MISSION BUILDING
404 Third Avenue. San Diego, CA 92101

DR. SUN YAT-SEN MEMORIAL EXTENSION BUILDING
328 J Street San Diego, CA 92101

MUSEUM HOURS
Friday, 12 to 4
Saturday, 12 to 4
Sunday, 12 to 4
2nd Sundays Free

FEATURED CHARACTER
Written by Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303 – 361 CE)
永遠 [yong yuan] forever
永生永世 [yong sheng yong shi] forever and ever
永不分离 [yong bu fen li] never apart
Wang Xizhi (303 –361 CE) was a Chinese calligrapher, politician, general and writer during the Eastern Jin dynasty. He was best known for his mastery of Chinese calligraphy. Wang is sometimes regarded as the greatest Chinese calligrapher in Chinese history, and was a master of all forms of Chinese calligraphy, especially the running script. Emperor Taizong of the Tang dynasty admired his works so much that the original Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion (or Lanting Xu 蘭亭序) was said to be buried with the emperor in his mausoleum. Many later famous calligraphers imitated the writing of the Orchard Pavilion, making it one of the most famous calligraphy writings in Chinese art.
A letter from our Chairperson:

Dear members, friends, and supporters of the San Diego Chinese Historical Society and Museum,

Greetings!

On April 1, 2022 the museum reopened. The road to the reopening has been bumpy and eventful. With the help of all the board members, staff members, volunteers and docents, we were finally able to open our doors. Our staff and volunteers have spent countless hours in the preparation of the reopening, we owe them ALL our gratitude.

Over the last few weeks, the museum has received visitors, young and old and from far and near. We were able to greet old friends and new visitors. Please plan your trip to visit the museum in the near future and let us know how we can improve our services to you and to our community.

Please also take time to visit our website and take a look at our programs. Our monthly virtual programs on the Chinese American experience and beyond have attracted global participation. Please check our website and register for the programs that interest you. Please provide your feedback so that we can continue to improve our services.

The Drumright exhibition is currently for your viewing at our Extension and I am sure you will enjoy our permanent exhibition in our mission building.

We would love to hear from you and thank you so much for your support.

A letter from our Interim Director:

Dear friends,

The past two years have been challenging, but we have reopened successfully, putting the safety of all visitors foremost.

There has never been a better time to have a museum like ours to teach tolerance and respect for each other’s cultures. Along these lines, we are expanding our offerings for schools and the general public. Our educational programs include both in-person activities, like our hands-on archeological dig program, as well as presentations on a variety of topics, from the Chinese Lunar New Year to Chinese scientific inventions over the centuries. We’re excited to engage the community through these programs.

We are continuing our very popular monthly Zoom talks on the Chinese American Experience and Beyond. You won’t want to miss the one coming up on Saturday, July 16—titled, “The Road to Happiness—does it go through Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism?” Check our website for more details and to register.

Thank you for your ongoing support of the SDCHM. We are looking forward to meeting you in person.

2022 Docent Training Program

LILY TOU BIRMINGHAM

With the museum open, we restarted our Docent Training program on Thursdays. The training group includes old-time docents and some newcomers. It has been a fun learning experience. The instructors are members among our own group. So we learn from each other. The Zoom sessions are recorded for future reference and for people who may want to be docents, but missed the training this time. All powerpoint files are available on our training Google folder. We did a workshop of the current special exhibition earlier, and will do a workshop for each upcoming special exhibition.

Members in this class, who will graduate in July are:

Allie Arnell,
Vivian Biely,
Diane Carlos,
Linda DiBenedetto,
Cathy Jones,
Kristof Marsolais,
Jack Meng,
Ginna Olsen,
Chia-Hui Shih,
Karen Soohoo,
Robert Stein,
Henry Tang,
Michael Yee

Training Outline:

The class has been a mix of Zoom and onsite sessions, which allow for tour practice. For graduation in July, each docent will do a 25-30 minute tour to three randomly selected classmates.

A brief syllabus follows:

Chinese American Segment:
4/14: (ZOOM) California/San Diego Chinese American history
4/21: (ZOOM) Fishing business, Chinese merchants, Chinatown, SDCHM history, How to explore collection database using CatalogIt.
4/28: (ONSITE) Asian Pacific district walking tour; team forming and assignments.
5/5: (ONSITE) Chinatown Archaeology / the immigrant experience

School Presentations:
5/12: (ZOOM) Chinese ancient inventions, First Emperor of China
5/19: (ONSITE) Chinese New year, Calligraphy

Chinese History/Culture Segment:
5/26: (ZOOM) Chinese history summary
6/2: (ZOOM) Chinese philosophies and religions
6/9: (ZOOM) Jade, Garden
6/16: (ONSITE) Chinese Paintings
6/23: (ZOOM) Cloisonné, Lacquer, Clothing, Embroidery
6/30: (ONSITE) Ceramics, Snuff bottles
The San Diego Chinese Historical Museum is pleased to announce Henry Tang as its Operations Manager.

