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THE OLDEST CHINESE TEMPLES IN CALIFORNIA, A LANDMARKS TOUR

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INTRODUCTION TO THE TOUR

The Chinese Historical Society of Southern California organized a tour of the oldest Chinese temples in California over September 28 — October 1, 1990. Most of these early landmarks survive in rural northern California, so the project was captained by Johnny Yee, who was familiar with the region. A bus tour originally was planned, but ultimately only five stalwart Society members made the tour: Elsie Wong, Wanda Leong, Johnny Yee, and Phyllis and Paul Chace. Our group toured five old Chinese temples and also visited a number of other Chinese landmarks. In the Chace's sedan, the tour became a stimulating seminar as we all discussed together our observations. Over the four-day trip, we covered 1966 miles, leaving Los Angeles and staying overnight in Oroville, Ukiah, and San Luis Obispo. It was a fun group and a great tour, and we enjoyed a rousing if exhausting historical excursion.

The tour provided an opportunity to see and compare the oldest Chinese temples in California. Some Society members previously had toured through San Francisco's similar institutions and those of Los Angeles. The temples there exist in twentieth-century buildings, although most originated as nineteenth-century institutions. In such urban centers, the earliest temple struc-

tures have all been lost to redevelopment or other fates. In nineteenth-century California, there were scores and possibly several hundred temples built by the Chinese. Many were located in smaller, more rural communities, and most of these also have disappeared. We know of only five original Chinese community temples that survive from the last century.



Cambria Temple

*Chinese Historical Society of Southern California
October, 1990*

For the five landmark temples that still survive, and in several cases still are functioning, we were able to make critical comparative observations. Major similarities and several noteworthy differences became apparent. The purpose of this paper is the presentation of comparative descriptions of: (a) the geographical location, (b) the general architectural design and features, (c) the altar design and other interior furnishings, (d) the principal deity and other figures on the altar, and (d) the documented annual festivals of these five early temples. Excitingly, our Society tour visited and further stimulated historical research on an emergent landmark of great significance, the old Chinese temple building surviving in Cambria. Hopefully, it too will soon achieve its worthy landmark status.

PEI CHI MIAO 北 溪 廟 AT MARYSVILLE

From Los Angeles, we drove northward directly to Marysville, in Yuba County. The Pei Chi Miao, or "North River-bank Temple," locally called the "Bok Kai Temple," in Marysville dates from 1880. Our group was met by Bing Ong, Robert Jackson, and Jeff Lee of Marysville, who opened the temple and hosted us. The lights illuminating the altar figures were turned on and burning incense sticks soon perfumed the hall. While our tour party and the hosts were there, two worshippers happened to come in to make prayers.

This landmark has existed for 110 years as a fully functioning Chinese community temple. In 1976 this temple was recognized as California Historical Landmark No. 889, and scholars have documented much of its history (Eberhart 1962, Ibanez 1967, Wells 1962, Wey 1988). There were several earlier temples in Marysville but floods continued to plague the town throughout the 1870s. This community, at the confluence of the Yuba and Feather Rivers, boomed as the river-boat terminus trade center supplying the northern mines during the gold rush. Subsequently, the community became an agricultural center. The still surviving temple was dedicated on March 21, 1880. The festival attracted about 1,500 Chinese. The local newspapers documented the temple dedication by priests wearing "black-gowns and cocked hats with red crowns," the procession through the streets, and the firing of lucky bombs with prize rings. Ten years later the temple secured its first gigantic dragon to parade in the annual rites. Locally, stories are often repeated of how Bok Kai has protected Marysville from floods ever since the temple dedication. (The construction of high river levees in the late 1870s certainly helped too.)

The major deity in the carved and gilt-covered central altar is locally known as "Bok Kai," the God of the Dark Northern Heaven, the God of water and flood control (Pei Ti, Mandarin). He is flanked on the altar by "Kuan Kung" (for justice), "Tai Sing" (for civil and military activities), "Quon Yim" (for mercy) and "Sing Mo" (for seafarers). The figure of "Wa Ho" (for medicine) sits in a separate beautiful, carved altar to the left, also along the interior north wall. There are tablets on the table in front of the central altar with the names representing these and additional deities. To the right of the central altar, on the floor near the dim corner, is a small "Tu Ti" or Earth God shrine consisting of a simple wooden frame covered with red paper with

brushed characters, for those seeking gold and fortune. Seated on a counter looking across the raised door sill to protect the temple entrance is “How Toe,” a white-bearded figure, a God of the earth (Tu Ti, M.).



