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## BIRDS OF PASSAGE: CHINESE OCCUPATIONS IN SAN DIEGO, 1870-1900

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In 1848, the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill began luring thousands of young men to California. They came from all walks of life and from all parts of the globe. Among these men were the Chinese. Like thousands of others, the Chinese came to seek their fortunes in the gold fields, momentarily fleeing their own troubled land. However, unlike most, these Celestials had no intention of remaining because the large number of Chinese who immigrated to the United States considered themselves "birds of passage."<sup>1</sup> After making their fortunes, the immigrants had every intention of returning to China. Visions of easy fortunes and a speedy return to the Middle Kingdom lured tens of thousands of young men to America.

Emigration was nothing new to the Chinese. Beginning as early as the third century B.C., the Chinese traveled to numerous Southeast Asian countries.<sup>2</sup> However, few ventured across the Pacific to seek their fortune until the 1850s.

Although reports of Chinese immigrants in the United States as early as 1781 are recorded, significant emigration from China did not occur until the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> The lure of gold was not the sole impetus to emigrate. China's defeat in the Opium Wars of the 1840s ended China's "closed door" policy. This opening of China to western powers, when coupled with massive governmental corruption, led to the gradual decline of the Ch'ing Dynasty. In addition, these political events coincided, in southern China, with devastating floods and droughts that occurred from 1846 to 1850.

Political instability and natural disaster fomented rebellion and revolt. Some ten to twenty million Chinese lost their lives in the T'ai P'ing Rebellion alone (1850-1864).<sup>4</sup> Further, the T'ai P'ing Rebellion was but one in a continuing stream of wars in southeastern China. The Cantonese themselves, tried unsuccessfully to oust British, French, and American mercenary forces during the 1840s and 1850s. The Hakka-Punti Wars (1855-1868) fought in

the Kwangtung Province between the migrant Hakkas (Guest Families) from the northwest and the indigenous Punti (Original Settlers) further aggravated social instability in southeastern China.<sup>5</sup> This series of events along with the discovery of gold in California served as motivating factors for emigration from China to the United States.

Consequently, when social, political, and economic upheaval erupted in China during the mid-1800s, many Chinese in Kwangtung Province chose to leave. Their history of emigration to Southeast Asian countries, proximity to the ocean, along with news of the "Golden Mountain," prompted Cantonese emigration.

California was seen as a land of opportunity, a place where riches could be obtained easily. However great California may have seemed, few Chinese expected to remain. They regarded China as their home. Wealth itself was not an end but a means to an end. Wealth brought the promise of respect, position, security, power as well as a life of ease not only for the emigrant, but also for his entire family in China. The purpose of the sojourn was for economic reasons with the rewards of the deprivation suffered overseas to be reaped in the Middle Kingdom. Retaining only enough money on which to subsist, most emigrants sent a major portion of their earnings home. Often these remittances supported the family, and frequently other male family members joined the sojourner in America.<sup>6</sup> The goal, however, remained the same – to obtain economic success and return home to China.

When the Celestials first arrived, California was an economic and social *mélange* caught in the throes of gold fever. At an early date, large numbers of Chinese were engaged as service workers, unskilled laborers, and miners in the gold fields. This avenue for quick wealth, however, was shortlived as discriminatory public legislation and popular uprisings throughout the period effectively removed the Chinese from the gold mines by 1880.<sup>7</sup>

While large numbers of Chinese emigrated to the United States in search of gold, the greatest impact on the development of California came from their importation as railroad laborers. The reasons for their importation are many, but economic considerations were the root cause. A transcontinental railroad was seen as pivotal for the continued economic development of the United States. Consequently, the federal government subsidized railroad construction with the amount of money given to the railroad determined by the number of miles of track laid. With the crossing of Sierra Nevada mountains facing the Central Pacific Railroad and laborers in scarce supply, why not import, as Charles Crocker (one of the directors of the Central Pacific) surmised, the very people who had produced the greatest man-made structure in the world – the Great Wall – and had invented that rock-moving substance gunpowder?<sup>8</sup> Thus, from 1866 through 1869, the Central Pacific employed over 10,000 Chinese.<sup>9</sup>

Although the Transcontinental Railroad was completed in 1869, many Chinese construction workers remained with the railroad companies as they

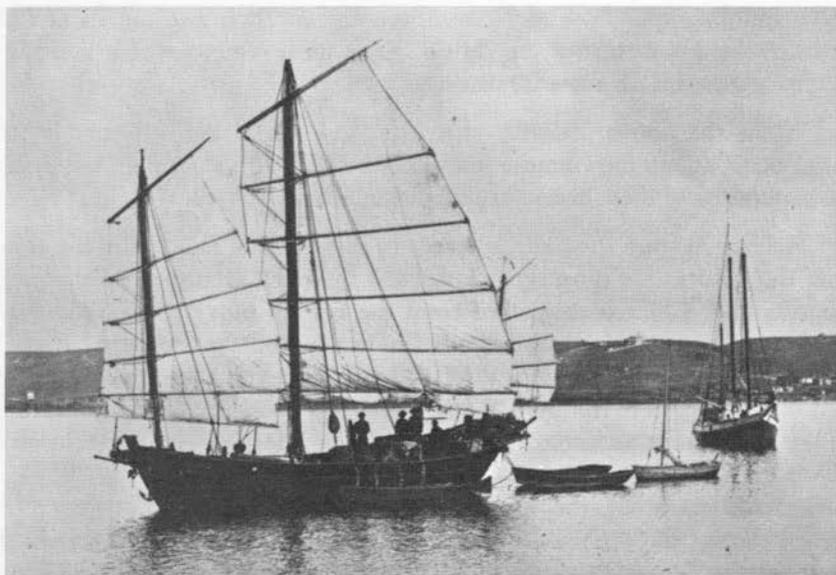
began building spur lines to the northern and southern extremities of California. Others moved into the state's agricultural regions where there was enormous demand for seasonal workers.

While the above scenario is a historically accurate reflection of the initial occupations for Chinese immigrants in California, it does not reflect the beginnings of the Chinese experience in San Diego.

Fishermen were the first Celestials to settle in San Diego, drifting down from the gold mines during the late 1850s.<sup>10</sup> Undoubtedly, since the major proportion of Chinese emigrated from the fishing province of Kwangtung which is adjacent to both the South China Sea and the Hungshui River, a number of these former miners resorted to their previous livelihood as fishermen when they left the gold fields. Although the 1860 Census Schedules report no Chinese in a San Diego population of 4,324, John Davidson in "Place Names of San Diego County" stated the Chinese were the ". . . earliest settlers along the bay from Roseville to Ballast Point [on Point Loma] during the [18]50's."<sup>11</sup> The first official mention of Chinese in the area, however, appears on an 1863 tax return listing, "a schooner valued at four hundred dollars" sworn to Ah Poo. The following year, the Y. Shing and Company listed among its assets, "seine, boats and other property" valued at eighty dollars.<sup>12</sup>



Chinese junk at San Diego in 1880s. Historical Collection – Title Insurance & Trust Co., San Diego.



Chinese junk "Hong Kong" in San Diego. Original photo by Fred W. Kelsey in Robert Nash Collection of CHSSC.

