidence can be found in 1880 and 1900 Censuses. In 1880, there were only 2 Chinese laborers' families with children, while the other 6 families with children were headed by small businessmen. Among 22 Chinese families with children in 1900 Los Angeles Census, only two household heads were "Farm Laborer"; the rest were small businessmen. It indicates that most Chinese laborers were economically less capable to have children than most of the merchants or businessmen.

Since there were very few children in Los Angeles Chinatown before 1900, the size of Chinese families is rather small. The average size of the families are 3.8, 3.6 and 4.7 in 1870, 1800 and 1900 respectively. None of the families included 3 generations. A typical family in 1870 and 1880 Los Angeles Chinatown consisted of husband, wife and one or two lodgers. In 1900, the family structure was similar to the previous years except there were more families with children.

** A project sponsored by the Asian American Studies Center at UCLA under Professor Lucie Hirata.

Chinese Food

RENEWING A TASTEFUL ACQUAINTANCE

By Louise Leung Larson
Evening Outlook Staff Writer

Now that I have the time, I am learning to cook Chinese food because I have developed a craving for it in my later years.

During my early childhood, I spurned the delicious Chinese meals — almost banquets — we had every night.

In those days my parents had been in this country from China only a few years and we lived with relatives.

Chinese-style, the men ate in one dining room and women and children in another. I caused many a disturbance in the women's dining room by my refusal to eat any of the dishes that loaded the table.

Usually I would end up sulkily with a bowl of rice with tea in it and — to my mother's horror — sugar. Adding sugar to Chinese tea is almost sacrilegious.

NICKEL FOR POTATOES

When I was a little older, I would wheedle a nickel from my mother and run to the corner delicatessen. There I would buy a plate of mashed potatoes, with a dollop of melted butter and a spoonful of dark rich gravy.

I still think those were the most mouth-watering mashed potatoes I've ever eaten, but they wouldn't stand a chance now against the roast duck, steamed fish or succulent vegetable I could have had.

Our cook was named Gee Suck. He lived in Chinatown and spoke not a word of English. When we moved to a new house on Pico near Union, he came with us, but reluctantly.

Every afternoon he would take a big straw basket, board the P streetcar and go to Chinatown to buy fresh poultry, fish and vegetables for our evening meal. After dinner he would return to his room in Chinatown.

WOOD STOVE

My father had a special range, fired with wood, built in our kitchen because Gee Suck was accustomed to cooking on wood stoves. There was a big new gas range next to it which Gee Suck never used. He cooked our rice in a big "wok" at the end of the range.

On our first day in the new house, Gee Suck made school lunches for my sister and me. We were mortified when we opened our lunches in front of our new schoolmates because the sandwiches were made with thick bread and big hunks of meat. After that we made our own lunches.

Gee Suck didn't eat with the family or even in the kitchen. He would take his bowl of rice and plate of food and sit at the top of the basement stairs.

A NEW COOK

When, after a few years at the new house, Gee Suck decided he had made enough money and was returning to China, it was a blow to my parents. They knew they could never find as good a Chinese cook. We were all sorry to see him leave, because he had always been kind to us children despite the lack of communication.

To my delight, Gee Suck was replaced with a Negro woman named Beatty, whose cooking was the epitome of Southern culinary art.

I shall never forget how impressed I was at the first breakfast she served us — cantaloupe cut with jagged edges, fluffy scrambled eggs and the lightest biscuits ever. Even my mother, who didn't much care for American food, ate a whole biscuit.

SOUP TO SHORTCAKE

Beatty had a repertoire of prize dishes, including oxtail soup, sweetbreads, sanddabs, spoonbread and strawberry shortcake. She was so jealous of her recipes that she would shut herself up in the pantry so no one could watch her at work.

I feasted and gorged shamelessly on Beatty's food, gaining weight, and spending most of my time in the kitchen.

But all good things must end and Beatty had to leave after she suffered an auto accident. There followed a succession of cooks, so mediocre that my mother, who by then had learned in self defense to cook Chinese food, took on the main chores.

