

Chinese American Community Organizations: History and Perspectives*

Zeng Ying

In the past, and even today, most scholarship on Chinese American communities has focused on Chinatowns. They were readily identifiable, mostly homogeneous communities. Today Chinese American communities can no longer be simply represented by Chinatowns, though Chinatowns continue to exist. Chinese American communities today represent numerous different communities with different language, cultural, and political backgrounds. This paper will show the changing nature of Chinese American communities through an examination of community organizations. The changing purpose and format of these organizations reflects the changing make-up of the Chinese American communities and the concomitant changing needs of the communities. San Diego, California will be used as a case study.

Community organizations, Chinese newspapers and Chinese schools have been called the three great pillars of Chinese overseas communities.¹⁾ They have played important roles especially in enabling Chinese immigrants to adjust to new circumstances, and to preserve Chinese culture in different cultural environments.

There are no exact statistics about how many Chinese community organizations exist outside China. Taiwan's Commission for Overseas Chinese Affairs compiles the only statistical data available. According to that data, community organizations among Chinese overseas increased from 4,847 in 1950 to 8,624 in 1981, and then increased again to 9,093 in 1991.²⁾

In the United States the earliest recorded Chinese social organizations were the district organizations, Sanyi (Sam-Yap) Huiguan³⁾ and Siyi (Sze-Yap) Huiguan founded in San Francisco in 1851.⁴⁾ The number of Chinese community organizations increased rapidly after World War II with the growth of the Chinese population, especially since the 1970s. Today, hundreds of kinds of organizations can be found all over the country, such as Chinese historical societies, Chinese professional associations, senior citizen clubs and political organizations.

I. Traditional Community Organizations

In an attempt to escape anti-Chinese hostilities, which started almost from the moment Chinese immigrants arrived in the United States, Chinese immigrants created their own distinctive society in Chinatowns. They organized their own systems for procuring jobs, for settling disputes among themselves, and for preserving Chinese culture in a hostile environment.

The main community organizations in Chinatowns are district associations (*huiguan*), family or clan associations (*gongsuo*), secret societies or tongs (*tang*), and business guilds

(*hanghui*). The fundamental conception of these associations came from traditional Chinese society, but the forms they took were unique to the overseas Chinese community.

District associations united all those who spoke a common subdialect or hailed from the same district of origin in China. Villages and districts in nineteenth-century south China were quite autonomous. Inhabitants of neighboring areas often spoke different dialects. People who shared a dialect identified strongly with one another. These associations primarily represented the Chinese from the seven counties of heaviest Chinese emigration to America, the Sze Yap (Xinhui, Xinning, Kaiping, and Enping) and Sam Yap (Nanhai, Panyu, and Shunde) of Guangdong. These organizations played an important role in early Chinese American history as immigrant receiving stations. Association representatives welcomed, fed, housed, outfitted, and sent to their respective employers newcomers.⁵⁾

The clan associations, originating from the lineage and clan organizations of South China, included all members bearing the same surname. In traditional China, people with the same surnames assumed they shared a common (or at least a putative) ancestor and observed exogamy. The same as district associations, clan associations also played an important role in early Chinese American history as immigrant receiving stations. They provided employment, housing, and welfare, and protected members from the harmful actions of other associations.⁶⁾

Tongs were fraternal organizations that bound members together through secret initiation rites and sworn brotherhood. The best known tong was the Chee Kung Tong (*Zhigongtang*), an outgrowth of secret societies in China that were formed originally to espouse the overthrow of the Qing dynasty and the restoration of the Ming dynasty.⁷⁾ Tongs maintained their interest in China's politics, and their efforts in the establishment of Sun Yat-sen's Republic of China in 1911 were significant. Tongs also provided mutual aid for their members in a host of social and economic activities. They became notorious for their elaborate street skirmishes and for assassinations by "highbinders" and "hatchet men."⁸⁾ Their aim was to control the Chinese immigrant underworld by staking out territory and monopolizing the profits from gambling and prostitution, as well as from smuggling in Chinese after immigration exclusion was imposed. Americans tended to group all tongs together and to attribute their violent activities to rivalries within and between tong organizations. However, not all tongs were "fighting tongs," and violent fallings-out often involved clan and district associations.⁹⁾