Fully bilingual in English and Mandarin, Tang was born in Beijing and grew up in Orange County, CA. He counts on over ten years of experience as the manager of a mid-size company that specializes in the packaging and transportation of fine art and cultural objects (Huaxie International Fine Arts – China). Through this role, he has had the opportunity to interface with diverse museums, galleries, auction houses, and personal collectors. He also gained a wealth of experience managing employees (more than 50), coordinating multiple projects with fixed schedules. From these past experiences, he brings to our museum extensive knowledge of operations and logistics in transcultural settings.

Henry has also studied and performed Chinese storytelling onstage for the past ten years. Engaging in this tradition has given him a deeper understanding of and appreciation for traditional Chinese culture. Drawing on the work of his godmother, Madam Lian Liru, who opened a teahouse and theater in Beijing in 2007, Henry has expressed interest in exploring the possibility of opening a storytelling teahouse in support of the SDCHM’s cultural offerings.

We are excited for what Henry will contribute to the museum’s mission. We would encourage you to seek him out when you visit the museum in the coming weeks.

In the minds of many Westerners, China is an ancient and mysterious country. Chinese culture has a long history and is broad and Chinese culture. If you want to understand traditional Chinese culture, there are two good channels: Peking Opera and Storytelling. Many people think that Peking Opera is too profound and difficult to understand. So, in addition to Peking Opera, what other art forms can we understand the Chinese culture? Right, the answer is storytelling.

What is story telling? People say it is a person telling a story on stage. This is only part of it, but it is by no means the whole thing. To be precise, it is a combination of telling story, teaching history, analyzing the human feelings and sophistication in it, entertaining and educating the public.

The performance form of the storytelling is quite simple: an actor, a table, a chair, folding fans, wake wood and handkerchiefs. After the actor takes the stage, he must first read a poem as an opening. After reading the poem, the official performance begins. Most of the stories are classical masterpieces, such as "Romance of the Three Kingdoms," "All Men Are Brothers," "Great Sui and Tang Dynasties," "Strange Tales of a Lonely Studio," and so on.

Of course, these stories are all familiar to us, if an actor is just reading them, no one would like to listen. Actors must spend a lot of time and effort to organize these stories, just like movie directors, to make the stories more entertaining, visual, and interesting. In the performance, actors need to pay attention to the audience’s reaction, add humor at appropriate times, and entertain the audience.

The performance is a way of learning history and culture. It is a way of teaching and entertaining. It is a way of making history accessible to the public. It is a way of making art accessible to the public.

It originated in Beijing in the last years of the Qing Dynasty (late 19th century) and flourished in Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, and Manchuria in the 1920s through 1940s. At that time, Chinese generally had a relatively low level of education, and many people did not even have the money to go to school. For the poor who couldn’t afford to go to school, the only way to learn about history and culture is to go to a teahouse and enjoy storytelling. This way of learning is the easiest, cheapest, and can also kill time.

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After 1949, for many reasons, tea houses and storytelling gradually disappeared from people's vision. Fast forward to 1979, storytelling returned, not in the teahouse, but through radio broadcasting. At that time, Chinese families had almost no television, and their only entertainment was listening to the radio. Needless to say, the form of storytelling is a great fit for radio shows.

In the 1980s, you often saw a lot of people gathered in front of a radio during their lunch breaks to listen to storytelling. Then in 1985, storytelling began to appear on television programs, which was undoubtedly a new model that made the audience shine. After all, listening to it on the radio, there is only sound, not images. This time the Storytelling on TV made up for the audience's regrets. However, the Storytelling on TV is still flawed, that is, the actor and the audience cannot communicate, the actor cannot see the audience's reaction, and it is difficult to adjust the performance content according to the audience's preferences. Therefore, the best place to perform the art of storytelling is still in the teahouse. It must be a live show, like football games and concerts.