Fishing was perhaps the most stable occupation in which the Chinese engaged, and they dominated the industry well into the 1890s.<sup>13</sup> The 1870 Census Schedules report nine fishermen in San Diego. A year later, they were supplying San Diego with all the fresh fish the city needed.<sup>14</sup> They settled in two fishing villages on San Diego Bay. One was located on the downtown waterfront near the Red Light District — the Stingaree — on "I" and "J" Streets between Second and Fourth, where ". . . two hundred feet of continuous small redwood dwellings, two or three rooms deep" were located.<sup>15</sup> The second settlement was located across the bay at Roseville.<sup>16</sup> In 1881, California Southern Railroad construction on the waterfront interfered with the San Diego-based fishing fleet. Consequently, this fleet joined the already existing fleet at Roseville.<sup>17</sup>

At that time, the principal catch was barracuda, mullet, sheepshead, and abalone.<sup>18</sup> Much of the fish was dried on large racks located near the fleet. Abalone, a delicacy highly prized in China but not in the United States, was dried and the majority of the season's catch exported to China. The shell was also shipped to the Middle Kingdom for lacquer inlays and to Austria-Hungary where it was used for buttons.<sup>19</sup> By the 1880s, dried fish became a major export from the port of San Diego and the Chinese dominated the business.<sup>20</sup>

Although the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act hampered free mobility in to and out of United States territorial waters, it did not seriously hinder the Chinese fishing industry.<sup>21</sup> The passage of the Scott Act in 1888, however, saw the beginning of the end of Chinese fishing domination in San Diego. The refusal of China to sign the Treaty of 1888 (a treaty to clarify the am-



detailed description of the carrier, 3) resulted in deportation for failure to register, 4) placed the burden of proof for legal status upon the person entirely, 5) denied bail and suspended habeas corpus to the Chinese; and 6) "rigidly defined the term 'merchant' so that Chinese engaged in mining, fishing, huckstering, and laundering were clearly in the 'labor' category."<sup>22</sup> The Geary Act profoundly affected fisherman who were now denied re-entry once they left United States territorial waters to fish in foreign waters.<sup>23</sup> Many Chinese fishermen were forced to leave the sea, and the fishing industry was taken over by other immigrant groups.<sup>24</sup>

While some fishermen returned to China, others opted to remain in the San Diego area and to enter other forms of employment. One such occupation was market gardening, a business which was virtually a Chinese monopoly by the 1890s.<sup>25</sup> In 1870, at least six Chinese market gardeners were listed in San Diego.<sup>26</sup> In 1880, at least eight were enumerated.<sup>27</sup> By 1900, the figure rose to twenty-seven.<sup>28</sup> Generally, market gardens were located on the outskirts of population centers, and the ones located in the Mission and Sweetwater Valleys were largely cultivated by the Chinese.<sup>29</sup> Crops were harvested and delivered door to door.<sup>30</sup> Typically, vegetable peddlers "... [used] a yoke which fitted over [their] shoulders and around the neck, with a basketful of vegetables suspended at each end," to deliver their goods.<sup>31</sup> Each peddler had his own route thereby carefully avoiding duplication. Average crops were "carrots, beets, turnips, spinach, peas, beans, parsley, lettuce, cabbage, cauliflower, tomatoes, corn, radishes, cucumbers, peppers."<sup>32</sup> In addition, vegetable peddlers frequently sold tickets to customers on their route for the nightly lottery game.<sup>33</sup> For ten cents, a rice paper ticket could be purchased. The player would select ten characters on the ticket which he or she believed would be a winner. Tickets were gathered each evening and stacked in one pile; ten holes were mechanically punched in the stack. Ticket holders having seven characters correctly marked won \$18, eight characters, \$80, and all ten characters, \$2,000.<sup>34</sup>

In San Diego, as in other California cities, many of the Chinese found employment in service occupations such as launderers, domestic servants and cooks, gardeners, barbers, ethnic restaurateurs, clerks, and hotel employees.<sup>35</sup> In his *History of San Diego 1542-1902*, William E. Smythe reported: "From the early 70's, they were practically the only help employed in the hotels . . ."<sup>36</sup> Chinese not only helped build the Hotel Del Coronado, but worked as employees once it opened in 1888. Despite agitation against Chinese employment in public and private enterprises during the 1880s, the hotel continued to use Chinese labor, but only in menial tasks such as scrubbing floors and kitchen work.<sup>37</sup> Even as late as 1900, numerous hotel owners continued to hire Chinese laborers as hotel employees.<sup>38</sup>

From the early seventies on, virtually all laundry business was controlled by the Chinese. Although reputedly rough on clothes, their prices were reasonable and Chinese laundries enjoyed a large white patronage.<sup>39</sup> In

1887, seventeen of the city's twenty-three laundries were Chinese with their number increasing yearly.<sup>40</sup>

Chinese tailors and barbers probably catered to an all-Oriental clientele. In other Chinatowns, barbers and tailors worked out of one of the mercantile establishments and it is reasonable to assume they did the same in San Diego's Chinatown.

The occupation which employed by far the greatest number of Chinese was heavy construction, especially the railroads. Prior to 1880, little or no mention is made in the *San Diego Union* of Chinese being imported into the area. In 1880, however, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad approved the building of the California Southern Railroad from National City to Waterman Junction (Barstow) where the line would connect with the main Santa Fe line for the completion of the southern-most terminus of the five transcontinental lines.<sup>41</sup> Beginning in 1881, Chinese laborers were contracted in San Francisco, and work on the California Southern Railroad began.

Between 1881 and 1884, some 1,000 to 1,500 Chinese were employed by the railroad.<sup>42</sup> The bulk worked on the Temecula Canyon segment where they constituted one-half of the labor force. The work was backbreaking in an area that is hot, dusty, and dangerous, as is evidenced by two entries in a burial register: Ah Sing, age 21, was "Burn [sic] up by Powder at Temecula" on October 27, 1881, and Lim Yuk, age 20, was "Killed by Cars CSRR" on April 10, 1882.<sup>43</sup>

Other construction projects included building the Sweetwater Valley extension of the National City and Otay Steam Motor Line in 1887 and constructing the Coronado Belt Railroad and other lesser railroad lines during the late 1880s and early 1890s.<sup>44</sup> Chinese also worked for the water company, the San Diego Street Car Company, local brickyards, the Land and Town Company, and were employed for numerous brush clearing jobs on Coronado.<sup>45</sup> In most cases, the work was menial, unskilled, and undesirable.

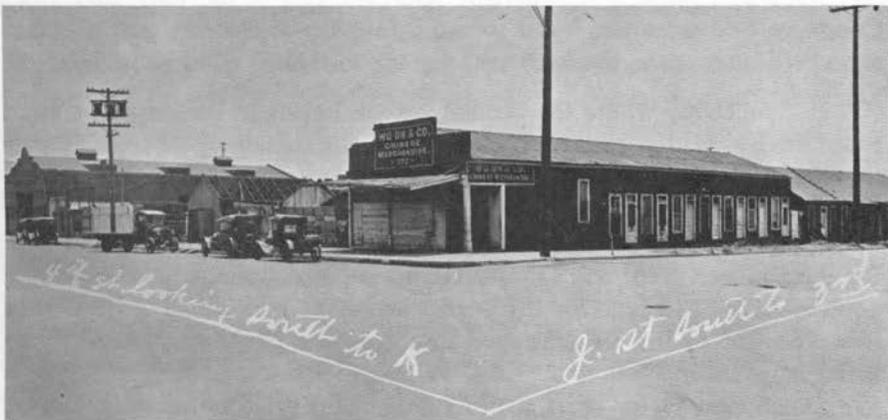
In San Diego where the economic foundations of the city were characterized by sudden economic fluctuations throughout the period of 1870 to 1900, the strength of the Chinese community also paralleled these fluctuations. This was reflected in the size of the Chinese community; however, despite these economic fluctuations, the range of employment varied little for the Chinese. Tables I, II, and III list the occupations for the Chinese population in San Diego for 1870, 1880, and 1900. Because all of the Census Schedules for 1890 were destroyed in a 1921 fire in Washington, D.C., no listing appears for that year. Table IV provides the Chinese population in San Diego County for years 1850 to 1900 based upon census data. During the late 1880s when San Diego was enjoying its "Great Boom," the largest number of Celestials was principally employed on construction projects. By 1890, although the figure appears quite high in comparison to previous years,

it is undoubtedly less than for figures in the late 1880s. It may be inferred that the depression following the 1886 to 1888 boom continued throughout the 1890s into 1900 and caused many Chinese laborers to migrate elsewhere to seek work. Many, in all likelihood, returned to San Francisco where they were originally contracted as suggested by an 1884 *San Diego Union* article. Ah Quin, a local merchant and railroad labor contractor, informed the *Union* that it was difficult to induce Chinese laborers to come to San Diego to work on the railroads for \$1.00 per day when they could readily obtain easier work in San Francisco for \$1.25 to \$1.50 per day.<sup>46</sup>