Business guilds were based on mutual interests rather than common origins, and they originated from the craft and labor guilds found in China. These associations upheld standards of workmanship, set prices, enforced territorial rights, and collected funds and hired lawyers to fight against anti-Chinese ordinances.¹⁰⁾

There were similarities in form and function among district associations, clan associations, secret societies, and business guilds, since their activities overlapped and there was competition for members. Because of this struggle for position and power, relationships between secret societies and other groups were complex and fraught with violence.¹¹⁾ To adjudicate quarrels among members of the different associations, officers of the six existing huiguan in California formed a loose federation in 1862, which was known as the "Chinese Six Companies." In addition, as the Chinese Exclusion Law went into effect in 1882, in response to the need to present a united front to a hostile outside

world, a formal umbrella association, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (*Zhonghua Huiguan* or *Zhonghua Gongsuo*, here after CCBA), was established in San Francisco.¹²⁾ The membership of the CCBA was composed of representatives from all local Chinese organizations. The CCBA served as a self-appointed representative of all the Chinese and acquired quasi-judicial powers, particularly in matters of immigration and legal affairs.¹³⁾ Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Associations were soon formed in Chinatowns all around North America, and they established their control over Chinatowns where they protected immigrants from the schemes of their own countrymen as well as from the wide range of reactions towards Chinese by the larger society.

II. Community Organizations in San Diego Chinese Communities

Chinese American communities have existed in San Diego since the mid-nineteenth century. However, unlike their better-known counterparts in San Francisco and other cities, San Diego's communities were never able to establish a lasting Chinatown. The communities have, therefore, existed without a spacial center.

This section introduces the many Chinese American organizations that are or were active in San Diego. Beginning with the early organizations, it provides an overview of the types of the organizations and the roles they played.

In the early San Diego Chinese community, unlike those communities in cities with big Chinatowns, district associations, clan associations, and business guilds were lacking. Many early bachelor immigrants were involved in tongs. As early as 1885, a Chee Kung Tong branch was established in San Diego.¹⁴⁾ Members of the Chee Kung Tong were known for their protection of illegal activities such as gambling, opium, and smuggling immigrants across the Mexican border. In 1922 the Bing Kung Tong and in 1945 the Ying On Tong, both of which were headquartered in San Francisco, established branches in San Diego.¹⁵⁾ These tongs became the underground powers of the Chinese community, and conflicts which turned into wars were, on some occasions, common among the tongs. In 1888 merchants in Chinatown organized the Lu Ying Big Company for protection against the tong members.¹⁶⁾

It is difficult to say why the district, clan, or guild associations, which played central roles in other Chinatowns, were lacking in the San Diego Chinese community. However, it is most likely related to the small size of the community. But "perhaps the most significant factor was the role of the Chinese Congregational Mission in facilitating the adjustment of Chinese immigrants in San Diego and providing the necessary organization and functions normally provided by voluntary associations elsewhere."¹⁷⁾

2.1 The Role of the Chinese Community Church in the Early Chinese Community

In 1870 the first Chinese mission was organized by the First Presbyterian Church as a branch of their Sunday school program, in which classes were provided for Chinese immigrants to learn the English language as well as Christian teachings. In 1885 the Chinese Mission School of the Congregational Church was founded. This early mission school served several important functions for the Chinese community. For example, English classes were provided free of charge six evenings a week. Since the small size of the Chinese community precluded its isolation from the larger society, knowledge of English was vital to anyone who hoped to work for, or conduct business with, the non-

Chinese community. The mission school helped the Chinese to solve many problems involving housing, employment, etc. In 1907 the mission moved into a new building that included a long dormitory containing tiny rooms that were rented to unmarried Chinese males. These rooms were always filled to capacity with recent arrivals to San Diego, providing an opportunity to meet other Chinese and to find employment. Besides providing religious instruction, the Chinese Mission in its new location became a center where Chinese immigrants (mostly bachelors) could learn English in order to adapt better to their new environment and to find employment. The Mission also served as living quarters and a social center, functions that in communities with big Chinatowns were usually served by voluntary associations like district, clan, or guild associations. Christians and non-Christians alike attended the many social events sponsored by the Mission. The Mission represented the interests of the entire Chinese community and did so effectively because of its association with prominent members of the non-Chinese community.¹⁸⁾