2007年，北京，著名的評書表演藝術家連麗如先生（北京評書國家級非遺傳承人）經過多年的努力，終於開辦了一家茶館，複刻了1930年代的故事表演形式：舞台上有表演，台下有茶坊，觀眾在看演員表演的同時可以買茶水、飲料、小吃。演員和觀眾終於有了交流，這才是原汁原味的北京評書。

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Anren Town, Dayi County near the city of Chengdu (成都). Mr. Jianchuan Fan (樊建川) devoted his time, resources and life to the building of a museum cluster on a huge piece of property of 500 acres (mu 茅) with exhibition space of over 100,000 square meters. The Museum opened its door on August 15 of 2005 and houses over ten million pieces of artifacts and national treasures. It consists of 26 museums which showcase China’s largest private collection of artifacts amassed during the last seventy years. General Hsiao’s statue stands proudly in a major square alongside many other significant figures of the years gone by.

In May of 2017, Mrs. Liang Ku took a trip to China to visit the three museums. Here are some photographs of her visits to the three museums and related photographs of the Ku and Hsiao families.

Three Museums Honoring the Families of Two of Our Supporters: Dr. Walter and Mrs. Liang Ku (顧慰華 and 蕭良傑)

LI-RONG LILLY CHENG 劉麗容

In the early days, Walter and Liang Ku were quite involved with the San Diego Chinese Historical Museum. Dr. Walter Ku grew up in the city of Wuxi (無錫) in the province of Jiangsu (江蘇). His family home was turned into Yu Hsiu Ku Memorial Museum (顧毓琇纪念馆) in honor of his father, Dr. Y.H. Ku (顧毓琇). Two museums, Anti-Japanese War Victory Memorial Museum in Zhijian (芷江) and Jianchuan Museum Cluster in Chengdu (成都), honor Mrs. Liang Ku’s father General H. S. Hsiao.

Dr. Yu Hsiu Ku (顧毓琇): Y.H. Ku was born into a family with a scholarly heritage. Y.H. went to Tsinghua Middle School and High School before enrolling at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1923. He was the first Chinese student to receive a doctorate in electrical engineering at MIT. For his thesis, Ku developed the variable coordinates that became known as the “Ku Variables.”

As Dean of Engineering at Tsinghua University, Ku Yu-Hsui invited Professor Norbert Wiener of MIT to Tsinghua University for a year as a Visiting Professor of Electrical Engineering in 1935-36. MIT has had a great influence among China’s scientific and engineering elites.

General I. S. Hsiao (蕭毅肅): Mrs. Liang Ku (薀良傑) is the daughter of General I. S. Hsiao (蕭毅肅), who was the Chinese representative to receive the surrender papers from the Japanese on August 21 of 1945 in the city of Zhijian (芷江) in Hunan province after the end of the Sino-Japanese war. General Hsiao was educated in Yunan and graduated from Yunnan Military Lecture School 雲南講武堂 in 1920. The Chinese had fought against the invasion of the Japanese for eight long years and finally, in 1945, the Japanese surrendered after the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The Americans and the Chinese worked together in the Pacific Theatre and General Hsiao received the surrender documents alongside his American colleagues. General Hsiao worked with General Joseph Stilwell, General George Marshall, and Major General Claire Chennault of the Flying Tigers. Hsiao was wounded during his tour to the famed River Kwai and oversaw the operations in the Burma/Thailand area. Currently, there is a museum called the Anti-Japanese War Victory Memorial Museum in Zhijian (芷江中國人民抗日戰爭勝利受降紀念館) that exhibits artifacts of what took place on that very special day and presents the historical facts and stories about events that took place during the Sino-Japanese war. General Hsiao received many medals of honor, including one from President Harry S. Truman and the highest Military Medal 清天白 日勲章 from President Chiang Kai-Shek. Liang and her family donated over 400 pieces of material that are now part of the museum’s collection.

In addition, there is a museum called Jianchuan Museum Cluster (建川博物館), which is located in Anren Town, Dayi County near the city of Chengdu (成都). Mr. Jianchuan Fan (樊建川) devoted his time, resources and life to the building of a museum cluster on a huge piece of property of 500 acres (mu 茅) with exhibition space of over 100,000 square meters. The Museum opened its door on August 15 of 2005 and houses over ten million pieces of artifacts and national treasures. It consists of 26 museums which showcase China’s largest private collection of artifacts amassed during the last seventy years. General Hsiao’s statue stands proudly in a major square alongside many other significant figures of the years gone by.