Generally, the majority of Chinese in San Diego began as and remained as wage laborers. Aside from a few wealthy merchants, a large number of Chinese worked in service occupations and as menials throughout the city. Others worked on heavy construction projects. Hence, fluctuations in San Diego's economy had repercussions for a large segment of its Chinese residents.



Junction of 3rd and "J" Streets, June 19, 1924. Photo from San Diego Historical Society, Ticor Collection.



4th and "J" Streets, June 19, 1924. Photo from San Diego Historical Society, Ticor Collection.

The Chinese in San Diego generally settled in the Chinese quarter located within the Red Light District in downtown San Diego.<sup>47</sup> Chinatown was bounded by Market Street and K Street, and Second through Fifth Streets, with the greatest concentration being in the southwest corner of the Stingaree district which was “. . . almost entirely occupied by Chinese, for their stores, homes, gambling rooms and opium dens.”<sup>48</sup>

TABLE I  
Occupations of the Chinese Population  
in San Diego: 1870

Laundry	27
Cook	10
Fisherman	9
Washer and Miner	7
Gardener	6
Servant	5
Total	<hr/> 64

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, United States Census of Population, 1870, Manuscript Schedules, San Diego Enumeration District (National Archives microfilm copy. Federal Archives and Records Center, Laguna Niguel, California).

TABLE II  
Occupations of the Chinese Population  
in San Diego: 1880

Cook <sup>a</sup>	62
Laborer <sup>b</sup>	40
Laundry	28
Fisherman	28
Gardener <sup>c</sup>	17
Servant	11
Keeping House <sup>d</sup>	8
Merchant	4
Physician	2
Clerk	1
Miner	1
Total	<hr/> 202

<sup>a</sup>Includes private family cooks.

<sup>b</sup>Includes railroad and farm laborers.

<sup>c</sup>Includes market gardeners.

<sup>d</sup>Females.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, United States Census of Population, 1880, Manuscript Schedules, San Diego Enumeration District (National Archives microfilm copy. Federal Archives and Records Center, Laguna Niguel, California).

TABLE III  
Occupations of the Chinese Population  
in San Diego: 1900

Laborer <sup>a</sup>	109
Laundry	102
Cook <sup>b</sup>	51
Gardener <sup>c</sup>	45
Merchant	34
Servant	18
Farmer	8
Fisherman	5
Physician	3
Barber	3
Student	2
Tailor	2
Bookkeeper	1
Clerk	1
Mistress	1
Restaurant Proprietor	1
Total	386

<sup>a</sup>Includes janitors, brick, day, farm, hotel, restaurant, and slaughterhouse laborers.

<sup>b</sup>Includes private family cooks.

<sup>c</sup>Includes market gardeners.

*Source:* U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, United States Census of Population, 1900, Manuscript Schedules, San Diego Enumeration District (National Archives microfilm copy. Federal Archives and Records Center, Laguna Niguel, California).

TABLE IV  
Chinese population in San Diego County, 1850-1900

Year	Chinese	Total Population	Percentage Chinese in Total Population
1850	—	798	—
1860	—	4,324	—
1870	70	4,951	1.4
1880	229	8,618	2.6
1890	909	34,987	2.6
1900	414	35,090	1.2

*Source:* U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, United States Census of Population: 1850-1900 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1851-1901).

Even after many of its residents moved to Roseville, the Chinatown survived in its downtown location because it was close to transportation lines. In addition to the railroad, the wharf where passengers and cargo disembarked, was located at the foot of Fifth Street. This pattern of location is not unique to San Diego as noted by S. W. Kung in *Chinese in American Life*, who wrote:

Most Chinatowns are situated near a railroad station (for example, in Boston, Pittsburgh, St. Louis) because the early Chinese wished to be readily accessible to relatives and friends. In New York and San Francisco, however, they are situated near the docks, to be convenient for debarking immigrants.<sup>49</sup>

While the initial founding of San Diego's Chinatown by fishermen was unique, in terms of occupational structure, San Diego's Chinatown was similar in many respects to other California cities such as San Francisco. The occupations Chinese entered into were similar; generally Chinese were employed in service-oriented and unskilled labor jobs. The type of employment had an effect upon their settlement patterns. Most Chinese occupations were located in or near cities and towns; as a result, the Chinese tended to be an urban population. In San Diego, most Celestials lived in or near the city's Chinatown.

The Chinese male/female ratio in San Diego paralleled that in the United States as a whole.<sup>50</sup> San Diego's Chinese population was predominantly male, single or if married, unaccompanied. The prevailing lack of Chinese women had repercussions for the Chinese population as a whole, but it particularly affected a city such as San Diego where the Chinese population was never numerically large. Without a normal sex ratio and with numerous anti-miscegenation laws, the birth of a significant second generation was unlikely. As the male population grew older, e.g., as evidenced in San Diego by 1900, many would die or return to the Middle Kingdom and leave a Chinatown with no means of perpetuating itself. In Chinatowns such as San Francisco, and later Los Angeles, the Chinese population was large enough to sustain losses due to death or return to China by its male residents, but in San Diego, such losses led to the Chinatown's decline and virtual disappearance.

In addition to the above factors, the sojourner status of the majority of Chinese also contributed to the decline of San Diego's Chinatown. Sojourners were, above all else, economically motivated. They were willing to go where occupational niches were available to them. Hence, in San Diego, they began as fishermen. As they were pushed out, new numbers of Chinese

males began working on heavy construction projects. When these projects were completed, the Chinese found new occupational opportunities such as in market gardening and in service occupations. However, the types of jobs taken by the Chinese required that the larger white community be prosperous. This dependent relationship had a devastating impact upon the viability of the Chinese community in San Diego. Thus, when San Diego's economy stagnated after 1890, the Chinese were forced out of their existing jobs, and with no new occupational niches available to them, the Chinese left and the community declined.