The Chinese Congregational Mission became an independent and self-supporting church in 1946.¹⁹⁾ It was later renamed the Chinese Community Church to express its community involvement. Many old-timers recalled that the Church was the only social gathering place for Chinese Americans in early San Diego. Many of them met their future spouses at the activities of the Church.²⁰⁾

2.2 Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and Other Early Organizations

The CCBA, the Bing Kung Tong (*Bing Gong Tang*, previously known as the Tu Kung Tong), and the Ying On Merchants and Labor Benevolent Association (*Yingduan Gongshanghui*, former San Diego branch of the Ying On Tong) were the only three social organizations in the Chinese community of San Diego until the 1970s. Their form and function have changed a great deal following the changes in the community, especially during the last two decades. While the CCBA, to a certain degree, still keeps its leading role in the communities, the scale and influence of both the Bing Kung Tong and the Ying On Merchants and Labor Benevolent Association are much smaller and weaker than before.

Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association

The first Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association was established in the San Francisco Chinatown in 1882. It was pushed forward by the General Consul of the Chinese (Qing) Consulate, Huang Zunxian.²¹⁾ There are now five CCBAs in California, in San Francisco, Sacramento, Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Diego.

San Diego's CCBA (*Zhonghua Huiguan*) was established in 1907.²²⁾ Unlike other Chinatown communities, the CCBA of San Diego was not a council of Chinese voluntary organizations, since it was the only one in town. Without a historic relationship to the political forces in China which characterized most Chinatown CCBAs, San Diego's CCBA could claim political neutrality. Together with the Chinese Mission School, it served a social welfare role, providing for the whole San Diego Chinese community.

The CCBA of San Diego did not have a system of membership until 1970, when it was registered as a non-profit public benefit organization under California law. In the early days all Chinese were considered to be members of the CCBA. Private donations

from the leaders and members of the Chinese community were the only funding sources. Whenever the community members had events like weddings or funerals, they would give donations to the CCBA. In 1936, when the Chee Kung Tong's branch in San Diego was closed, the CCBA received its two-story building as a donation. The building became the CCBA's office and meeting hall. The main activities of the early CCBA were interpreting for immigrants who did not speak English and arranging social activities such as dance parties or parties for senior citizens.

On December 26, 1970, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of San Diego was formerly organized as a non-profit corporation. The primary stated purpose for which the corporation was formed was to provide charitable and benevolent activities, social welfare, and to preserve and to promote the culture and traditions of the Chinese people.²³⁾ Although a membership system was established, the income from membership fees was limited because most of its members are senior citizens for whom the membership fee is only five dollars per year. Relying on private donations, it received tax-exempt status from the Franchise Tax Board in 1971, and furthermore, was granted tax-exempt status by Internal Revenue Services in 1972.

In 1972, to meet the needs of the increasing number of immigrants and elderly community members, the Chinese Social Service Center was organized on the initiative of several Chinese American social workers. Many CCBA board members became involved in the founding of the Chinese Social Service Center and became its board members as well. In addition, the CCBA leased its building to the Service Center at a very low rate. The Center helped new immigrants learn English, find homes, training, jobs, adjust to the new culture, and get information about how to deal with the various levels of American government. It also provided support for social security applications, hospital information, interpreting and translation, and other basic social services for elderly community members. Later the Chinese Senior Citizen's Club was organized to meet the social needs of senior citizens. Once again, the CCBA gave aid by offering office space in its building. The CCBA also arranged for a free lunch party for the senior citizens once every other week.²⁴⁾

When the County of San Diego cut its funding for social service programs in 1984, the Chinese Social Service Center faced financial difficulties. The CCBA helped the Center sponsor the Chinese New Year's Fair, at which traditional Chinese cultural activities such as the lion dance and dragon dance, Chinese gift shops, Chinese food stands, and the like attracted a great number of visitors. The income from the fair became the main funding source of the Chinese Social Service Center. The Chinese New Year's Fair has been held every year since then. The CCBA's efforts were reciprocated by other community organizations. Now a variety of organizations representing different groups work together as co-sponsors of the New Year's Fair.