Although I still preferred American dishes, I became resigned to Chinese meals again. But I never learned to cook them as my sister did.

Now the metamorphosis is complete. Chinese food has become a real treat — and I hope some day I'll be able to cook a "Gee Suck" dinner.

—*Santa Monica Evening Outlook*

(Editor's note: Several months ago, a special project known as "Library Research Day" was initiated by the Society under the guidance of Stan Lau. Participants meet one Saturday each month at the Los Angeles Public Library. By scanning back issues of publications such as the Los Angeles Daily Star, the group has uncovered many interesting facts pertaining to the Chinese in Los Angeles in the latter half of the 1800's. The article reprinted below is one of several timely stories discovered due to meticulous research.)

CELEBRATION OF CHINESE NEW YEAR JANUARY 1876

The Chinese of this city are celebrating the advent of their New Year with their usual noisy demonstration; and, if possible, with more enthusiasm than heretofore. Their holidays commenced on Monday, and they will continue at least until tomorrow. In the meantime, their business is entirely suspended; they attire themselves in their most attractive robes, and they give up their time to feasting and the interchange of social and friendly greetings. They make offerings of roasted pigs and good fat hens to their idols, which they will withdraw presently and eat at their own feasts.

The four days at the beginning of each new year for the lower classes and 30 days for the gentry are observed as festal days at home, according to established usage. The custom is here somewhat modified; but some of the more wealthy Chinese keep up a round of festivities for two or three weeks; while the special holiday season may be said to expire at the end of the third day. All business and labor are omitted, and the days are given to feasts, social calls, the interchange of mutual wishes for health, prosperity and long life. All the faithful make offerings and invocations. The exploding of firecrackers has with the Chinese a religious signification. Besides propitiating good spirits, the main idea seems to be to scare away and utterly route the Evil One. For this they keep up a firecracker fusilado, utterly regardless of expense. Some houses expend from $300 to $400 for this single item, undoubtedly reckoning that if the business of scaring Satan is worth doing at all, it is best it were well done. It has cost this year, so far, at least $1,000 for the item of firecrackers to put the potentate of the hot realm to flight, and we cannot say at this writing whether the business has been effectually done, or whether more fulminating powder is still required. But this persistent din and the rattling explosion in the small hours of the night has made many a "Melican" man rouse himself at midnight and invoke the imp of darkness – it is to be hoped in vain. Los Angeles St. and Rue de Nigger were covered yesterday with the red fragments of firecrackers, the sidewalks looking as though the frost-bitten leaves of a forest had fallen there. In some instances a barrel filled with firecrackers was let off at once, to the great delight of Young America, who was on hand to see the sport.

During this holiday season, no allusion to anything sad, as death, sickness, losses in business, or any misfortune, is tolerated by anyone. Every sentiment must be of hope, good will and good cheer. Every true subject of the Flowery Kingdom dons his best and the attire of some of the wealthy Chinese far exceeds in cost the dress of the richest of our own people. A sable cape, silk trousers and embroidered silk over dress make up a very expensive and stylish rig, and it certainly harmonizes well with the Oriental style of doing things. The greetings and salutations are very ceremonious, and all imaginary blessings are included in the interchange of good wishes.

Upon nearly all of the stores, places of business and tenements of the Chinese, may be seen, during the holiday season, sundry strips of red paper pasted up, inscribed with Chinese characters. It is more common to see five of these strips close together. These are sometimes called "charms." They are recognized by those familiar with the usages of these people, as the Five Blessings. Each is inscribed with a separate blessing thus — Health, Wealth, Friends, Long Life, and Posterity. After each New Year festival, some of the stores or business places remain closed, or are opened by new parties. Ancient usage has become a commercial law among these people, requiring that all who cannot pay their debts, and squarely settle up at the close of the year, should close up and go out of business. All credit is withheld until this settlement is made. A new year demands a clean record, and the requisition is generally respected.