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## NOTES

1. The Chinese often referred to themselves as Celestials because they came from the "Celestial Empire" which is one of the less literal translations for the "Middle Kingdom" of China. See "The Ch'ien Lung Emperor: A Decree" in Franz Schurmann and Orville Schell, eds., *Imperial China: The Decline of the Last Dynasty and the Origins of Modern China, The 18th and 19th Centuries* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), pp. 105-13; Stanford M. Lyman, *The Asian in the West* (Reno, Nevada: Desert Research Institute, 1970), p. 27.
2. Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia* (2d ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 8-23.
3. Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California*, VII (San Francisco: The History Co., 1884-1890; Santa Barbara, Ca.: Wallace Hebbberd, 1970), p. 335.
4. Frederic Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China, 1839-1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 3.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 159-76.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 16; Gunther Barth, *Bitter Strength: A History of the Chinese in the United States, 1850-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 30.
7. Stanford M. Lyman, "The Structure of Chinese Society in 19th Century America" (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1961), p. 112.
8. Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 15-19.
9. Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 61-65. Although the exact number of Chinese employed by the Central Pacific is unknown, Saxton stated, "By Crocker's own reckoning, the Central kept ten or eleven thousand on the line from 1866 to 1869, but what the rate of replacement may have been, he did not specify" (p. 65).
10. John Davidson, "Place Names of San Diego County, No. 259 - Chinatown" (MS in Serra Museum Library, San Diego, California), vertical file no. 72 - Chinese in San Diego.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. For an excellent account of the Chinese fishing industry in San Diego see Arthur McEvoy, "In Places Where Men Reject: Chinese Fishermen at San Diego, 1870-1893, *Journal of San Diego History*, XXIII (Fall, 1977), pp. 12-24.
14. Davidson, n.p.; Herbert C. Hensley, "The Memoirs of Herbert C. Hensley: The History of San Diego, City, County and Region, Through the Memories, Anecdotes, and Recollections of the Author, Compiled and Edited by Him Over a Period of Three Years, 1949-1952," IV (MS in Serra Museum Library, San Diego, California, 1949-1952), p. 495.
15. Don Stewart, *Frontier Port: A Chapter in San Diego's History* (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie Press, 1965), p. 14.
16. Robert A. Nash, "The Chinese Fishing Industry in Baja California" (paper presented at the Baja California Symposium IX, Santa Ana, California, May 1, 1971), p. 2.
17. Stewart, pp. 14-15.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 17; Thomas C. Chinn, ed., *A History of the Chinese in California: A Syllabus* (San Francisco: Gollan and Son, 1969), p. 40; San Diego Union, February 26, 1884, p. 3.
19. Chinn, p. 40; Stewart, p. 17.
20. *San Diego Union*, February 14, 1880, p. 4; September 17, 1880, p. 4; August 2, 1881, p. 3; January 24, 1885, p. 3.
21. Nash, p. 9.

22. Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1909), pp. 197, 213-18; George E. Paulsen, "The Gresham-Yang Treaty," *Pacific Historical Review*, XXXVII (August, 1968), pp. 281-97 cited in Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 75.
23. Nash, p. 10; Elmer C. Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1939), pp. 103-4.
24. Even prior to the Scott and Geary Acts, immigrant groups – Italians and Portuguese in particular – who had interest in fishing, agitated for restrictions against the Chinese. Coolidge, pp. 73-74; see also Don Estes, "Masaharu Kondo: The Best of All Fisherman," *Pacific Citizen*, December 24-31, 1976; pp. 17-19, 26.
25. R. P. Middlebrook, "Chinese Gardens" (MS in Serra Museum Library, San Diego, California), vertical file no. 72 – Chinese in San Diego; Stewart, p. 18.
26. U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, United States Census of Population, 1870, Manuscript Schedules, San Diego Enumeration District (National Archives microfilm copy, Federal Archives and Records Center, Laguna Niguel, California). Hereafter cited as Manuscript Schedules, 1870; Ping Chiu, *Chinese Labor in California, 1850-1880: An Economic Study* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin for the Department of History, University of Wisconsin, 1967), p. 8, reports eight gardeners for San Diego.
27. U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, United States Census of Population, 1880, Manuscript Schedules, San Diego Enumeration District (National Archives microfilm copy, Federal Archives and Records Center, Laguna Niguel, California). Hereafter cited as Manuscript Schedules, 1880; Chiu, p. 8, reports thirteen gardeners for San Diego.
28. U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, United States Census of Population, 1900, Manuscript Schedules, San Diego Enumeration District (National Archives microfilm copy, Federal Archives and Records Center, Laguna Niguel, California). Hereafter cited as Manuscript Schedules, 1900. Includes one person who listed his occupation as "peddler."
29. Middlebrook, "Chinese Gardens," n.p.
30. Chiu, p. 77; Stewart, p. 19.
31. Chinn, p. 60.
32. Stewart, p. 19.
33. Walter Bellon, "Memoirs" (MS in Serra Museum Library, San Diego, California), vertical file no. 72 – Chinese in San Diego.
34. *San Diego Union*, April 19, 1959; descriptions provided by Gladys Hom, native-born Chinese San Diegan, in a personal interview, San Diego, California, March 19, 1976.
35. For example, Lyman lists similar occupations for San Francisco Chinese in Stanford M. Lyman, "The Structure of Chinese Society," p. 122.
36. William E. Smythe, *History of San Diego, 1542-1902: An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Pioneer Settlement on the Pacific Coast of the United States* (San Diego: The History Co., 1907), p. 383.
37. *San Diego Union*, February 27, 1888, p. 5.
38. Manuscript Schedules, 1900.
39. Stewart, p. 18.
40. *San Diego City and County Directory, 1886-87, in Three Parts* (Los Angeles: The Express Printing Co., 1886), p. 379.
41. R. P. Middlebrook, "The Chinese at Sorrento," *San Diego Historical Society Quarterly*, X (January, 1964), p. 8.
42. Figures based upon *San Diego Union* accounts of arrivals from 1881 to 1884.
43. "Burial Register, 1867-1888" (San Diego: Johnson, Saum and Knobel Mortuary, on file in Serra Museum Library, San Diego, California, 1869-1888). (Xerox.)

44. *San Diego Union*, July 27, 1887, p. 3; November 21, 1887, p. 5; December 20 1888, p. 4.
45. *San Diego Union*, February 11, 1881, p. 4; August 24, 1884, p. 3; April 30, 1886, p. 3; January 27, 1887, p. 3; August 9, 1887, p. 3.
46. *San Diego Union*, August 24, 1884, p. 3.
47. Elizabeth C. MacPhail, "When the Red Lights Went Out in San Diego: The Little Known Story of San Diego's 'Restricted' District," *Journal of San Diego History*, XX (Spring, 1974), p. 2-28.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 7; Davidson, n.p.
49. S. H. Kung, *Chinese in American Life: Some Aspects of Their History, Status, Problems, and Contributions* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1962), p. 199. This tendency of Chinatowns to be located near transportation lines is further substantiated by this author's research conducted in San Jose in 1976. It was found that in communities such as San Jose and Mountain View, the Chinatowns were located originally near railroad lines. In Mountain View, the earliest Chinatown was located on the old stage line between San Francisco and San Jose. When the railroad was built in 1864, the Chinese community relocated by the railroad. Judith Liu and Herbert Wong, "The San Jose Research Project on the Problems of the Chinese Population" (paper presented to the Bay Area Committee, Episcopal Asiamerican Strategical Taskforce, San Francisco, California, August 1976).
50. In 1870, the Chinese male/female ratio was approximately 11 to 1; whereas the national ratio was 13 to 1. By 1900, San Diego's ratio was 18 to 1 compared to a national average of 19 to 1. San Diego calculations based upon Manuscript Schedules for 1870 and 1900. National ratios from Lyman, *Asian*, p. 28.

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## HISTORY AND SOURCES OF AMERICAN FAMILY NAMES OF CHINESE ORIGIN

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Surnames are the bonds of ethnicity that link the many disparate groups of Chinese Americans. With a history of over 130 years in this country, Americans of Chinese descent are not surprisingly divided into the Chinese speaking and non-Chinese speaking, the established families and the new arrivals. They are also subdivided linguistically into distinct dialect groups representing regional origins in China, by political alliances, and by degrees of acculturation. Six generation Chinese American families stand in contrast to recent ethnic Chinese immigrants from many different countries who have come to establish new identities. Interracial marriages — the “ultimate assimilation” — have produced a subgroup of part-Chinese Americans bearing Chinese family names and such out-marriages are now increasingly taking place.<sup>1</sup>

Despite these disparities, Chinese Americans have, as a group, retained their family names and naming traditions which reflect a common history and culture. Many Chinese Americans have only their Chinese personal names, but those who possess western given names more than likely also own Chinese names. Chinese Americans generally conform to the American custom of placing the surname last in the transcription of the Chinese personal name. However, when this is stated or written in the Chinese language, all Chinese Americans automatically place the family name first, according to tradition.