In the early stages of its history the members of San Diego's CCBA were mainly old-timers and native-born Chinese Americans. Beginning in the 1980s, it started to recruit members from among the new immigrants. However, this effort was mostly limited to Cantonese speakers.²⁵⁾ In 1986, the CCBA had its first new immigrant president. More and more new immigrants from different groups have been recruited as its members since then.

Besides sponsoring the Chinese New Year's Fair and other community events, the

CCBA organizes three regular activities every year. On the day of Qingming (Pure Brightness), which traditionally is observed as a festival for worshipping at ancestral graves, a worship ceremony and picnic is held at Zhonghua Yifen (a cemetery plot purchased for community members by the CCBA) at Mt. Hope cemetery. On the Dragon Boat Festival and the Moon Festival, two important traditional Chinese Festivals in which cultural activities and family reunion take place, the CCBA organizes dinner parties for its members as well as community members from other groups. The dates are significant because they are celebrated almost universally among people of Chinese descent who maintain traditional culture practices.

From the early 1990s, the CCBA began to draw up plans for a seniors' home next to the CCBA building on Third Avenue in downtown San Diego. The first senior-housing project developed by the Chinese American communities in San Diego was granted clearance by the city, and the four-story CCBA Senior Garden, designed with traditional sloping, red-tiled roofs and a courtyard featuring bamboo and a Chinese sculpture, finally broke ground in May, 1997. This project, together with the CCBA's building renovation project, became the most important topics at the CCBA's monthly officers/directors meeting.

Bing Kung Tong

In 1878, Bing Kung Tong broke away from Chee Kung Tong and became independent. The San Diego branch of Bing Kung Tong was established in 1922. Most of its members, reflecting the make up of the overall Chinese community, were bachelor laborers. Because San Diego is very close to the border with Mexico, the headquarters of the Tong sent those members who were involved in criminal activities in San Francisco or Los Angeles to San Diego. They usually hid in San Diego and would be sent to Mexico if the situation warranted flight.²⁶⁾

The Bing Kung Tong of San Diego fell into decline as the structure of the San Diego Chinese American community changed after World War II, especially after the decline of San Diego's small Chinatown in the late 1960s. By the beginning of the 1980s, there were only about half a dozen old-timer members left. However, the Bing Kung Tong was able to recruit new members from among new immigrants, especially young refugees from Indo-China during the 1980s. Its membership increased, rapidly growing to approximately one hundred.

In the early 1970s, when the city of San Diego started its redevelopment project in the downtown area, all the building owners of that area were required to take part in hearings to decide the fate of their buildings. No one from Bing Kung Tong appeared at the hearing. Therefore, the land on which the Bing Kung Tong's building stood on Third Avenue was declared purchasable. The building was sold to the Grand Horton Hotel in 1984. Two years later, under the direction of the national headquarters, the Bing Kung Tong of San Diego bought a new building on University Avenue. The income from renting the building facilities became one of the Bing Kung Tong's main funding resources. The Tong also helps community members conduct weddings and funerals. The donations collected for such services are another funding resource.

In recent years, the Bing Kung Tong has often cooperated with the five organizations of Ethnic Chinese from Indo-China on community events and affairs. The location of

the Bing Kung Tong's new building, which is very close to the buildings and offices of the five organizations, facilitated cooperation. It is also probable that, because most of Bing Kung Tong's members are old-timers, or Cantonese speaking new immigrants, they shared a common language, Cantonese, with the ethnic Chinese from Indo-China.

Ying On Merchants and Labor Benevolent Association

The Ying On Merchants and Labor Benevolent Association was established in 1945. It owns a building on Third Avenue in the heart of the old Chinatown area.