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Professor Ku Yu-Hsui and family

Professor Yu-Hsui was heavily involved in education. He served as the President of Central University and Chengchi University in China and later in life he was a professor at MIT and at the University of Pennsylvania. Professor Y.H. Ku received numerous awards and honors and was truly a “renaissance man.” He was not only a scientist/engineer but also a poet and philosopher. He had numerous publications and his life story, along with those of his ancestors and his descendants, is displayed in the Yu Hsiu Ku Memorial Museum. Twelve words were used to describe this great scholar: soft wind 清風, bright moon 明月, sturdy pine 劲松, scholar 学者, poet 诗人, professor 教授. Many photographs of Professor Y.H. Ku are exhibited in this museum, as are photographs of his son, Walter Ku.

The following was written by Y.H. Ku in 1951:

MIT esteems reason and seeks facts. Striving for new knowledge and diligent at lectures. By the banks of the Charles the peach and plum newly blossom. Y.H. Ku, 1951

General I. S. Hsiao

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It’s Time: Telling the Story of Yosemite’s Chinese Laundry Building

LARRY BECK

The Chinese Laundry Building in Yosemite National Park had largely been forgotten. It is now part of a story being told at Yosemite about people who came to America seeking opportunities.

Chinese immigrants were instrumental in Yosemite’s history of hospitality and tourism, making this iconic park the destination it is today. Uncovering and telling stories such as this, especially in a time of national divisiveness, can help bring the people of this country together.

Nation Builders/Park Builders

Remarkably, those who have actually done the hard work to build this nation (consider, for example, the enslaved who worked on cotton and sugar plantations) are the ones most often shunned by our democracy, and their contributions are often rendered invisible. A captivating illustration of this can be seen in the official photographs commemorating the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads’ conjunction at Promontory Point, Utah, in 1869, completing the transcontinental railroad. Absent from the photographs were any of the Chinese workers who made up a vast majority of the workforce who built the western half of the railroad.

To investigate these interpretive efforts on-site I visited Yosemite National Park in November 2021. My host for the visit was Scott Gediman, who serves at Yosemite as the Public Affairs Officer and has been there for the past 25 years. Scott arranged a meeting with Adam Ramsey, Supervisory Park Ranger, to guide me through the History Center and restored Chinese Laundry Building. The new interpretive displays focus on several dimensions of Chinese immigrant contributions to the park, including road building to provide access into Yosemite Valley.

Laundry

Outside the newly dedicated Chinese Laundry Building, Scott Gediman oriented me noting that for decades people walked or drove by without any idea of the stories the building could tell. He suggested that this large structure held a “quiet dignity” during the time when no one really knew what it was. Scott views our present “moment in time” as conducive to telling more diverse and inclusive stories.

Adam Ramsey provided a tour of the building and related that after serving as a laundry building, it was used for stagecoach repair, and later as a storage area that became rodent infested and dilapidated. Adam lamented, “The building had been forgotten.” Adam explained that the Wawona Hotel employed about 20 Chinese overall. Some of the staff did laundry in what was then this separate laundry building just downhill from the hotel. Working in the laundry meant carrying heavy loads of bedding and towels, standing next to hot stoves where ironing took place, and long hours each day. Adam suggested that, “Interpretation is evolving and must appeal to the current culture, the next generation, and beyond.”

Conclusion

In a long phone conversation Yenyen Chan explained that only recently does one hear much about the accomplishments of the AAPI community. Yenyen said, “We’ve been here a long time.” She suggested that what the Chinese did in Yosemite is a “mirror” of what they did throughout the rest of the country, contributing to the culture, texture, richness and strength of the United States. Chinese immigrants provided hospitality to tourists at Yosemite. Their work contributed to making visits accessible, comfortable, and safe. In today’s parlance, we would say that the Chinese have, then and now, been “essential workers.” Yenyen’s research reminds us that these previously invisible workers were indispensable. They built the roads, tended the gardens, cooked the meals, and did the laundry.
Exhibitions:
Acupuncture: Fifty Years In The United States

LILY TOU BIRMINGHAM

Today, most people are aware that acupuncture is an alternative medicine payable by the insurance companies. But many do not know it was illegal to use this procedure without a physician’s license in the early 70’s. Some experienced acupuncturists were arrested during this time. It took much effort by many people to have Acupuncture of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) accepted and supported by stand alone laws across different states.