For 3,000 years, family names have been important to the Chinese people. Steeped in mythology and ancient Chinese history, surnames are continuous reminders of ethnicity to Americans of Chinese ancestry. At the same time, there are close ties to the 130 years of Chinese American history because surnames also tell about migration. While these particular observations tell only part of the story, they were selected for this article to demonstrate some unique aspects about American family names of Chinese origin.

## Overview of Chinese American Family Names

There are four main characteristics of Chinese American surnames: they are limited in number, mainly monosyllabic, variously spelled according to dialect sound, and written in Chinese according to a standardized method. Recent research shows approximately four hundred family names have now been brought to America out of over eight thousand, the most current estimated number, that exist in China today.<sup>2</sup>

Most family names in China consist of either one or two ideographs, each representing a single syllable.<sup>3</sup> Monosyllabic surnames, however, predominate for Americans of Chinese ancestry, such as Wong, Lee, and Chen. Except for surnames like Soo Hoo and Ouyang, very few disyllabic names were brought to the United States. The most common Chinese family name is Li, according to recent information.<sup>4</sup> As for Chinese Americans, there is only anecdotal information, but it seems safe to say that Wong Lee, and Chen, though not necessarily in that order, are still their three most common surnames as reported 50 years ago.<sup>5</sup>

The ideograph to the family name is a constant symbol but spelling varies, like many other American family names, according to dialect sound. And there can be an incredibly wide difference in spelling the same family name since the Chinese spoken language is divided into several major dialects, each fragmented further into sub-dialects. For example, Dear, Der, Jair, Jay, Hsieh, Tse, and Zia are spelling variants that represent different dialect sounds of the same family name. Most surnames, it should be pointed out, are romanized according to Mandarin — which is the Chinese national language — or Cantonese, the predominant dialect of the early families. Thus, due to the diversity in spelling, there appears to be three times as many family names as were actually brought to this country.

On the other hand, a single spelling, such as Chi, may apply to several different family names of similar or near-like sound. Some surnames, like Huie, Lee, and Young, may not appear to be particularly Chinese in origin due to Americanization or anglicized spellings. New patronymics also developed for the American-born generation from the father's given name; surnames such as Afong, Fatt, and Typond, unlike any others. The ideograph to the family name thus is extremely important because of the variations in spelling the same family name, the similarity in spelling different family names, and the changes in family names. It is the ideograph — the stable symbol of identity — that is the Chinese American's important symbol of ethnicity and the absolute tie to family history.\*

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\*The ideographs shown in this paper follow the traditional method rather than the abbreviated form used in the People's Republic of China. This is because most Chinese Americans adhere to this system of writing. However, the Pinyin system officially used in the People's Republic of China will be followed for spelling place names and dynasty names.

## Survey of Chinese American History

The rich variety of spelling variants and dialect sounds of Chinese American names is actually a recent phenomenon. For almost a century – from the mid-nineteenth century to 1950 – Cantonese sounds in surnames predominated; Cantonese refers to both people and dialect of Guangdong province in southern China. For example, we saw such surnames as Wong, Chew, and Moy repeatedly out of the hundred or so common family names that were brought to the United States. Since 1950, Mandarin-sounding surnames have been more commonly heard. These same family names are usually romanized by the Mandarin speaker as Huang, Chao, and Mei, respectively. During the 1970s, when surname variants increasingly began to denote other major dialect sounds, we began seeing these particular family names spelled as Oei, Tio, and Bui.

This step-wise representation of dialect sounds in surname spelling shows the effect of Chinese American history. It is a complex history involving U.S. immigration laws which largely determined the pattern of Chinese immigration; hence, surname patterns, first, by the Chinese exclusion laws (1882-1943) and second, by the national origins quota system that ended in 1965.

Historically, the Chinese were initially lured here by the 1848 California gold rush and were recruited, until 1882, to meet the demand for labor in the western states. The vast majority of these early immigrants who came prior to 1882 were Cantonese. Actually, mid-19th century emigration to America was only a small part of a mass migration that took place out of South China. Overpopulation, political chaos, and poor economic conditions drove some to Hawaii and Australia. Larger numbers left for Southeast Asia and Latin America where European colonialism, too, demanded a cheap source of labor.<sup>6</sup>

The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act – the first racially exclusive immigration law ever enacted by Congress – specifically excluded the Chinese laborer from further entry and all Chinese residents from naturalized citizenship. However, such persons as merchants, teachers, students, and visitors could apply for admission. Under a complicated set of rules and regulations, foreign-born merchants could bring their families from China but, after the 1924 general immigration law, the American-born citizen who married in China lost the privilege of bringing his wife; only his foreign-born children could come. The exclusion laws existed over half a century before they were repealed during World War II as a gesture of goodwill to China.<sup>7</sup>

While the exclusion laws curtailed legal Chinese immigration, they encouraged illegal immigration which led to the adoption of “paper” surnames.<sup>8</sup> Many Chinese were still desirous, despite legislative and social discrimination, of coming to America and for those who could not qualify

for admission, ways were found to circumvent the law. Frequently it was through the purchase of false certificates. To guard against deportation, the owner of a false certificate assumed whatever name was recorded and later handed down the "paper" surname to his American-born children. To this day, families have kept their "paper" surnames while retaining the ideograph of the real family name for the Chinese name.

The exclusion laws froze surnames in number and dialectal variety. But after their repeal, the number of surnames increased; first gradually, then rapidly in response to historical events. In 1943, China was allotted a quota of 105 persons a year in keeping with American policy to restrict immigration from Asia. It included any person, regardless of country of birth, defined as Chinese or part-Chinese.<sup>9</sup> For all practical purposes, the restrictive quota system, which replaced the exclusion laws, failed to keep immigration at a minimum as intended.

In late 1949, when the People's Republic of China was established, several thousand foreign-born students and scholars, mostly Mandarin-speaking from various provinces, remained as permanent residents. This event represents the first change in the composition of the Chinese American population which added new surname variants — mostly Mandarin sounds — to the existing pool of Chinese American surnames. Then refugee laws enacted by Congress during the 1950s and 1960s brought thousands of non-quota immigrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong, further enlarging this pool of surnames.<sup>10</sup>

But the greatest growth in population came after the 1965 general immigration act. Its passage abrogated the national origins quota system for China and other Asian countries, bringing about a new wave of immigrants. When the Vietnam War ended in 1975, thousands more ethnic Chinese arrived as refugees from Southeast Asia.<sup>11</sup> As a result, Chinese American surnames today are more representative of the different dialects that form the Chinese spoken language.

If we look back to 1940 before the exclusion period ended, there were less than 80,000 persons of Chinese ancestry with about one hundred family names represented. In 1980, over 800,000 were counted in the federal census.<sup>12</sup> Along with the growth in population, the number of family names increased to nearly 400 and there are at least 1,000 different spelling variants.

Yet, whether family names were brought several generations ago, recently, brought from China directly, or upon second migrations, these symbols of identity are deeply rooted in ancient Chinese history, echoing the ancient sentiment that all those of Han Chinese descent are sons and daughters of Huang Ti, the Yellow Emperor; the common ancestor of their race.<sup>13</sup>

## The Beginning of Family Names

According to tradition, surnames came into usage during the prehistoric era of the "Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors." The Chinese, who were the first people to adopt hereditary names, believe the custom started because Fu Xi,<sup>o</sup> second of the Three Sovereigns (2953-2838 B.C.), decreed that persons of the same patrilineage should not intermarry. Down through the centuries, this rule also prevented unrelated persons of the same surname from marrying. On the other hand, there were no taboos on consanguinous marriages as long as the couple bore different surnames. Thus, first cousins could marry.<sup>14</sup> Today, however, marriage between unrelated individuals of the same surname is acceptable, but first cousin marriages are no longer approved.