Just as was the case with Bing Kung Tong, the Ying On Merchants and labor Benevolent Association went downhill following the decline of San Diego's Chinatown. Most of the members are now restaurant owners, and the building serves as a center for them to gather, play Mahjongg, and exchange information. The building, however, was in such disrepair that it was severely damaged in the recent storms caused by an El Nino. The annex of the building was recently torn down.

2.3 The Organizations of Ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos

The ethnic Chinese refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos (here after VCL) maintained well-established organizations in their former countries of residence. They brought this tradition to the new land and formed organizations for mutual support soon after they arrived in the United States. Since the refugees from Vietnam arrived first and eventually made up more than half of the total number of the VCL refugees, they took the lead in establishing these new organizations.

There are five organizations that serve the ethnic Chinese from VCL in San Diego. Although they have their own offices and governing bodies, they usually work together to represent the whole community of ethnic Chinese from Indo-China. Whenever there are any events or activities for Chinese communities in San Diego, the five organizations always participate together and take the same position on any actions.

The five organizations started to co-organize parties to celebrate the Spring Festival (Chinese New Year) and Moon Festival (Mid-Autumn Festival) beginning in 1996. Each organization takes turns being in charge of the events, while the other organizations act as co-sponsors. They often call themselves "brotherly bands (*xiongdi bang*)."

The Indo-Chinese Association of San Diego

The Indo-Chinese Association of San Diego (Shengdiyage Yuemianliao Huaren Lianyihui) was established in 1983. The members are mostly ethnic Chinese refugees from VCL, 98% of them from Vietnam. There were about 500 members when it was established, and with the growth of the community there are now more than 3,000 members.²⁷ The Association was registered as a non-profit organization under California law in 1987. The governing body consists of the president, two vice presidents, and a board of directors. The board has a monthly meeting, mostly conducted in Cantonese, and occasionally in Mandarin.

The Association has no membership fee because the initial motive and doctrine of the Association were to organize refugees, who had lost almost all their belongings before their arrival in the United States, and to help each other settle into their new circumstances. The funding of the Association is dependant upon donations given to

their temple, Tianhou Gong,²⁸⁾ donations from members when they have weddings, funerals, or birthday parties for the elderly, and private donations from community leaders. In most instances, the rank of one's leadership in the Association is decided, to a great degree, by the amount of money one donates.

There are three committees under the leadership of the Association: the Elderly Affairs committee (*Qi Yang Zu*), the Sun Yat Sen Chinese School (*Zhongshan Xuexiao*) committee, and the Temple (*Tianhou Gong*) committee. The Elderly Affairs committee has responsibility for taking care of the elderly members. When an elderly member passes away, the committee is in charge of collecting twenty dollars from each of its members and using the money for funeral expenses. The Chinese School was established in 1983, only a few months after the founding of the Association. The main purpose of the school is to teach the children and youth the Chinese language and to propagate and insure the continuation of Chinese culture. There is no tuition required; the school is completely funded by the Association. When the temple was built in 1987, it received donations not only from the Association's own members, but also from other Chinese American organizations in San Diego.²⁹⁾

The Association joined the World Federation of Chinese Organizations from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos (*Shijie Yuemianliao Huaren Tuanti Lianhehui*) in 1986. The President Emeritus became the Vice-Chairman of the World Federation. The Association's representatives take part in the annual convention of the World Federation and establish a network with other Chinese organizations from Indo-China through the World Federation.

The Chinese Friendship Association of San Diego

When the Indo-Chinese Association was established it was politically pro-Taiwan, since most of its members had painful experiences under Communist rule in Vietnam. Many became devout anti-Communists. A group within the community that disagreed with the anti-Communists decided to establish its own organization which is politically pro-Mainland.³⁰⁾ The result was the establishment of the Chinese Friendship Association (*Shengdiyage Huaren Lianyihui*) in 1984. The Association recruits members not only from among the Chinese refugees from VCL, which still make up almost ninety percent of the total membership, but also from among ethnic Chinese immigrants from Myanmar, Thailand, and other Southeast Asian countries, as well as from among immigrants from mainland China.