*Marysville Temple
Alta of Hua T'o medicine to the left of the central altar on
the north wall, flanked by two mirrors.*

The Marysville temple festival always has been focused around “2-2,” the second day of the second lunar month in the Chinese calendar, and it still is an annual community celebration. Currently, this festival with its “Bomb Day” is said to honor “Bok Kai,” the high deity in the temple. In earlier years the newspapers reported it was considered locally to be an agricultural or “harvest” celebration. In traditional China “2-2” was the birthday festival of the regional Earth God (possibly in Marysville once recognized as “Bok Chi,”

the name above the temple entrance; Pei Chi, M.), and also as the day when the dragon annually was thought to emerge from earthly slumber, to be toured in a grand procession throughout the village, and then to arise to the sky to oversee the rains which brought forth new crops and renewed life to the land. It appears that they all are celebrated together in the annual Marysville festival.

This temple is situated on the north bank of the Yuba River and oriented south, facing the river, with the town behind it. The temple is constructed of brick and plaster painted white, with beautiful Chinese scenes painted in fresco across the top of the entrance porch wall. The recessed porch of concrete has three steps up to the red-painted set of big double entrance doors, with opened double spirit-doors just within. There are no windows. The central hall is about 18 feet wide and 30 feet deep, with the altars along the north interior wall. The double parallel gabled roof is covered with curved red tiles. There is a wing of rooms, the temple caretaker's quarters, on the east side of the temple hall; and on the west side of the temple is a meeting hall and storage room.

After leaving Marysville the group drove to the rice growing center of Richvale in Butte County. There are many miles of flat fields, sectioned with dikes and flooded; these lands are planted in April-May and harvested in September-October. This is the home of the CalRose rice business, the Butte County Rice Growers Association processing plant, and the Rice Experiment Station operated by the University of California and the U. S. Department of Agricultural. After a quick look, we hurried on to Oroville.

LIET SHENG KUNG 列 聖 宮 AT OROVILLE

Over the entrance doors, the red signboard with the gold characters reads Liet Sheng Kung or "Palace of Assorted Gods" at the palace-temple of Oroville, in Butte County. This brick temple was dedicated in the spring of 1863 and became California Historical Landmark No. 770 in 1962. Our group was met by Curator Nancy Price and several volunteer docents who tour visitors through this restored community temple-museum.

Oroville was inundated in 1907 when the Feather River flooded and many lighter wooden structures were swept away. Within the brick temple everything was covered with silt and mud to a height of five feet. Most of the Chinese left the town following the flood, so the temple was closed up and no

longer utilized. The local Chan family assumed responsibility for the building; they removed and stored the deity figures, tapestries, and many of the temple furnishings. The property was deeded to the City of Oroville in 1935. The Oroville Women's Community Club initiated renovations, and in early 1948 they enlisted the City Department of Parks and community volunteers to complete the restoration. The preserved furnishings were reassembled, and the renovated temple was reopened to the public as a community museum on the July 4th holiday of 1948. The property is actually a complex of old Chinese structures, along with a handsome new museum complex housing related exhibits opened by the city in 1968.



Oroville Temple altar and deities. Kuan Kung in the center.

The original 1863 palace-temple has a central hall about 17 feet wide by 34 feet deep, with eight-foot wide rooms along the east and west side. The front is oriented toward the river, directly to the north. The open recessed porch of concrete is slightly raised. The temple entrance in the center of the porch has large double doors, with a set of spirit doors inside. Small single doors near both ends of the porch access the narrow wings of rooms alongside the main hall; these little rooms probably were storerooms and quarters for the temple caretaker. Near the north end of the central hall, there also are side doors to

these wings. The temple has a nearly flat-roof behind the simple parapet walls of unpainted bricks. There are no windows.

Within the palace-temple is a tall, elaborately filigree carved, gilt and black altar located in the center of the south interior wall. Currently, there are three seated deity figures on the altar. The central figure is the red-faced Kuan Kung. It has been reported (Wells 1962:52) that the temple's old five deity figures also include "Bok Aie" (Pei Ti, M.). Other temple furnishings are displayed throughout the hall. The carved blocks for printing oracle slips had been mounted into a wall exhibit, and many pairs of memorial boards are installed from the ceiling, which neatly obscures the modern electric lighting.

Along the east side of the temple building, with its own entrance door on the north end, is a long brick addition about 15 feet wide presented as the Chan ancestral hall built in 1874. On the large altar is seated a bearded figure flanked by two elaborately framed tablets. A Chan clan flag, a bridal chair with red drapes, six fine chairs, and other furnishings also are exhibited here.

Several yards south from the palace-temple is a two story brick building dated from 1868. The lower hall is exhibited as a council room, with an altar in the center of the south wall and palanquins to either side. The second floor hall is called "The Moon Temple"; the doorway in the north wall is a circular moon shape, and along the south wall is an altar with a Buddha figure. Several smaller altars and Buddha figures are displayed in this room.

A reconstructed shrine is in the nearby park. This four-foot tall brick monument is set with a plaque in Chinese and one in English describing it as the "Lo T'ien Altar." This shrine faces north, toward the river. The similar original shrine is shown in an old photograph.