This exhibition tells the amazing stories of acupuncture in the United States in the past 50 years. During the time when Henry Kissinger visited China to prepare for President Richard Nixon’s visit in 1972, everything Chinese was a sensation in the media. Here, the story starts in 1971, when the New York Times published an article written by its journalist James Reston, who having surgery to remove his appendix in Beijing underwent acupuncture for post-operative pain. His bemused yet factual writing of his personal experience ignited the Acupuncture Fever. Many major magazines published articles about acupuncture in the 70’s. Many celebrities underwent acupuncture treatments and were publicized. However, there were news articles about some experienced acupuncturists being arrested in the early 70's as well.

It took decades before acupuncture could be established legally in most states and widely used by the public. Notably, some key people worked diligently, and almost by fate, they convinced different states to make acupuncture legal. The first state that made acupuncture legal was Nevada. The exhibition also covers acupuncture used for anesthesia during surgery and applied on animals.

Along the way, people knew it was important to have educated and well trained professionals to work in the acupuncture and TCM field. This exhibition examines how schools and professional associations were formed to support acupuncture. We now have over 50 accredited Chinese Medicine colleges in the United States. To make the exhibition a better experience for the visitors, we will have a Mock Clinic for acupuncture and sample books that acupuncturists must study to get the license. This exhibition of an American story with Chinese roots about acupuncture’s history is both educational and fun to experience. You may even consider acupuncture treatment for yourself in the future.

Red Bishop was born out of simple interest in my family’s history. But I also wrote the book Red Bishop out of desire to inform a mainly non-Chinese audience about one of the most dynamic, tumultuous, and impactful periods of human existence. Every year brings new stories and movies of World War II and the Holocaust yet hardly a single film of 20th century China for Western audiences. Recent debates and opinions regarding China confirm how little most Americans know about China.

I never knew my maternal grandfather, a leading bishop in the Anglican Church before and after the communist takeover in 1949, Chinese parents in America rarely spoke to their children of the past, or of their families left behind. But I always had a curiosity about how I came into such a fortunate life. And I dreamed of a movie about China with a star-studded cast of thousands shown on a big silver screen that might educate, inspire, and move people like The Last Emperor, Lawrence of Arabia, or Doctor Zhivago.

After years of research, I first wrote a screenplay depicting my grandfather’s imagined life. It told of his complicated journey from a schoolboy in a Wuhu to the presiding bishop of the Anglican Church, spanning nearly a hundred years, set in three continents, and intersecting with many significant historical events. But it also became a story of China itself, of Christianity and the Anglican church in China, of my mother’s inner conflicts as an unintended immigrant/refugee, and of the Chinese perspective in geopolitics. Nearly every person who read my screenplay recommended that I write a book, not only because the screenplay read like a book, but because it could facilitate the movie. In fact, my screenplay was too big and sprawling. Hollywood just doesn’t make those historical epics anymore. And following a fact-finding trip to China, I learned that such a film might never see the projected light of a movie theater there because of burdensome censorship.

In writing this book that took additional years of research and writing, I became more knowledgeable about my family, my mother, and my ancestral motherland. As I tried to show in the book, it was a challenging, emotionally difficult, but enlightening journey. Red Bishop is a multi-dimensional story not only about my grandfather’s life in China but, also, my mother’s experience in America. I hope, and believe, it is a story worth sharing.

Highlights From The Chinese American Experience & Beyond:
Red Bishop: an introduction

ROBIN YUAN
Red Bishop: a review
LI-RONG LILLY CHENG 劉麗蓉

In the Chinese chess game (象棋), there are three key pieces that are called 象士 and 相. The book, Red Bishop, has two meanings for me. One is Bishop in the Chinese chess game and the other is the bishop in the Christian religion, in this case, Red Bishop means an Anglican Bishop in Red China.

I read this book with great interest and curiosity, at the same time, I read it with a sense of kinship and memory. Dr. Robin T. W. Yuan, the grandson of Bishop Robin Chen (陳見真) took a lot of time to research the content for this book. He meticulously described what happened to his grandparents and his parents during the last century. He did focus on his maternal grandfather, the Red Bishop and his mother Grace, the maternal grandfather, the Red Bishop, Bishop and his mother Grace, the Anglican Bishop in Red China.

During the second world war, China was a very difficult place to be. I was very curious about Robin Chen’s education and his life story. His grandson, the author, provided a vivid description of his youth, his education, his journey to the United States, his lifelong friendship with his teachers and his Christian colleagues from near and far, his marriage, his family, and his work and life in China. I was also intrigued about Bishop Chen’s education and his experience because, in those days, there were very few women who studied medicine and even fewer who studied medicine in the United States. Grace was expected to return to China to serve the Chinese people after she finished her medical school. However, the war, and the internal arrest and chaos prevented her from realizing her dream of returning to China.