—From the Los Angeles Daily Star, January 1876

CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
1648 Redcliff Street . Los Angeles, California 90026

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MEETINGS: 1st Wednesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. Visitors welcome.

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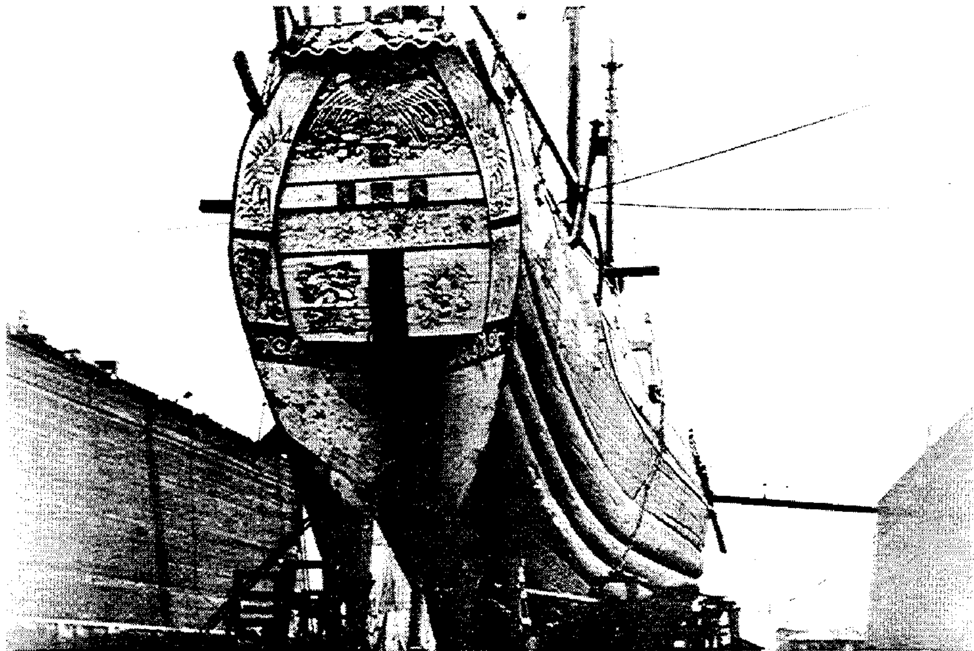
CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

THE *NING PO*
(DRAGON BOAT OF YESTERYEAR)

By Anna Marie and Everett G. Hager

(The editor wishes to thank the authors for their kind permission to reprint their fascinating account of the Ning Po, *legendary "dragon boat" of the 1800's and early 1900's. Everett and Anna Marie Hager have long held a sincere interest in the Chinese in California. They are members of both the Chinese Historical Society of America (San Francisco), and the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California. Their major interests center on the history and development of San Pedro and the Los Angeles Harbor.)*

"Strange Chinese craft is expected today!" So read banner headlines of the San Pedro Pilot of February 19, 1913, announcing the arrival of the fabled *Ning Po* in American waters. So many garbled and ludicrous stories, supposedly based on the *Ning Po's* past, have appeared that her true history has been as much obscured as are her splintery remains resting on the floor of the Isthmus at Catalina Island.



NING PO, showing highly decorated stern with the rudder removed and the Dragon on each side headed to the stern. In dry dock at Craig Shipbuilding, 1913.

For many years we have been collecting material and photographs concerning this unique Chinese junk. Through a fortunate meeting with historian William T. Corbusier of Long Beach, now sadly deceased, we merged our notes and photographs in the hope of producing a more accurate history of the old historic craft.