At the beginning, surnames were evidently bestowed as symbols of merit. The twelve earliest recorded surnames belonged to fourteen sons of Huang Ti, the first of the Five Emperors (2698-2598 B.C.).<sup>15</sup> Although he had twenty-five sons, only fourteen had merit and deserved surnames. Two received the same name, two others received Huang Ti's own surname of Chi (姬), possibly the very first hereditary name. Historians, however, regard the entire period of the "Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors" as a mythological age.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, Chinese family names are of great antiquity even though myths and legends shroud their exact beginnings.

### Exogamy

Regardless when usage actually began, surnames first arose, as in other countries, among the aristocracy. This was attributed to the practice of exogamy by the noble clans of the feudal Zhou<sup>o</sup> dynasty (1122?-221 B.C.). In obedience to Fu Xi's ruling, men obtained wives from outside the clan. For the nobles, it was the clan — a common descent group of related families who acknowledge the same patriarchal ancestor — rather than the nuclear family, that was the more important social unit.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the noble clans traced their lineage to Huang Ti; hence he was the progenitor of the Han people.

Exogamy was required of all people by the end of the Zhou dynasty. Then when the Qin<sup>oo</sup> dynasty (221-207 B.C.) came into power, the nuclear patriarchal family replaced the clan as the basic social unit, primarily to forestall opposition to the new regime. Therefore surnames became necessary for distinguishing family lines.

### Meaning of *Xing* and *Shi*<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

The Qin dynasty can be viewed as the watershed of surnames as we understand them to mean today. There are two Chinese words — *xing* (姓) and *shi* (氏) — that mean surname, family name, and clan name. However,

<sup>o</sup>pronounced like "shi" as in "shield."

<sup>o</sup>pronounce like "joe."

<sup>oo</sup>pronounce as you would "chin."

<sup>ooo</sup>similar in sound to "shing" and "she."

*shi* is further defined as “clan” and as “maiden name of a married woman,” definitions that do not apply to *xing*. The Chinese family name is always called *xing*. And these two words cannot be used interchangeably because of their original purposes.

Prior to the Qin dynasty, only nobles possessed both a *xing* and a *shi*; each a different symbol of identity. The *xing* was the symbol of lineage, but *shi* was more like an emblem of clan prestige.<sup>18</sup> Twenty-two *xing* — probably equal to the total number of noble clans — existed during the Spring and Autumn period of the Zhou (722 to 481 B.C.).<sup>19</sup> It is thought that *xing* originally represented matrilineage rather than patrilineage.

Certainly the ideograph lends itself to such conjecture. The left half or the “radical” of this word means “woman” (女); the right half, “life” or “birth” (生).<sup>20</sup> Interestingly enough, the symbol for “woman” appears in eight of the most ancient Chinese surnames. While it was understood that men of noble birth had a *xing* or surname, they were known by the *shi* which had greater importance as a symbol of identity. New *shi* continually arose during the Spring and Autumn period, either adopted by or conferred on a man of noble lineage.

China was divided during the Spring and Autumn era into numerous small states, but skirmishes and political maneuverings eventually reduced their number to seven powerful states. The state of Qin finally emerged as the victor over the other states during the “Warring States” era of the Zhou dynasty (481-221 B.C.). During its brief rule, Qin unified the country, stripped the noble clans of their lands, and dismantled the old social order of class distinction.<sup>20</sup> Although *shi* was converting into *xing* during the “Warring States” era, it definitely became ordinary *xing* or surnames with the change in society under Qin dynasty.

In traditional China, *shi* was widely associated with the maiden name of a married woman. Upon marriage, the woman took a name that consisted solely of two words: her maiden name followed by the word *shi* — her given name was omitted entirely. When the husband’s surname was attached, it always came first since traditionally, as in Western custom, it has precedence over that of the wife.

Evidence of this ancient name custom can still be seen in the names of older Chinese American women who had arrived here during the early part of this century. They bear names like Pang Shee (the popular Chinese American spelling for *shi*) because of adherence to traditional name customs and also, at that time, it was considered impolite to ask a lady her given name. Some women have names like Louie Leong Shee, meaning Mrs. Louie “nee” Leong, which indicates the addition of the husband’s surname. And others have names like Gee Shee Woo or Mrs. Woo “nee” Gee, which is an

<sup>20</sup>Most ideographs are composed of two parts: a “radical,” often found on the left side, which gives the word its root meaning and a “phonetic” part, which may point to its pronunciation.

interesting juxtaposition of an ancient Chinese custom with an American name custom.

From early on, the Chinese married woman has had the privilege of retaining her maiden name despite her subordinate role in traditional society. This practice dates back to marriage customs of the noble clans and it seems to have been a practical means to prove that exogamy had been scrupulously observed. Today's Chinese woman has the dignity of using her full name following marriage and, depending on her traditional leanings, she may or may not add her husband's surname.

### **Ancestor Worship**

The practice of "ancestor worship," with its stress on patrilineage, also contributed to the stable use of surnames. In this custom, the individual is regarded as a link in the chain of forebears and descendants and held accountable to both for his actions and deeds. He pays homage to his forebears for his being and, as long as the chain remains unbroken, he will be honored by his descendants after death.<sup>21</sup> Thus sons were important to the Chinese family — not only to perpetuate the family name, but to carry on the duties connected with honoring one's ancestors.

The traditional family and clan system no longer exists per se because modernization and western ideas have eroded many of its functions and usefulness to society. Nevertheless, due to the assiduous attention paid to surnames over the centuries, Americans of Chinese ancestry today are able to trace their family names to their ultimate sources.

### **Sources of Family Names**

Almost all Americans of Chinese ancestry can find their family name in the "Bai Jia Xing" (also written Pai Chia Hsing), a compendium of the common Chinese family names that was compiled during the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279). Apparently only 454 names were listed at the time and today's version consists of 488 family names — 408 monosyllabic and 80 disyllabic ones. Incidentally, one of the stringent requirements of a classical Chinese education — which was abolished in 1905 — included memorizing the Bai Jia Xing. Although punctuation marks are missing, this feat was aided by the mnemonic arrangement of family names into rhyming groups of eight.

The original author very cleverly chose the following four family names to head the Bai Jia Xing: Chao (趙) comes first because it was the family name of the Song dynasty emperors (960-1279); Chien (錢) was the surname of the Governor of Zhejiang province where Hangzhou, once the capital of the Southern Song dynasty, is located; Sun (孫), interestingly, belonged to Chien's favorite concubine; and Li (李) honored the Governor of Nanjing (Nanking).

The major sources of the Bai Jia Xing are place names, titles of office, posthumous titles, and patronymics. About one-third arose for various reasons, such as from the fear of persecution or changes made in the original ideograph. Not surprisingly, given its long history of usage, a family name may have originated from more than one source or varying accounts of origin are offered. While many clans bear the same family name, they are not all related, anymore than all Smiths in America are kinsfolk. Nonetheless, according to tradition, all clans of the same family name are considered descendants of one common ancestor.

Place names form the foremost source of Chinese family names, which is no different from that of other countries. At the beginning, the *xing* was the name of the place where a man of merit was born or raised. The *shi* often came from the name of the territory or fief conferred upon him which accounts for the importance of the *shi* during the feudal period.