A superb exhibition of photographs showing the Chinese of early Oroville is assembled in the modern museum of this park. These photographs are a treasury of views showing ritual processions, festivals, and customs. Such sources can greatly enhance the history of the Oroville palace-temple and its Chinese community, for only brief background works have been published (Book 1976, Wells 1962). The museum also features historic textiles and garments.

WON LIM MIAO 雲林廟 AT WEAVERVILLE

Weaverville began as an 1850s gold-rush boom settlement in the Trinity Mountains of northern-most California. Along one of the countless curves in State Highway 299 through these rugged mountains, the state has developed and dedicated the Moon Lim Lee Safety Rest Area in honor of this regional civic leader's contributions. We refreshed ourselves there before proceeding into town. We first visited the monument marking the site of the 1854 Weaverville Chinese War, a conflict between 2,000 Chinese miners of two different native-district groups. A roadside plaque commemorates this episode, but the flat below the monument where the battle occurred now is developed as a school.



*Weaverville Temple
Left - Caretaker's Room*

Right - Temple

The Won Lim Miao, or "Temple Amidst the Forest Beneath the Clouds," at Weaverville in Trinity County dates from 1873. It now is maintained and operated as Weaverville Joss House State Historic Park, and we were toured by the senior State Park Ranger Fred Meyer. This public temple also has been considerably documented by historians (Hanover 1982, McDonald and

McDonald 1986, Wells 1962, Wey 1988, Wong 1987). The Chinese population of this community already had dwindled when the last long-time temple caretaker, Mock Ah Fong, died in September 1933. Moon Lim Lee, a prominent Weaverville businessman and the descendant of local Chinese pioneers, continued his worship there. He led the effort to transfer ownership of this community landmark to the State of California, which finally occurred in 1956. After major stabilization and rehabilitation, the State opened the temple to visitors in 1957. By policy, prayers still are permitted. Except for the addition of electric lights and protective wood railings to keep visitors back from the altars and temple furnishings, the State has preserved the temple in an apparent state of semi-interrupted worship. While the once golden oranges before the altar have long-ago withered, the State has carefully maintained or even restored the major religious items: the deity figures, the gilded altars, the deity umbrellas, and the temple procession banners. There are seven deity figures seated on the three tall and very elaborately carved altars across the south wall of the temple hall. Currently, the prominent central altar is shared by two figures; these are locally referred to as "Bok Aie" (Pei Ti, M., God of the Northern Heavens and protector from floods) at the right and the red-faced "Kwan Aie" (Kuan Ti, M., God of war and justice) to the left. The locally famous, white-bearded deity figure guarding the doorway of the temple is known as "Dai Tze."

A smaller, earlier temple at this location dating from 1852 or 1853 burned down on June 24, 1873. This conflagration began in a nearby cabin, and some of the temple's interior furnishings apparently were removed quickly and preserved. The local newspaper also documented that the surviving construction was begun February 7, 1874, and the temple dedication occurred with a grand celebration on April 18, 1874. This corresponded with "3-3" on the Chinese calendar, and the Weaverville Chinese community continued to celebrate "3-3" as their major temple festival for many years. In the Chinese tradition, this is the birthday festival day, or local "Bomb Day," for the deity Pei Ti. The temple also sponsored a slightly lesser "Bomb Day" each "1-16." Apparently this "1-16" festival culminated the local celebration of each lunar new year. Possibly, in this river mining region, this served as an initial propitiation with the high god "Bok Aie" to mediate water flows for a prosperous mining season; alternatively, some have asserted this "1-16" ritual honored Kuan Ti, the second figure on the central altar (Wong 1987:245). The

last of these local temple celebrations occurred in 1922.

The temple is oriented toward the north, apparently toward a curve in a small stream. The recessed entrance, across a raised wooden and fenced porch, is through a set of tall double doors, with a closed set of double spirit-doors just inside. There are no windows. The wooden walls of the front porch have been painted to resemble light blue glazed brick or tile set within lines of white mortar. All the other exterior and the interior walls are covered by unpainted, horizontal wood boards. This temple is a rectangular wood-frame structure about 23 by 48 foot in size. The shingled roof is designed of double parallel gables with elaborate triple winged parapets, while two dragon fish and several other ornamental figures protect the top of the front gable over the entrance porch. A small meeting room and quarters for the temple-caretaker were built along the east side of the temple.

WU TI MIAO 武帝廟 AT MENDOCINO



*Mendocino Temple
Entrance door sign.*

We drove through the forested coast range and down the picturesque Mendocino County coast to Caspar Bay. Here in 1975 Johnny Yee related that he met the late Robert Nash, a Society member. Nash was exploring the

wreckage of a Chinese junk in this bay and recovering broken rice bowls.