The Chinese Friendship Association was soon registered as a non-profit voluntary organization under California law. There are now about six hundred regular members. The membership fee is twenty-four dollars a year and is the only regular funding resource for the Association. Other funding resources are similar to those of the Indo-Chinese Association: donations to its temple, Guanyin Tang,³¹⁾ and donations from members and leaders of the Association. The Association bought a piece of land on Fiftieth Street and built a temple on the land in 1985. The temple is also used as the office for the Association and as the classroom for its Chinese school, Bac Ai Chinese School (*Bo'ai Zhongwen Xuexiao*).

As with the Indo-Chinese Association, there are three committees under the Chinese Friendship Association. The Elderly affairs (*Laoren Zu*) committee, the Bac Ai Chinese

School committee, and the Temple (*Guanyin Tang*) committee.

The Elderly Chinese Association of San Diego

The Elderly Chinese Association of San Diego (*Shengdiyage Dongnanya Huaren Qiyingshui*) is the first organization for ethnic Chinese refugees from VCL. It was established in 1981 to help community members over sixty years old by providing for their daily life needs and their needs in death. It was registered as a non-profit voluntary organization under California law in 1989.

The initiation fee is ten dollars for each member, and the annual membership fee is twenty-four dollars. These fees are the only regular financial income of the association. Because regular income is limited, the main funding resource is donations from the community. The association bought a house on Marlborough Avenue, across from University Avenue, where many ethnic Chinese refugees from Indo-China reside, and converted it into its office and social center in 1994.

The Association consists of several groups. The Mutual Aid Group (*Xiangji Zu*) was established for taking care of the elderly in death. Once a member passes away, every member donates twenty dollars, and the money goes to the family to help with funeral expenses. Members of the Music Group (*Guoyue Zu*) often practice together and play for the elderly once a month. Taiji Group and Qigong Group organize the elderly to practice Taijiquan and Qigong. The Dining Group (*Jucan Zu*) is in charge of organizing a dinner party every month and prepares daily free lunches for the elderly at the center. Once a month, Chinese doctors who practice traditional Chinese medicine are invited to examine the members.

The Association also represents the Southern California Elderly Indo-Chinese Association (Southern California *Huayi Yiyang Hui*) in the San Diego area.

The Hakka Chorng Jeng Association of San Diego

The Hakka Chorng Jeng Association of San Diego (*Shengdiyage Keshu Chongzhenghui*) was established in 1991 and was registered as a non-profit voluntary organization under California law. Its membership is limited to Hakka people. There are now about seventy paid members, most of them aged from seventy to ninety. The youngest member, the current president, is fifty-seven years old. The structure of and services offered by the Association are similar to the organizations discussed above. Its office is a rented apartment, in which there is just enough space to set up a few tables and chairs for its members to play Mahjong.

Fukienese Association of San Diego

The smallest of the five organizations, the Fukienese Association of San Diego (*Shengdiyage Fujian Tongxianghui*), was established in 1990 with about thirty members. There are no membership fees for the Association. Anyone whose origins are in the Fujian Province of China can be a member. As with the Hakka Chorng Jeng Association, the office of the Fukienese Association is rented. Buddhist services are held in the office every month on the 1st and the 15th of the old calendar.

The five organizations discussed above perform many of the roles of the earlier

district associations. They provide a source of mutual support for people of the same background. In the beginning there was, nevertheless, some conflict. Differences of opinion over the PRC-Taiwan question were a source of conflict between the organizations. However, with China's open door policy attitudes began to soften. Also, the leadership changed to the younger generation, which had a more mild opinion of communism. Today, the five organizations work together and do not actively support either side in the PRC-Taiwan debate.

2.4 Organizations for New Immigrants from Taiwan

The formation of organizations in Chinese overseas communities often reflects the social and political situations of the country of their residence as well as of the country of their ancestry. As most immigrants from Taiwan are recent immigrants, they are still closely in touch with the situation in Taiwan. The most prominent political issue in Taiwan is whether Taiwan should become an independent country or remain as a part of China. Immigrants from Taiwan are also divided into different groups according to their identity and regional feelings.³²⁾ In San Diego, the majority of the organizations for immigrants from Taiwan call themselves "Chinese", and participate in the events and activities of the Chinese American communities. However, some organizations call themselves "Taiwanese" or "Formosan" and either refuse to participate altogether, or limit their participation to a few events.