Meantime, her family in China and more specifically, her parents had to make many difficult decisions. I understand how torn they must be in making those decisions. But the common theme about this book is their love for the family and China. In the last century, China went through the 1911 revolution, the overthrow of the Qing dynasty, the Sino-Japanese war, the domestic war between the communists and the nationalists, and then, the cultural revolution.

I held on to every word he wrote and stopped from page to page and from paragraph to paragraph imagining what it was like for Bishop Robin Chen and his wife Constance to write those letters to Grace, and for Grace to read the words from her father. I also tried to imagine how the grandson of Bishop Chen, Robin Yuan, felt when he returned to experience China after waiting for three years for a visa and after traveling 36 hours through many cities. Grace finally touched down on the soil of her motherland. I could not stop crying as I went through the pages and the words penetrated through my thoughts and my heart. The most important word from the Red Bishop, forgive.

The photos in this book are so precious. The beautiful smile on the face of Grace holding her baby Robin and her happy smile with her husband Robert. I was trying to figure out the names of each child on the family photos of Bishop Chen’s face and facial expressions through the turmoils of time.

These family photos remind me of the photo of my grandparents, my mother, and her siblings in Shanghai and then in Taiwan and then in the United States. We all took separate journeys in our lives and we all learned from our journeys. The journey of Bishop Robin Chen and his family is a journey through time and this is a book I will go back to many times. I want to offer a special thank you to Dr. Robin Yuan for making this story available for a great number of readers and for sharing his family history with the world.

I met Elena 60 years ago when we were both students at Wellesley College, in Massachusetts, USA. Elena was a beautiful woman. She was interested in everything. I don’t remember a time she wasn’t smiling. I simply could not believe that she was not American-born, because her English was so good. I learned that she had attended the American school in Costa Rica where she was born. In 1965, a year after my graduation, I told Elena that I was going to Argentina to work for a year. She said, “You’re going to Argentina? I’m going home to Costa Rica this summer. You come visit me for a month on your way down?” I did, and I had a new eye-opening, memorable experience visiting Elena’s family at their coffee plantation in Golfito, Costa Rica, in the jungle on the Pacific coast.

Ambassador Elena Wachong has had an extraordinary career. Some highlights of her career include serving as Ambassador to the Republic of China in Taiwan, Consul General to Washington DC, Economic Attaché in Ecuador, and currently serves on several Boards of Directors, including the National Theater of Costa Rica and NGO Costa Rica Outward Bound. She was an executive officer for 20 years with multinational banks such as Citibank, and as Vice President of Bank of America in over 10 countries in Latin America. She combined providing financial credit training to bankers with the Inter-American Development Bank, while serving her country at non-diplomatic posts in several countries. She worked with citibank in 8 countries as consultant for Costa Rica, Honduras, Canada, USA, and Pakistan with 6 different presidents of Costa Rica from 3 different political parties.

But life began much more modestly for Elena Wachong. She was born in Costa Rica into a penniless Chinese immigrant family. Her formative years included growing up in a perilous Chiquita Banana town owned by the United Fruit Co., and in pioneering her family’s coffee plantation in the wildness of Costa Rica. So she is well aware of the challenges posed in developing countries by poverty, and the lack of infrastructure in public roads, education, and health services.

She received a scholarship to Wellesley College. There she combined her Latin Spanish background with an American education: a major in Russian History, while living in the German Language Residence Hall and picking up French later. She later obtained a Master’s degree in Political Science and Economics from the University of Florida.

She says that the experience which most impacted her life, however, was the hitch-hiking solo trip she took after graduate school. Elena walked from Athens to Istanbul, from there to Iran, through Afghanistan, Pakistan, the famed Khyber Pass, New Delhi, and ended in the city of Kathmandu, up in the Himalayas. These three months of overland hiking convinced her of one thing. She says, “97% of people in the world are good people, and the other 3% is not worth worrying about.”

Elena tells me tracing her Family Tree from Costa Rica to China in a language she cannot read, has been an enormous challenge, and she could not have achieved it, without reaching back to her education in European Medieval History and her travels. Her experience as Ambassador of Costa Rica to the Republic of China, as Talleyrand central to her understanding of the complexity of China and its language. The arduous process she followed to recover her Chinese Family Roots back 2,600 years, is the theme of her lecture.

Upcoming lectures:

June 18, 2022: Russell Low, RIPPLES IN TIME: How the Early Chinese American Experience Shaped the Greatest Generation in WWII

July 16, 2022: Sandra Wawrytko, The Road to Happiness- Does it go through Daoism, Confucianism or Buddhism?