Numerous Chinese American surnames were originally names of states that existed during the Zhou dynasty: Chan, Chen, Chin, Chinn, Tan (陳); Cheng, Jann, Trinh (鄭); Don, Jung, Tseng, Zane, Zeng (曾); Eng, Ng, Woo, Wu (吳); Kuo, Kwock, Kwok (郭); Lang, Leon, Leong, Liang (梁). Others were once district names: Huang, Wong, Oei (黃); Mark, Mo, Mock (麥); Mei, Moy (梅); Kuan, Quan, Quon (關); Yang, Yeung, Young (楊). Still others were names of local places: Chiu, Hew, Yau (邱); Lam, Lem, Lim, Lin, Ling, Lum (林); Look, Lu, Luke (陸); Tu, To, Tu (杜).°

Some of today's surnames were feudal titles of office: Chuan (全) – Chancellor of the Exchequer; Soo Hoo, Ssu-Tu, Szeto (司徒) – Title of a Minister to the prehistoric Emperor Yao (2357-2256 B.C.); Tso (左) – Court Annalist. Some surnames can be traced to posthumous titles conferred after death upon a noble, such as a Duke (Gung) or an Earl (Po). But the rank was customarily omitted when descendants took the posthumous title for the surname. The surname Hu (Woo, Wu 胡) came from the title Hu Gung or Duke Hu; Chien (Gan, Kan 簡) from Chien Po or Earl Chien; Tai (戴) from Tai Gung.

Patronymics or a surname taken from the personal name of a father or grandfather form yet another source: Chen, Gin, Ginn, Jin, Yan (甄); Chin, King (金); Kung (孔 – surname of Confucius); Liao, Leo (廖); Lo, Lock, Locke (駱); Niu, New (牛).

However, patronymical additions indicating “son” or “grandson,” which are commonly seen in Western surnames, very rarely occur in Chinese ones. Such additions were used during the feudal Spring and Autumn era to designate the sons and grandsons of noblemen who did not receive territory of their own. But the next generation customarily did not retain these as

°The ideographs for the surnames Don and Mark originally had a topographical radical (吳) on the right side. Huang is also attributed to the name of a feudal state.

surnames. Only a few, such as Kung-Sun(公孫) or "Duke's grandson," exist today.

Many unusual stories have been handed down about the derivation of family names. One of the best known tells about the common name Chang (Cheung, Chong, Djang, Tchang, Tjong 張); it came from the sobriquet of Huang Ti's fifth son who, it is believed, invented the bow and arrow. One can see the shape of the bow in the left half or radical to the ideograph. The surname Wu (Woo 烏) arose because the prehistoric ruler, Shao Hao — who succeeded Huang Ti (c. 2598 B.C.) — liked to call his officers by the names of birds. Another surname also pronounced Wu (武) originated from the distinctive lines found on the palm of the youngest son of a noble.

Fear of persecution led to the adoption of the surname Li (Lee 李) by the ancestor of all Lee clans. It arose during the Shang dynasty (1766?-1122 B.C.?) when Li Li-chen had to flee for his life after incurring the wrath of his ruler. During his flight he happened to rest under a plum tree and out of gratitude for the nourishment of its fruit, he adopted its name for his new identity. Coincidentally, the word "plum" has the same sound as the name he discarded.

During the early 18th century, when a member of a certain Hsu clan (Chue, Shu, 徐) wrote a poem that offended the emperor, he and members of his immediate family were slain. To avoid similar treatment, closely related Hsu clans dropped the radical of the ideograph and took the surname Yu (Yee 余). For a long time thereafter, members of the Yu and Hsu clans could not intermarry. The surname Yu, however, was already in use at a much earlier time: it had originated during the Qin dynasty from the name of a tribal chieftain.

Emperors had a definite influence on the adoption of surnames. They would punish a subject by branding him with a name of contemptuous meaning or they honored a distinguished citizen with a name of felicitous meaning. They also bestowed their own surname on favorite subjects: Liu (Lau, Lew, Low, Lowe 劉) during the Han dynasty (202 B.C.-;A.D. 220); Li (Lee 李) during the Tang (618-907); Chao (Chew, Chiu, Jew, Jue 趙) during the Song; and Chu (Gee, Jee 朱) during the Ming (1368-1644), the last indigenous Chinese dynasty. In addition, there was a rule that forbade the given name of an emperor from appearing in the names of his subjects. Sometimes surnames had to be changed. One such example is the surname Yen (Yim, Im 嚴).<sup>22</sup>

Over the centuries, new surnames developed for various reasons. Disyllabic surnames were shortened to monosyllabic ones; monosyllabic surnames became disyllabic when combined with another ideograph. Deletions or additional strokes to the original ideograph produced new surnames that either retained the same sound or took on an entirely different pronuncia-

tion. For example, two surnames were derived from Ou-Yang (Owyang, OwYoung, 歐陽), a disyllabic family name meaning "south of Ou hill." At first it shortened to Ou (歐) when the second ideograph was discarded. Later the right half of Ou was deleted (區) to form another surname of the same sound.

Omission of a tiny stroke in the surname Yu (Yee 余), just mentioned, led to the surname She (Sai 佘). Both written characters look very much alike and it requires close examination, especially for one who is unfamiliar with the language, to see that the tiny vertical stroke connecting the two bars in the ideograph for Yu is missing in the one for She.

### Meaning of Chinese Surnames

Do Chinese family names have any meaning? Almost all are words that make up the common written language. For instance, the surname Louie (Lei, Louis, Lui 雷) is the same word that means "thunder"; Lin (Lem, Lim, Ling, Lum 林), the word for "forest." Other examples are: Chiang, Gong, Kong (江), "a large river"; Che (車), a "cart or carriage"; Shih, Shek (石) means "stone." Some surnames are more difficult to translate: Yee, Yu (余) means "I, me, myself, we"; and, Hu, Woo, Wu (胡) means "Why, what, how." However, the Chinese, like other peoples, do not consider their surnames as having any specific meaning except when intentionally making a pun.<sup>23</sup>

### Conclusion

The United States is probably the only country where the richest mixture of spelling variants can be found for family names of Chinese origin. As long as Americans of Chinese descent retain the ideographs to their family names, they can trace their derivations with relative ease. This occurs because of a family and clan system that stressed the honoring of ancestors and some carefully preserved myths and accounts of surname origins.

The spelling of Chinese American surnames according to dialect sound reflect the history of Chinese immigration. Certainly, large numbers of surnames bearing a particular dialect sound appeared in stages that closely follow the chronology of Chinese American history. The laws pertaining to Chinese immigration are part of American social history, telling about the steady progress America has made since WWII in welcoming immigrants of all races. Surnames of different ethnic groups, each with its own unique history and set of surnames, enrich our sense of what it means to be an American. In that respect, the history and sources of American family names of Chinese origin rightfully belongs to the total story of American family nomenclature.

## FOOTNOTES

1. "Ultimate Assimilation," Asian intermarriage, once taboo, is on the rise," *Newsweek*, 24 November 1986, p. 80.

2. "China's Family Names," *Chung Pao*, 4 May 1987, p. 3. (In Chinese only.) This article cites the research being conducted by Du Ruofu and Yuan Yita of the Institute of Genetics at the Academia Sinica in Beijing. Dr. Du, who kindly sent me this article, has collected over 8,000 surnames to date.

3. Family names in China can range up to 6 ideographs in length. But polysyllabic surnames having more than 2 ideographs are relatively rare and belong to the national minority groups.