San Diego used to be one of the bases for advocates of the Taiwan independence movement before martial law was lifted in Taiwan. The United Formosans in America for Independence (*Quanmei Taiwan Duli Lianmeng*) still maintains a strong chapter in San Diego. The San Diego Taiwanese Association (*Shengdiyage Taiwan Tongxianghui*) is also known for its radical stand on Taiwan's independence. It declines participation in any Chinese community activities and refuses contact with officials of the Nationalist government. In the recently established Taiwanese Community Center (*Taiwan Zhongxin*), Minnan dialect (a dialect originally from Fujian Province) is used as the common language instead of Mandarin.

On the other hand, the San Diego Taiwanese Chamber of Commerce (*Shengdiyage Taiwan Shanghui*) takes a much milder stand. Due to economic and business interests, it maintains a lukewarm relationship with the Nationalist government. It also participates in some of the activities sponsored by the Chinese communities, such as the celebration of the National Day of the Nationalist government. Other organizations, such as the Taiwanese Tennis Association (*Taiwan Wangqiu Xiehui*) and the Taiwanese American Golf Association (*Taiwan Gaoerfuqiu Xiehui*), are associations based solely on common interests in sports and appear to maintain no special political stand.

San Diego Chinese American Science and Engineering Association

The number of Chinese American professionals rapidly increased in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and a professional society to provide opportunities for people with the same ethnic and professional backgrounds to meet and exchange ideas and information was formed. The San Diego Chinese American Scientists and Engineers Association (*Shengdiyage Zhonghua Kegong Lianyihui*, hereafter SDCASEA) is the first and the biggest organization in San Diego established by Chinese immigrants from Taiwan.

When it was established in 1983, the founders asked the Qingnian Fudao Weiyuanhui (Youth Commission) of the Taiwanese government for help. They received financial support (several thousand dollars a year) from Qingnian Fudao Weiyuanhui until the new president rejected the grant-in-aid in 1997 to maintain neutrality.³³⁾

SDCSEA was registered as a nonprofit mutual benefit corporation under California law. The main activities of the Association include an annual convention, quarterly seminars, and a summer picnic. Over ninety percent of its members are immigrants from Taiwan. Many of them were born in mainland China and moved to Taiwan with the Nationalist government when the People's Republic of China was established in 1949. The main language of the Association is Mandarin.

Four years ago, the SDCSEA was renamed the San Diego Chinese American Science and Engineering Association to broaden its membership. The programs sponsored by the SDCSEA have gradually shifted from very technical ones to broader subjects, such as social issues, art, history, and so on. This shift reflects not only the general membership's interests, but also their professional backgrounds.

In 1989 two active members initiated the SDCSEA Scholarship. They contributed the seed money to begin a program to offer scholastic awards to college-bound high school seniors who have excellent academic and extracurricular records. Two scholarships of two hundred and fifty dollars each were restricted to the children of SDCSEA members. Later, as many members responded with generous donations to expand the program, two more scholarships were reserved especially for students of Chinese descent whose parents are not SDCSEA members.³⁴⁾

The SDCSEA scholarship is aimed at students of Chinese descent who have excellent academic records. It is highly regarded. However, it was found that most of the winners were from well-to-do families. A need-based scholarship was initiated in 1998 to help students who face financial difficulties. Two scholarships of one thousand dollars each are presented to students (high school students as well as college students) needing tuition assistance based on recommendations from community members.³⁵⁾ There are now six scholarships altogether.