In the town of Mendocino six miles further south, we found the red signboard over the temple doors with bold gold characters reading Wu Ti Miao. This temple is called "Mo Dai Miu" in Cantonese, and sometimes it is referred to in this manner locally (Bear and Houghton 1991, Wey 1988). This temple was officially designated the "Kuan Ti Temple" in 1979 upon its recognition as California Historical Landmark No. 927. Kuan Ti is the deity figure worshipped at the temple altar. When Kuan Ti was canonized by the emperor in the sixteenth century he was designated with the appellation Wu Ti Ti, the God of War. Thus, each Wu Ti Miao is dedicated to Kuan Ti. Our group was greeted by Lorraine Hee Chorley, her sister Loretta Hee McCoard, and her brother, Wayne Hee, — the great-grandchildren of one of the temple founders. This temple has been long maintained by the Hee family, and offerings still are made at the beginning of each new year.

The temple is located near the lower side of the town on a high, sloping hillside with a commanding view south across Mendocino Bay, the mouth of Big River. It is a wood-frame structure with an interior hall about 12 feet wide and 22 feet deep, with a simple gabled roof. A six-foot room extending across the back of the temple hall and covered by a shed roof probably is an addition; it is said to be quarters for the temple caretaker. It has an exterior door and a glass window in the rear wall, and there is an interior door into the rear of the temple hall, alongside the altar. The exterior walls are covered with milled, vertical shiplap boards. A six-foot porch with a balustrade extends across the front of the temple. The porch is covered by a simple shed roof. The entrance is a double set of tall, narrow, paneled doors. Two framed windows flank the entrance; (these windows lack evidence of shutters or blinds of any kind). The building-wide staircase reaching up to the temple porch has nine tall stairs. The porch, window frames, doors, and stairs on the front of the building are painted green. The exterior wall boards have been painted red, which has weathered to an almost natural red-brown color.

Within the temple is a truly exceptional painted depiction of a seated Kuan Ti, with a white-faced figure and a black-faced figure standing behind his shoulders, said to be his son Kuan Ping and his sword bearer Ju Chang. This unframed, sooted, old canvas should be considered a Chinese American treasure. It is about 2-1/2 by 5 feet in size, the focal feature of the altar. The altar, in the center of the north wall, is a wide pedestal with side boards



*Mendocino Temple
Altar painting and offerings. Temple of Kuan Kung.*

extending upward to box in the figure of Kuan Ti. The main altar is crafted of locally milled tongue-and-groove and plain boards with simple cornice features, similar to the two narrow but wide secondary altar pedestals (not tables) in the front. The altar is painted green, while the secondary pedestals have been painted red, with a faded green-blue and gold highlights. The altar is elaborately decorated with aged yellow drapery, peacock feathers, and a red painted signboard over the top and vertical memorial boards with large gold characters. The two secondary altars are furnished with a set of bright pewter altar vessels, silver flowers, and bright red wax candles. A variety of food offerings extend onto a third small table covered with a red cloth.

The interior walls of the hall are smoothly surfaced tongue-and-groove milled boards with a natural wood color or brown finish. There is a wooden

box holding burned incense sticks and candles atop a small bench along the wall behind the entrance door, to the right upon entering. Possibly, this is for a protector of the entrance way. A small dedication sign of paper (or wood) for this guardian may once have covered the wall directly above the incense box; its presence is indicated by the cleaner, long-protected finish on the wall surface. To the left, along the west wall near the corner, is a metal stove for paper prayers and offerings. Two ornately painted, globular lanterns nearly



*Mendocino Temple
Temple of Kuan Kung.*

two feet in diameter hang from the ceiling near the altar. Simple board benches for visitors, situated against the side walls, are the only other major temple furnishings.

The documented history for this temple reaches back past 1883, and it

may be considerably older. The building already existed at this location when the Sanborn Company map of July 1883 was prepared. Lorraine Hee has the land title record and a lumber mill receipt of the Hee family suggesting it existed in the 1870s. Her late father's own oral tradition claimed the temple dated back to 1854; he was born in 1897 in Mendocino, and his story was recorded years ago (Levene 1976: 52, 199). The State recognized that this "may be not only the longest in-use temple, but the oldest 'original' Joss House" surviving in California.

LOCKE

The following day our tour traveled to Locke, along the Chinese-built old levees bounding the Sacramento River. Locke is unique in California, being constructed entirely as a Chinese settlement about 1915. The entire town is registered as a California Historical Landmark. We viewed the distinctive buildings, sauntered through the shops and the "Dai Loy" gambling house-museum, while lingering impatiently to have the famous steak luncheon at Al The Wop, a landmark itself.