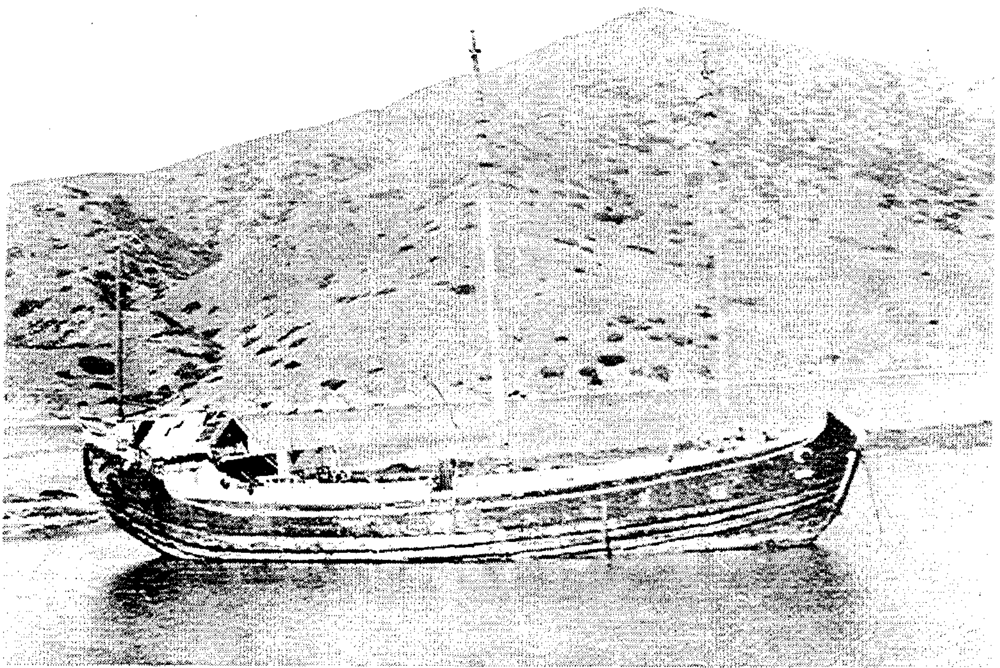
A difference in dates covering the launching of the *Ning Po* ranges from 1753 and 1806. She was definitely modeled after the Chinese idea of a sea monster with an open bow representing a mouth; bulging portholes eyes, the masts and sails as fins, and her high fantastically carved stern (the tail with painted dragons on each side of the stern) further carried out the dragon image.

Originally launched as *Kin Tai Fong* and as a Chinese merchant ship, she was the fastest and best equipped vessel afloat for her time, but soon became a smuggler of silk, opium and slave girls.

Reputedly captured by the Chinese government in 1841, the *Kin Tai Fong* served for seven years as a prison ship for pirates and smugglers. It has been claimed that one hundred and fifty-eight prisoners, whom the Chinese government found too expensive to feed, were beheaded. Seized again in 1861 at Taiping, she was converted into a transport, due to her size and speed, and re-named *Ning Po*.

The most complete description of the *Ning Po* appeared in an April 1917 issue of the *Overland Monthly* by Della Phillips, who visited the *Ning Po* while the ship was on exhibition in San Diego.

> *The* Ning Po *was almost entirely built of camphor and ironwood. The seams and cracks of the vessel are plastered with a cement of a sort that English speaking races have sought for in vain. Intermixed with cocoa-fibre, the cement does not crack with the motion of the vessel and is as good today as when first applied. The secret of its making remains with the Chinese who discovered it.*
>
> *The huge mainmast is of ironwood and its weight is estimated at twenty tons, ninety feet in length and nine feet in circumference. A great strip of mahogany braces the vessel amidships, to keep her from straining herself apart there. From this mast one huge sail, criss-crossed by bamboo spreaders, extends to the stern. The boom for this sail weighs five tons, so it can be readily seen how strong a mast must be to sustain such a weight.*
>
> *The thick ribs are placed only two and one-half feet apart, and the heavy beams and timbers are so ponderous that the caretaker estimates that there is sufficient wood in this old hulk to build six ships of modern construction.*
>
> *The camphor wood ribs and outer sheathing of logs are all paired. That is to say, a tree of the right curve was selected, whipsawed in halves, and a half used on either side of the ship, thus preventing the slightest discrepancy in shape and symmetry.*
>
> *No bolts were used in the ship's construction. Instead, sharp-pointed iron spikes, about one foot in length, were driven slantingly into the wood, for greater security. The rough decks are full of these spikes.*
>
> *With the exception of the ribs and sheathing, the old boat resembles a crazy-quilt in construction, odds and ends of wood being pieced together. All is neatly and carefully spiked and cemented together, but the joining is plainly visible.*
>
> *Another striking feature of this ancient craft is that she has nine water-tight compartments below deck and separated by water-tight bulkheads, an ancient Chinese device. They could only be entered by hatches from the deck.*
>
> *True to the Oriental way of doing things, in direct opposition to the Occidental, this craft was navigated from the stern; the captain stood on the sea-monster's elevated tail to direct the vessel's movements.*
>
> *The rudder, a cumbersome affair, weighing two tons, was not fastened to the vessel, but was attached to a special windlass by cables — two that held it upright and two more that passed from the rudder stem down underneath the vessel from stern to bow. Here they were fastened, thus holding the rudder to the vessel. On coming in anchor, the crew slacked up on the bowlines, and by means of the windlass lifted the rudder clear of the water. The steering was done by means of two tillers, six men at each tiller.*