August 20, 2022: Allie Arnell, Messages Revealed: Symbolism in Chinese Art
I was born in Costa Rica of Chinese immigrant parents and neither speak nor read Chinese. In spite of that, I recovered our family tree to its origins 2,600 years ago. We traced 106 Generations of the Lee (呂) Family, from 600 BCE to 2000 CE. The 2003 photograph includes 150 members of the most recent 7 generations of the Wachong Lee Family in Costa Rica and we overcame barriers to our family tree thanks to the help of many friends, family and strangers, and to a manuscript received from China.

Language is the first barrier to overcome. We pieced together our family language is the first barrier to overcome. We pieced together our family tree thanks to the help of many friends, family and strangers, and to a manuscript received from China.

The Chinese language is difficult: there are many dialects, but also there are simplified (繁) and traditional (正) characters representing the same Family name (呂): there are 2 ways to Romanize it ("Lee" according to Wade Giles (1870) and "Lü" according to Pinyin (1970); even worse, immigrants to the West receive a Christian name which is unrelated to their original Chinese family character. In our case, written 呂, Romanized as "Lee or Lü", but Christianized as "Wachong Lee". The first challenge is to find the Chinese character or glyph of our family name written in Chinese.

The next barriers are social customs which are unique to China: The Family Poem and the Zupu. Access to internet and English translations of ancient written "Classics" or histories help to overcome these.

1) The Family Poem: this is a sequence of names selected by an ancestor around 1730, who chose the name of each of the following 16 generations of males. The names are selected in a specific sequence, and is shared by every male of that generation. This chart records the generational names of our most recent generations from number 91 to 106, which cover 500 years.

2) The Family Zupu is a millennial generational manuscript which registers the generational name of each male in the family, starting with generation No. 1 around 600 BCE, ending 3 millennia later, with generation 106, yet unborn. A Zupu is kept by every male member of the Lee Family, and every male of that generation shares that name. My brother’s Generation number one in China, to its tribal origins around 600 BCE.

We start with the simplest barrier: finding the original Chinese family surname and birthplace in glyph form. I will list the steps I took in what follows:

1) Recover your Chinese family glyph: Lee (呂), Heshan (鶴山) and your ethnic group or language, Hakka Han (客家).
2) Recover your birth town, Heshan (鶴山) and your ethnic group or language, Hakka Han (客家).
3) learn two Romanizations: 1870 Wade Giles (Lee ) ; 1979 Pinyin (呂).

A third arcane Chinese barrier: the Family 'Zupu', or Chinese Family Generational Millennial Manuscript: this is a handwritten record or Family Tree from China, which each male family member keeps. Our "Zupu" has 53 pages, records the Generational Name of each male member since 600 BCE, his descendants, and locations. The Lee Family poem is recorded in page 39 of the Zupu.

The next challenge is to find the Chinese generational names of at least 3 male ancestors, because this helps identify the family poem. Around 1733 CE, our Lee ancestor of Generation No. 90 selected the Generational Names of 16 future generations: Generations 91 to 106. These generational names have a specific sequence that is unique to our family. Every male with the surname 'Lee' and whose Generational Names match this specific pattern, is related to our Family Tree.

With Internet and the Zupu, we decoded our original ancestral name of tribal origin in Shandong: The ancestral name is "Jiang" (姜), the Clan name is "Lü" (呂); our Generational Name No. 90 is "Zhang". We tied the Family Poem to its tribal names of emperors and nobles recorded in the Zupu, and matched these to the Gregorian calendar.

We traced the first member of our Lee Family, generation No. 1, back to its tribal origins around 600 BCE and identified two notable members of our Chinese Zupu in English:

a) Duke Huan of Qi, our Generation No. 12, named "Lü Xiao Bai" (呂小白). He was the ruler of the State of Qi from 885 to 643 BCE, and
b) Duke Xi of Qi, named "Lü Fu" (呂福), who coincides with the name of Generation No. 11 in our Zupu.

The Lee Family Zupu thus links our family through 2,600 years, from generation number one in China, to generation No.106 in Costa Rica.
Get To Know Our Advisory Board Members

Members of SDCHM Advisory Board counsel our Board of Directors on all matters pertaining to museum operations. In particular, they support our efforts to expand and diversify the museum’s leadership and audience.