There is no community temple in Locke, but the locals there told us that at the nearby town of Walnut Grove there is a chapel-temple on the second floor in the Bing Kong Tong hall. It was said that in recent years it only was opened and used during celebrations for the new year. (However, the hall with its upstairs chapel at Walnut Grove is modern, having been rebuilt after the town's great 1937 fire. This common pattern of an association's large building having an upper area, the part closest to heaven, devoted to a chapel-temple also occurs at Hanford, in Kings County. There, within the 1893 brick building of the Sam Yup Association, the second floor was dedicated as a temple in 1897. It now is restored as a Hanford landmark-museum.)

The "Dai Loy" museum had a small exhibit on the riverboat "Yosemite" explosion at Rio Vista wharf in October 1865 which killed about 100 people, including all of the 36 Chinese aboard; they had just sailed from Sacramento. We drove down river to Rio Vista to visit this landing and the town cemetery. (The old Chinese community in Sacramento, in order to avoid further disasters, immediately organized a four-day Chiao ritual to appease and dispel ghosts. They built a temporary public temple along "I" Street late that October and again each October for many years to conduct the rites.)

WU TI MIAO 武帝廟 AT CAMBRIA

The survival of the original building of the Wu Ti Miao at Cambria, in San Luis Obispo County, was brought to public attention in 1980 with the state sponsored survey of Chinese American landmarks in California conducted by Nancy Wey (1988), but this important and locally unique structure is not yet a publicly registered landmark. By prearrangement, our tour was met by Forrest G. Warren, the current owner, along with his immediate family. We also met with senior members of the family, Forrester and Walter Warren, and their neighbors, Lila and Margaret Soto. They remembered the old temple in use from their childhood (about 1915-20), the small settlement of Chinese living around it, and (most vividly) the tasty gifts from the friendly men of white coconut candies and red lichee nuts.

The temple originally was situated at the end of Bridge Street, on the bluff facing east toward a crook in Santa Rosa Creek which flowed along the southern side of the town. About 1923 the Warren family purchased the abandoned structure, moved it about 170 feet, and incorporated it with two other buildings to create their family home on Centre Street. The temple hall became the living room, with the obvious additions of two framed windows and an added side door, quite distinct alterations of a more recent style.

The surviving, original temple building is a wood-frame structure, a single room about 12 feet wide and 13 feet deep. The exterior is covered with roughly sawed, horizontal board-and-batten redwood siding. The long boards indicate it was built on foundation posts, and it must have had one or more steps up to the porch and entrance. Evident in an old map and a photo, there was a porch along the entire eastern or front side covered by a simple shed roof. The entrance was through a handsomely paneled set of 20-inch-wide double-doors set in the middle of the east wall with metal Victorian style hinges. Originally, it appears that there were no windows. It is said the building had no basement or excavated half-basement. There is a flue vent high on the south wall, which also shows in an early photo, indicating the temple furnishings included a typical stove. This structure still has its original simple gable roof.

The temple interior ceiling and walls are sheathed with good, milled tongue-and-groove wall boards. Across the west wall, opposite the door, there is a six-foot-wide by two-foot-deep altar seat, flanked by tall storage closets, which together form a five-and-a-half-foot-tall altar box from the seat to the

sloping ceiling. The altar seat and cabinets are all finished with the same tongue-and-groove boards as the remainder of the interior walls. These original features shorten the interior room depth from about 15 to 13 feet. Several tiny paint scrapings suggest the room's original interior was dark colored or natural wood, while the altar area originally was painted green. Margaret Soto and Walter Warren recalled the altar as containing a single large statue (almost certainly the figure of Kuan Ti).

Dating the surviving temple building remains a dilemma. There may have been one or several earlier temples. The Sanborn Company map of 1895 clearly indicates the "Chinese Joss House." However, even the earliest Sanborn map of 1886 indicates a similar wooden structure in almost the same location in the Chinese quarters. A still earlier photo in the San Luis Obispo County Historical Society even shows the Chinese quarters. It was long present at the lower end of Bridge Street. Noting that the locally milled tongue-and-groove interior wall boards are the same throughout the assembled rooms of the house, Forrest Warren has speculated that all these structures were built sometime after 1889, when most of Cambria burned down. One local Cambria history briefly documented the local Chinese, and it reproduced the 1921 Sanborn Company map showing the surviving "Joss House" in its original location (Hamilton 1974).

Importantly, the members of our tour were shown a wide shelf-board under the kitchen sink in the Warren home which was carved with giant and small Chinese characters. This appeared to be the signboard to be placed over the entrance to a temple. It appeared to have been painted green originally, with the grooves outlining the giant characters painted red. Forrest Warren subsequently made delicate tissue rubbings which Society members have translated. The big characters are "Wu Ti . . ." [Miao is cut away], with a vertical dedication line in smaller characters reading ". . . Kuang-hsu, 24th year" or 1899 on the Western calendar. This board suggests the still surviving building at Cambria was rebuilt and rededicated in 1899 as the Wu Ti Miao. This interpretation would be further confirmed if newspapers or other notices were found indicating that this temple community celebrated the traditional Kuan Ti festival day, "2-15" on the Chinese calendar, which usually is late March on the Western calendar.