NING PO at the Isthmus, Catalina Island.

The old wooden anchor and great mahogany windlass for hoisting it are very interesting objects, very rough and ungainly contrasted to the steel affairs of today but it was no doubt durable and served its purpose well.

The walls of the officers' quarters are decorated with panels from the Chinese classics and over the door of the commander's cabin, characters denoting tonnage and the date of the vessel's construction.

Back of the officers' quarters is the old smugglers' chamber of horrors. In this dark dungeon compartment there was originally only one very small entrance, and the compartment itself a deep well of darkness extending clear to the hold.

From the misty, dim interior of the old ship, redolent of camphorwood, we at last emerged on the upper deck that was warm and bright in the California sunshine.

Here, also, are shown some of the modes of torture that were practiced in China. The Kee-long *is the wooden cage in which persons accused of piracy or crimes against the government were suspended without food or water until death came. Other torture instruments, on board, included a two-handed sword, a big beheading knife, iron flairs (bone-crushers), thumb-screws, the* Kang *double and single-boards that were fitted about the neck, a "weazened rusty little gun" 3-feet long, estimated to be 400 years old and a capstan whose iron bands litter the decks."*

In 1911, a group of tourists in China greatly admired the *Ning Po* and raised money to purchase her, and arranged for her passage to the United States with the intent to exhibit her in various ports.

Twice the *Ning Po* attempted to leave the Orient but was turned back due to typhoons and a mutiny. On her third attempt, under the command of a Danish sea captain, Captain Ues Toft, and a crew of fourteen men, the *Ning Po* left Yokohama on December 12, 1912, and after a journey of 7,000 miles in 58 days reached San Pedro February 19, 1913.

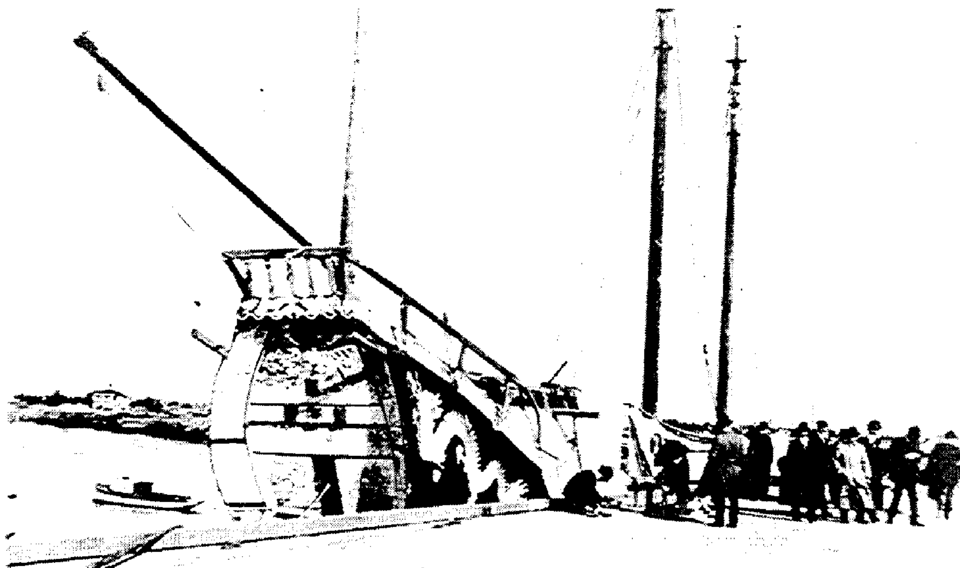
NING PO close-up view of highly decorated stern and dragon which was painted on both sides of the craft. Note "Ying and Yang" design on taffrail above stern.