4. "China's Family Names," This observation by Du and Yuan included the family names on the mainland of China and Taiwan. However, according to the statistics gathered by Chen Tse-ming, the most popular family name in Taiwan is Chen. See Chen Tse-ming, *Pai Chia Hsing*. Taiwan, Shih Chi Shu Chu, 1983, pp. 257-285. (In Chinese only.)

5. Leong Gor Yun, *Chinatown Inside Out*. New York: Barrows Munsey, 1936, p. 55; Kung, S.W., *Chinese in American Life*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962, p. 222. Leong stated that Chan, Lee, and Wong outnumbered all other surnames among the Chinese in America. These surnames have long been recognized, in this order, as the most common family names in Guangdong province, the ancestral home for many Americans of Chinese ancestry. There is even a popular saying among the Cantonese that goes: "Chan in Guangdong, Lee, everywhere else." Kung, however, wrote that Wongs are the most numerical among Chinese Americans.

6. Kung, pp. 3-29; Chinn, Thomas W., H. Mark Lai, and Philip P. Choy, *A History of the Chinese in California*. San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1969, pp. 2-14, 43-47, 56-58.

7. Kung, pp. 80, 103-105; Malloy, Timothy J., "A Century of Chinese Immigration: A Brief Review," *USINS Monthly Review*, Vol. 5/6, June-July 1947-1949, pp. 69-75.

8. Sung, Betty Lee, *The Story of the Chinese in America*. New York: Macmillan Co., Collier Books, 1967, pp. 98-100.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-79.

10. Chinn, et. al., pp. 29-30; U.S. 96th Congress, 1st sess., Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *U.S. Immigration Law and Policy: 1952-1979*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1979, pp. 51-57.

11. U.S. Immigration Law and Policy, pp. 76-78.

12. Sung, pp. 110-111; Gardner, Robert W., Bryant Robey, and Peter C. Smith, "Asian Americans: Growth, Change, and Diversity," *Population Bulletin*, vol. 40 (October 1985), p. 5. In 1980, Chinese Americans comprised 0.4% of the total U.S. population which numbered about 227 million. Statistically, Chinese Americans were the largest group — 23.4% — of the total Asian American population of 3½ million persons.

13. Fitzgerald, C. P., *The Horizon History of China* (ed. Norman Kotke). New York: American Heritage, 1969, p. 30. The majority in China refer to themselves as Han Ren or men of Han after the name of their glorious dynasty (202 B.C.-220). The Cantonese, however, call themselves Tong Yan-men of Tang — after the name of the dynasty (618-907) when Guangdong was heavily settled by immigrants from the north.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 84-85.

15. Teng Hsien-ch'ing, *Chung-kuo Hsing Shih Chi*. Taipei: Chih Tai Tu-shu Wen Pei, 1971; Preface, p. 1 (In Chinese only.)

16. Hucker, Charles O., *China's Imperial Past*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1975, pp. 22-24.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

18. Mu Lien-sen, *Pai Chia Hsing Tsu-tien*. Hong Kong: I-wen Yen Shu-kuan, n.d., Introduction, p. 1; Wang Su-tsun, *Hsing Lu*. Taipei: Chung-hua Tsung Shu Wei Yuen, 1960. Preface, p. 1. (In Chinese only.); Du Ruofu, "Surnames in China," *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*, vol. 14, no. 2, June 1986, p. 317.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 1; Teng, p. 6; Fitzgerald, C. P., *China: A Short Cultural History*, 3d ed. (1935; reprint ed.). New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1961, p. 60.

20. Hucker, pp. 41-46.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 10; Lin Yutang, *My Country and My People* (New York: Halcyon House, 1935), p. 105-106.

22. Kiang Kang-hu, *On Chinese Studies* (1935; reprint ed.), Westport, Conn.: Hyperion Press, 1977, p. 131.

23. This information was obtained from the late Dr. Yuen Ren Chao, the renowned linguist. Personal correspondence, 19 February 1977.

## THE RIVERSIDE CHINESE MEMORIAL PAVILION



*Society members at the newly dedicated Riverside Pavilion. 1st row (l. to r.) Bob Large, Tom Moy, Wendy Eads, Barkley Lee; 2nd row, Doreen Chan, Kipham Kan, Judy Lee, Lillian Fong; rear, Richard Smith, Ida Eads, Ben Nakayama, Beverly Hom, Dorothy Siu, James Koga, Eugene Moy, Cy Wong.*

The dream has become reality. Two major projects commemorating the Pioneer Chinese have reached completion: the published results of the archaeological and historical investigation of Riverside's Chinatown and the erection of a Chinese Memorial Pavilion honoring the Chinese contributions to the city and region.

The process of instigating and funding an archaeological excavation in Riverside brought the many contributions of the early Chinese settlers to the attention of local leaders. Among those were the late Dr. Robert Poe, a professor of physics at the University of California at Riverside (UCR), and Riverside restaurateur David Chang. The two men, with the support of others in the community, suggested the community celebrate Chinese pioneer contributions to the growth and cultural heritage of the city and region by erecting a memorial pavilion in Riverside.

Through Dr. Poe's initiative, a proposal was submitted via the Office of the Coordination Council for North American Affairs in Los Angeles to the government of the Republic of China requesting financial support for such a project.

During that period of time, Dr. Poe died while on a visit to Taiwan. Later, the Republic of China agreed to major financial support. David Chang and Dr. Sun-Yiu Fung, a UCR professor of physics and close friend of Dr. Poe, became co-chairs of the Pavilion effort.

In December 1985, the committee held a major fundraising dinner which raised more than \$50,000 in private donations. The government of the Republic of China presented a matching check at the dinner.

The project was on solid ground financially. Yuen-Chen Yu, the principal architect of Acropolis Archiplanners Associates of San Jose, donated his services to design the Pavilion. Dr. Yin Sung, owner of the China Palace Art and Painting Company with offices in both Taiwan and Los Angeles, served as the material designer and Chinese coordinator. James Lee, a building contractor from Monterey Park, was selected to construct the Pavilion. He received assistance from four Chinese craftsmen who were selected by Dr. Sung and then flown in from Taiwan.

Prior to the December fundraising dinner on November 5, 1985, the Riverside City Council had approved the main library compound on Seventh and Orange Streets as the location for the Pavilion site. Later the city allocated landscaping funds. Actual construction began on November 16, 1986. In March 1987, a ceremony was held to honor the Taiwanese workmen.

All materials used in the building of the Pavilion were manufactured in Taipei, Taiwan, and made to order by Dr. Sung's company. The Pavilion foundation was built using a technique thousands of years old in China.

The Pavilion was completed in the Spring of 1987, followed by the landscaping project in July. It is the first structure of its kind built in the United States to honor Chinese pioneers and is the first built by private funding.

October 5th through 10th was adopted as Official Dedication Week in order to combine its efforts with those of the Greater Riverside Chambers of Commerce and the City of Riverside during its Third Annual Riverside Citrus-Heritage Parade and Festival. The theme selected was "A Salute to Riverside's Chinese Heritage." David Chang was chosen to be Grand Marshal.

"At last," said David Chang, "these Chinese settlers have taken their rightful place in the history of Riverside, the State of California, and our great nation."



*CHSSC marching at the Riverside Citrus-Heritage Parade. Angi Ma Wong and Tom Moy carrying the banner. Others include Wendy Wong, Helena Mao, Jaime Wong, Cy Wong, Lillian Fong, and Bob Large.*



*Eugene Moy receiving an award from Clark Brott of the Great Basin Foundation for all of his efforts relating to the Riverside Chinatown Dig.*



*Maxine Hong Kingston signing the book, "Wong Ho Leun - An American Chinatown."*



*Dr. Peter C. Y. Leung, author of "One Day, One Dollar," shows Secretary of State March Fong Eu the exhibit based upon his book.*

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