Next, we drove into the City of San Luis Obispo to see the Ah Louis Store, the family's handsome two-story store-and-home erected in 1874,

California Historical Landmark No. 802. It is reported that Ah Louis devoted one-quarter of the upstairs for a temple. We found the building closed, with their familiar "gone fishing" sign in the store window. We visited instead with Society member Stella Louis at her home.

Ah Louis became a major businessman in the area. His first big project, beginning in 1872, was a contract to provide workers to build the railroad to the Harford Wharf, now Port San Luis. We drove down to the port and walked out along this historic wharf to the old warehouse. With this railroad and wharf development, the regional agriculture boomed. Since 1904 the wharf also has been an important oil shipping terminal. From Port San Luis we headed for Los Angeles and home.

SUMMARY OF TEMPLE COMPARISONS

With the completion of this Society tour, it is practical to compare and characterize the old Chinese temples in California. As temples, each of these five landmarks is a complete community hall for worship. These temples are categorically distinct from shrines which are in the open and without a roofed hall, and distinct from chapels or altars which are areas above or within a larger building functioning for broader social purposes. For example, at Oroville, besides a temple, there was also an outdoor shrine, and, additionally, there was a second floor chapel ("The Moon Temple") over a council room which likely served to support a specific group or association. Similarly, at Walnut Grove and at Hanford, a local association had its own hall with a chapel on the second floor. There also were temporary temples, like 'matshed temples' in China. These were built for special ceremonies and immediately disassembled, as for the annual Chiao rites in Sacramento; this type of temple would not be preserved.

These five temples appear to be situated with respect to the water course flowing beside the community, and they appear to stand as an initial spiritual barrier to any evil that might flow along with the important water source and sweep away good fortune from the community's enterprise. Each temple is situated near the edge of the settlement. Each temple entrance and its altar faced directly toward the water. In these respects, it could be concluded that these temple locations reflect a Chinese geomancy of the earthly world, a proper orientation with respect to feng shui (wind and water) and the flow of

chi (positive energy).

The large and elaborately constructed community temples at Marysville, Oroville, and Weaverville obviously involved substantial funding. They must have been initially supported by prosperous communities. Indeed, these were gold miners' centers, where great wealth was extracted for a time. These temples feature one or more ornately carved and gilded altars, probably made by artisans in China and imported. They each have a full compliment of banners, umbrellas, and emblematic staffs for community temple processions and other rituals.

In a different class are the two smaller temple structures at Mendocino and Cambria. These simple wooden structures are similar in design and in many features. The altars apparently were crafted by local carpenters and painted green. Originally, the Cambria temple altar probably was brightly furnished in a manner comparable to the Mendocino altar. Certainly, as an institution important to the local community's well being, even such a small edifice probably required a relatively great investment from the local Chinese population. These two temples, apparently, were supported initially by modest Chinese populations with far less conspicuous economic fortunes than their gold-miner cousins. The glass windows in the temple hall at Mendocino are unparalleled among the temples toured. As unprotected openings, they seem to be philosophically exceptional. Further, in contrast to the larger temples, both the Mendocino and the Cambria temples appear to have had neither raised sills nor spirit doors for protecting the entrances to these small halls.

Lastly, with this brief temple tour, it is clear that the early Chinese in California strongly favored, sought, and celebrated the protection of Pei Ti and Kuan Ti. Both a traditional Chinese religious philosophy and geomantic view of the world are preserved with these landmark temples. As unique institutions among California cultural landmarks, these surviving historic temples continue to reflect the serious, prideful, and devoted contributions of the pioneering Chinese Californians.

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MEXICALI AND THE CHINESE CONNECTION

by MARGIE LEW

Saturday morning, May 25, 1991, dawned clear and cool as 55 members of the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California departed from the four corners of Los Angeles County destined for San Diego to begin a highly-anticipated weekend to Mexicali, Baja California Norte. The Society had been cordially invited to join members of the Chinese Historical Society of Greater San Diego and Baja California on this tour. Originally, only one bus was chartered, but the enthusiastic response from CHSSC members necessitated *two* buses, so — as the old saying goes, the more the merrier!

As departure time approached, the last few stragglers (this writer was one of them!) finally limped into the designated parking lot with about five seconds to spare. As the two buses headed for “south of the border”, introductions were made, information sheets were distributed, and everyone settled down for a relaxing trip and a new adventure.