From the Matson liner *Honolulu*, Captain Fred Bennett sent word, by wireless, after sighting a weird-looking craft which bore gaudily painted sides and had a high poop deck. It was the *Ning Po* headed for southern California.

W. M. Milne of Pasadena, the new owner of the *Ning Po*, was on hand to meet his strange craft's arrival. Since the junk had no clearance papers, she was liable to a tonnage tax of about $600 or $800. After clearance at the Port of Los Angeles, the *Ning Po* left San Pedro on the 22nd of February and was towed to Venice for exhibition. Evidently it did not pay very well at Venice and by April she was towed down to San Diego.

While the *Ning Po* was in San Diego, Mr. Milne expressed the hope to take the *Ning Po* through the Panama Canal and exhibit her on the eastern seaboard after being displayed at the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco, but neither of the ports were ever reached.

By October she was back, moored off the breakwater at San Pedro. A month later, the *Ning Po* was still anchored east of Deadman's Island, in an anchorage used by smaller craft and by the Navy submarines. On November 18th, southeasterly storm signals went up and the submarines and tender *Alert* were moved inside for safety, but the *Ning Po* remained outside. Except in cases of southeasterly storms, the area east of Deadman's Island provided a good anchorage, even though not fully protected by the breakwater.



NING PO anchored off Long Beach Pier, March 2, 1914. Admission: 25¢.

First Officer Albert Wiborg, who had been with the *Ning Po* on her voyage across the Pacific, was the only man on board during the height of the storm. Wiborg managed to escape from the *Ning Po* after it grounded by using a "slipper" boat, one of the small craft which crews of the junk had used in years gone by. Other crew members only came onboard the *Ning Po* on Sundays, when the junk was "dressed" for visitors.

The *Ning Po* parted her anchor chains late on Tuesday night and in the stiff southeasterly, drifted onto the rocks and sand about a quarter of a mile east of Deadman's Island. The *Ning Po* lay in about 12 feet of water and within 15 feet of the rocky side of the easterly jetty at the harbor.

Mr. Milne, after receiving word from Wiborg of the storm and wreck, managed to take off as many of the relics and curios as was humanly possible. By 10 a.m., the *Ning Po*, her stern and rudder badly damaged, had almost seven feet of water. By 2 p.m., she sunk to the bottom with only a part of her upper deck above water. At high tide, portions of her deck were covered and her masts lay over to starboard at an acute angle.

Numerous efforts by the tug *Crescent* to pull the *Ning Po* off the rocks proved unsuccessful. After four days of heavy and dangerous work, salvagers managed to install a 10-inch pump and get enough water out of her, and with the aid of divers patched the hole stove in at the port bow and floated her at high tide.

First she was taken to Mormon Island to the Fulton and Woodley shipbuilders, but they were unable to complete the extensive repairs required and the *Ning Po* was towed to the Craig Shipbuilding Company at Long Beach, where the heavy repairs were completed.

While the *Ning Po* was at the Fulton and Woodley yards, George Childs and a friend had discovered that the port "eye" of the dragon head at the bow could be moved. The wooden "eye" had been so perfectly and securely placed at the bow that ravages of earlier storms or fires had not dislodged it until the San Pedro southeasterly hit the *Ning Po*, some 160 years after her launching.