Without further ado, we are pleased to introduce the members of our Advisory Board:

Dr. Niyi Coker, Jr. serves as Director of the School of Theatre, Television, and Film at San Diego State University. He holds a B.A. from the University of Ife, Nigeria, an MFA from Brooklyn College CUNY, and a Ph.D. from Temple University in Philadelphia. He is the founding Artistic Director of the African Arts Ensemble in New York City and has served as Visiting Artistic Director to numerous theater companies, including K3 at Malmo Hogskola in Sweden, the National Theatre of Nigeria, and Black Box Theatre in Bermuda. His documentary film writing and directing credits include Black Studies USA, The Black 14, and Ota Benga: Human at the Zoo. He was a recipient of the Carnegie Fellowship from 2015-18, and is the writer & director of Miriam Makeba - Mama Africa the musical.

Chris Chan

With nearly three decades of experience in journalism, communications and teaching, Chris Chan serves as the Director of San Diego City Council Communications for the team of Council President Sean Elo-Rivera. After earning his Bachelor’s in International Relations from USC, Chan moved to Hong Kong in 1994 and later Singapore, working at CNBC Asia, TVB and ATV. He made his home in San Diego in 2003 and pursued stories all over San Diego County as a reporter for NBC 7. He also taught media and journalism at SDSU and local colleges prior to joining the City of San Diego.

M.G. Crisci

Manhattan-born M.G. Crisci is the best-selling author of 16 books based on true stories and events. He is also an award-winning journalist, a Fortune 500 senior executive, and has been elected to Who’s Who in the World 24 times.

Heath Fox

Heath Fox has a background in the arts and culture sector, and previously served as the Deputy Director of the Museum of Photographic Arts and the San Diego Museum of Art, later serving as Assistant Dean of Arts and Humanities at UC San Diego. In 2012, he started his tenure as Executive Director of the La Jolla Historical Society, where he led the organization through an important phase of capital development, which also incorporated new and expanded exhibition and education programming.

Woon-Wah Siu

Woon-Wah Siu is retired from a legal practice focused on international business, where she worked with multinational firms representing a broad range of industries in locations across China and the United States. She currently supports nonprofit organizations in San Diego in a volunteer capacity, including the Chinese Historical Museum, Jewish Family Service of San Diego, and the San Diego Chapter of the Organization of Chinese Americans.

Dr. Sandra A. Wawrytko, Ph.D., former Director of the Center for Asian & Pacific Studies (2014-2021), Professor in the Department of Philosophy at San Diego State University. Her specialization focuses on Buddhist and Daoist epistemology and aesthetics in the context of neuroscience. Dr. Wawrytko is Founder and President of the Charles Wei-hsun Fu Foundation, a tax-exempt, non-profit educational family foundation organized in 1997 in loving memory of the life and work of Dr. Fu (1933-1996), a Taiwanese-American scholar and teacher. The foundation provides funding for faculty research and scholarships for students. It also supports non-profit organizations focused on philosophy and environmental causes.
Honoring one of our founding members

Recently, the City of San Diego held a celebration in honor of one of the SDCHM’s founding members: Tom Hom. On that day, the City unveiled “Tom Hom Avenue,” the new name for the section of Third Avenue between Market Street and Island Avenue.

Tom, as many of our readers may be aware, is a well-known politician and real estate developer. He was the first minority elected to the San Diego City Council, and the second to the California State Assembly. As a real estate investor and developer, his footprints are all over the City of San Diego. The formalization of the Asian Pacific Historic District is one testament to his (and his late wife, Dorothy’s) efforts, as is that of the Gaslamp Quarter Historical District. As a founding member of the CHS, Tom was instrumental in the process of securing the parcel of land where the former Chinese Mission building was placed and restored, serving today as our principal facility.

The ceremony took place at the corner of Market and Third on Saturday, February 12, 2022. The event was presided over by Mayor Todd Gloria.

We at the San Diego Chinese Historical Society and Museum wish to share our congratulations with Tom, for the public recognition of his achievements.

MUSEUM FOUNDERS:
Sally Tsui Wong-Avery
Dorothy Hom

DIRECTOR EMERITUS:
Alexander Chuang

CURATOR EMERITUS OF CHINESE AMERICAN HISTORY:
Murray Lee

HONORARY CIRCLE (for donations exceeding $1,000 since Spring 2021)
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Winfred Wong Chase
Li-Rong Lilly Cheng
Conrad Fung
Joseph Wong
Gene Jeng Guang Lay
Tom Tsi-Hsiuang Lee
Sheldon Lou
Alicia Pei-Lien Miao
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