Arriving in Mexicali at 12 noon, the group was graciously welcomed by the staff of the Hotel Lucerna, and promptly checked into their rooms. Reservations for lunch at the Alley 19 Restaurant in Old

Chinatown had previously been arranged by the San Diego group. This restaurant is known for some of the best Chinese food in Mexicali, and everyone agreed that the food was almost as enjoyable as the warm welcome received from the restaurant's owners and staff.

Following lunch, there was a guided bus tour around town, with the tour guides pointing out the various government buildings and interesting sights, with historic facts interspersed.

Brief history of the Chinese in Mexicali during the early years of this century

(Excerpts and information taken from the following sources:

“The Chinese of Baja California Norte, 1910-1934”

Evelyn Hu-DeHart

Washington University

“Story of Chinese Progress in Agriculture and Business in Lower Imperial Valley”

Patrick Cooney

San Diego Union - Jan. 1, 1920)

The Chinese started coming to Mexicali in 1910 and 1911. It all began in 1902, when the vast Andrade Tract in Baja California's Mexicali Valley acquired by Southern California tycoons and Los Angeles Times publisher Harrison Otis and his son-in-law Harry Chandler. Not until 1910 was anything done with the land. During that year, a small acreage was put under cotton cultivation, thus marking the beginning of an agricultural revolution in Baja California Norte and an era of great prosperity.

In deciding on extensive cotton cultivation for their land, Otis and Chandler chose as partners not local Mexicans, or Mexicans from other parts of Mexico, but Chinese entrepreneurs from California and

Chinese contract laborers imported directly from China. Thus, the history of the Colorado River Land Co. in Baja California was also very much the history of the Chinese in that region.

Otis-Chandler were the largest landowners; their property consisted of 832,000 of the approximate one million acres in the Mexicali Valley. This land was leased to whoever was willing to do the cotton-planting. As it turned out, most of the lessees were Chinese, from California and from China. By 1920, the Chinese were raising 80% of the Mexicali cotton crop. To Otis-Chandler and other large American landowners in Mexicali, the Chinese partnership proved efficient, economical, and most satisfactory and profitable. The Chinese seemed perfectly willing to undertake the arduous task of clearing the virgin land and preparing it for cultivation; the Chinese lessee-planters supervised a labor force made up of their own countrymen who worked diligently and never presented any labor problems.

By 1921, there were 32 Chinese "rancherias" in operation, with a total of 1,314 laborers. By 1930, there were 2,919 Chinese males in the Mexicali area, plus 63 women. Because of this uneven ratio, many of the Chinese men formed families with local women.

In Mexicali, some of the Chinese planters also had commercial establishments, which served Chinese and Mexicans alike. For mutual aid and protection, the Chinese had their own association, which included a hospital. The Tuck Tong Society facilitated negotiations between the Chinese community and outsiders.

For a number of years, the Chinese in the Mexicali area prospered, working hard on the "rancherias", and in other businesses, such as grocery stores, general merchandise, and factories. Many became wealthy owners of large companies in addition to owning thousands of

acres of farm land. The Mexican government regarded them as ideal citizens — they worked hard, paid their taxes, and never violated the law, either criminal or civil.

However, there were periods of anti-Chinese sentiment, and attempts were made to reduce the numbers of Chinese immigrating into Mexico. Certain factions resented the Chinese monopoly on the chief sources of wealth, and there was the question of Chinese labor versus Mexican labor. This pertained not only to Baja California, but also to other areas, such as Sonora and Ensenada, where a sizeable Chinese colony had been established. There was a degree of persecution of Chinese, and an attempt to expel them from the country. However, the anti-Chinese campaigns in Tijuana and Mexicali were unsuccessful, and eventually, the one in Ensenada ended with a meeting between the Nationalist Committee of Ensenada and the Chinese colony to discuss their mutual problems and interests.

During the 1930's, the Chinese population in Baja California, as throughout Mexico, declined steadily, reaching a low of 618 in 1940. It increased again to approximately 1,200 in 1950. In this period, Mexico drastically curtailed all foreign immigration to its shores, and the Chinese population never regained its prominence of 3,000, as indicated in the 1930 census.

Today, there are perhaps 2,000 Chinese in the Mexicali area, including those of mixed parentage. They are businessmen, ranchers, store proprietors, and industrial workers who are continuing the tradition of the original Chinese pioneers in the area, a group of people who left an indelible impression as being hard-working, industrious, law-abiding, and skillful in business. Today, both the Chinese and the Mexican citizens co-exist amicably without conflict. In fact, the tour group was informed by the two very personable tour guides that the

Chinese are well-liked and highly respected in Mexicali.

Dinner on Saturday evening was at La Mision Dragon, where the group was warmly welcomed by the restaurant's owners and a group of mariachi singers and musicians — a nice surprise and a lovely gesture. The sumptuous banquet was every bit as delicious as in any outstanding restaurant in Los Angeles.