Childs and his friend found, after moving the "eye", a silver plate underneath, which had been fastened to the hull with one-inch silver nails. The thin silver plate measured two inches by two and three-quarter inches, and had small holes in the center of each two-inch side; it had been mounted vertically with the dragon characters at the top, facing forward. According to Chinese boatbuilding tradition, such a plate under the "eye" served as a sacred talisman, and attended with the greatest of care and secrecy when placed on a vessel. Through Chinese friends, the Chinese characters, of a conventional form in early Mandarin, were freely translated to read: "The eye of the dragon is bright and colorful."

After the required repairs were completed, the *Ning Po* once again was anchored in the west channel of San Pedro near the yacht club and safe from storms.

Mr. Milne sold the *Ning Po* to the Meteor Boat Company of Los Angeles. The new owners promptly announced their plans to take the *Ning Po* to Catalina Island for exhibition purposes. Instead the Meteor Company requested and was granted permission on February 4, 1914, by the City of Long Beach, to tie the *Ning Po* alongside the municipal dock.

The Long Beach *Daily Telegram* stated: "Outside of its very great age and interesting points of construction, the ship's contents, though gruesome, would have a great educational value to the ordinary person."

The Meteor Boat Company (or perhaps it was Milne's doing), after the wreck and loss of some of the torture artifacts, re-stocked the *Ning Po* with a larger collection of such items, some of dubious antiquity and authenticity, but all calculated to make the countless visitors shudder.

The Long Beach Board of Public Works extended the permit for the *Ning Po* to remain anchored at the municipal dock, but by early 1915, the junk was towed down to San Diego where she remained until 1917. Numerous visitors, during the Panama-California Exposition of 1915 and 1916, took small launches out to visit the *Ning Po* and one important visitor was Della Phillips, who left such a valuable legacy in descriptions of the *Ning Po*.

After World War I, the Wilmington Transportation Company's brochures and maps depicted the *Ning Po* anchored at the Isthmus of Santa Catalina Island. Among many of the choice descriptions written to entice tourists to the Isthmus were: "*A sight to see is the Chinese ship, the* Ning Po, *built in 1753, of camphor and ironwood. Her ribs have been crimsoned with the blood of the most desperate outlaws of the Orient. At one time 158 pirates were beheaded on her decks. She is called* Ning Po *after the city in China.*"

The *Ning Po* never visited San Francisco, Panama Canal, New York or the famous European ports, but remained in southern California waters until a disastrous fire in 1935 destroyed her and she sank on the shores of Catalina Harbor, Santa Catalina Island. In that same fire several wooden ships which had been used in motion picture "spectaculars" were also destroyed. Among them was the famous old down-easter, *The Llewellyn J. Morse*, which ended her active days as the *U.S.S. Constitution*, re-rigged for the silent film, "Old Ironsides." It has been claimed that the *Ning Po* provided scenic interest for various motion pictures made at the Isthmus.

For many years the ribs of the *Ning Po* and her rotting hull lay half-submerged at the Isthmus before falling prey to vandals and skindivers who hacked away at her few remains with a vengeance, seeking mementos of camphor and ironwood as souvenirs of the once famed *Ning Po*.

On display today in the Catalina Island Museum at Avalon, are various artifacts taken from the *Ning Po*, as well as some hand-crafted items carved by Island residents from woods taken from the fabled Chinese junk.

Stories will continue about the *Ning Po's* past. Her history needs little embellishment, for she holds a unique part in the California maritime history. It is hoped that future articles, based on personal reminiscences, will uncover additional data to add to the unusual history of the *Ning Po*.

NING PO, silver plate found under the starboard "eye." Translated freely: "The eye of the dragon is bright and colorful." It was believed that under the guidance of the dragon's eyes the voyage ahead would be safe and rewarding.

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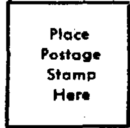

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