Following breakfast on Sunday, there was a tour of the Museo Regional Universidad Autonoma de Baja California. This is a small, but surprisingly well-designed museum which features the region's archaeology, early indigenous cultures with rare photographs, the mission period, and native flora and fauna. Then it was back to the hotel to pack up and check out, but not before taking time out for group pictures. Although the weather was wiltingly hot, the 94 smiling faces around the hotel's swimming pool was proof that everyone was enjoying their visit to Mexicali. After bidding "Adios!" to the hotel staff, the next stop was the new Plaza Cachanilla, a beautiful complex where dozens of families were shopping, eating, and taking advantage of the air-conditioned mall. After lunching on Mexican specialties and delicious "helados" (frozen fruit ices in two dozen flavors), the group boarded the buses and headed for San Diego by way of Calexico and El Centro, where there is a scattered but sizeable Chinese community. In El Centro, the group was escorted to the headquarters of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, where a most cordial welcome was received from the members. The El Centro Chinese Women's Club, an auxiliary to CCBA, also extended a very warm welcome. It was like "going home." The ladies (bless 'em!) had prepared delicious "goodies" and ice-cold drinks, much appreciated by the travellers in that 100-degree heat.

Finally, it was time to head for Los Angeles — and home.

Scheduled time for arrival in San Diego was approximately 9 p.m. However, one of the buses became disabled, and was stranded on the freeway for a couple of hours until help arrived. After an anxious wait, the passengers returned safely to the San Diego parking lot. With a two-hour drive to the Los Angeles area, and a stop for an after-midnight snack along the way, the travellers arrived home in the wee hours of the morning — weary, happy, but most importantly — safe and sound.

This was a most memorable weekend, thanks to the warm and friendly invitation from the Chinese Historical Society of Greater San Diego and Baja California. President Tom Hom and his fellow members did an outstanding job in this event, and they were the most cordial and considerate hosts. Of great significance was the opportunity for CHSSC members to have a glimpse of the history of the Chinese in Mexicali and the vital role they played in the economic development of the area. And it was a heartwarming experience to meet and enjoy the citizens of Mexicali, both Chinese and Mexican, our neighbors “south of the border.” OLE AMIGOS!!

MEXICALI MEMORIES



Group photo at poolside at "Lucerna Hotel".



Tour Guides Monica and Javier from the "Bureau de Turismo".



Dr. Kiphan Kan interpreting for Professor Eduardo Ao Quang, artist and historian, at the "Televisora de Mexicali, S.A.". Professor Quang speaks Cantonese and Spanish only.



"Museo Regional Universidad Autonoma de Baja California".



Posing for local newspaper reporter who met us at various locations.



Emma Louie and Munson Kwok posing at "Plaza Cachanilla", mostly owned by Chinese.



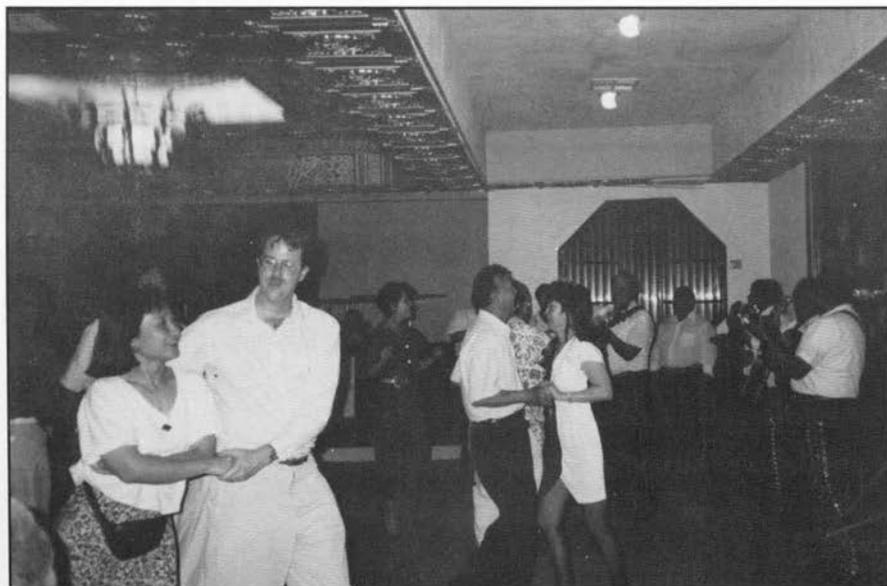
Dr. Kiphan Kan standing by to interpret at "El Centro CCBA Hall".



"Alley 19", the oldest of "100" Chinese restaurants in Mexicali.



Some members of the "El Centro Chinese Women's Club".



Dancing to the Mariachi Band at the "La Mision Dragon", the finest and newest Chinese restaurant in Mexicali.

CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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