San Diego Women's League

The Professional Women's League started in 1992 as a chapter of the Los Angeles based Chinese Professional Women's League, which was founded by the wife of the Director General of Taiwan's North American Coordination Council in Los Angeles. When the Director General left Los Angeles in 1994, the Women's League lost its leader and was adjourned. However, the members of the San Diego chapter wished to continue their activities. The chapter became an independent organization and was renamed the San Diego Women's League (*Shengdiyage Huayi Funu Lianmeng*) to broaden its range of membership.³⁶⁾ Most of the League's members are immigrants from Taiwan. Because of their common background, many members are also members of SDCSEA as well.

The main activities of San Diego Women's League are quarterly seminars and lectures. Mandarin is the main language for most activities: English is used only when the guest speaker's native language is English.

Friends of the New Party

Dissatisfied with the ambiguous attitude of the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) towards the Taiwanese independence movement, a group of Kuomintang dissidents founded the New Party in 1993. They urged democratization and reform in the party. The New Party advocates that Taiwan is a part of China, and stresses nationalism. San Diego's Friends of the New Party (*Xindang Zhi You Hui*) has no active members except for two representatives, because many of its supporters do not want to relinquish their membership in the Nationalist Party. It participates in most of the important Chinese community activities. It also sponsors the annual tour of North America by the New Party, and political speeches.³⁷⁾

To commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Nanking Massacre, Friends of the New Party initiated the Historical Facts Preservation Society of the War of Resistance Against Japan. The Society put up a successful photo exhibition at the San Diego Chinese Academy, one of the Chinese schools. This gained the support of other community organizations and won praise, not only from Chinese community members, but from other ethnic groups as well.

2.5 Organizations for New Immigrants From Mainland China

The "Open Door" policy that was started in China in 1979 paved the way for mainland Chinese to immigrate abroad. A large number of Chinese from mainland China have immigrated to San Diego since the beginning of the 1980s. Many of them came as students and chose to stay after their graduation. Because of differences in language and cultural background, this new group of immigrants seldom associated with established community organizations. Instead, they joined existing professional organizations in their academic fields or started new organizations among themselves to serve their own cultural and social needs.

San Diego Chinese Association

San Diego's first organization for new immigrants from mainland China, the San Diego Chinese Association (*Shengdiyage Zhongguoren Xiehui*), was founded March 7, 1993. It is a non-political and non-profit organization "devoted to the matters pertinent to the American Chinese at San Diego County."³⁸⁾ Its objectives include: community socialization, assisting its members to adapt to American society, ensuring the legal rights and privileges of its members, and introducing to and providing its members with opportunities for development. This Association also regards it as its obligation to promote Chinese culture; to facilitate cultural, academic, scientific and business exchange between China and America; and to strengthen the unity among local Chinese communities.³⁹⁾

There were 314 members (not including their family members) in the first directory. There are now over five hundred members. Most members have Master's or Doctoral degrees.⁴⁰⁾ In 1995, the Association organized a celebration meeting for the National Day of the People's Republic of China. It has since become a tradition of the Association. Over one thousand community members, old-timers as well as new immigrants, attend these celebrations. The Association also organizes many activities in conjunction with

other community organizations. For example, they helped organize commemorative activities for the fiftieth anniversary of victory in the War of Resistance Against Japan, a welcome party for the first visit of Chinese warships to San Diego, and a celebration party for Hong Kong's return to China.

U.S. - China Entrepreneurial Association

Many new immigrants from mainland China are professionals in the fields of science and technology. Some have their own firms in high-tech fields, such as biotechnology and the computer industry. They, therefore, are willing to serve as a bridge between the United States and China for the exchange of science, technology, and trade. The U.S.-China Entrepreneurial Association (*Meizhong Keshanghui*) was established in 1995 for members who are interested in the exchange activities.

Besides participating in important community events and activities, the members of the U.S.-China Entrepreneurial Association play an important role in projects to introduce technology and investment from the United States to China and host visiting groups from varied areas of China.

There are more than half a dozen organizations organized by mainland Chinese immigrants in all. Among them are the district associations, such as the Chongqing Association (*Chongqing Tongxianghui*), the Great Southwest Association (*Da Xi'nan Tongxianghui*), and the Overseas Shandongese Association (*Haiwai Shandongren Lianyihui*), and associations related to schools and universities, such as the UCSD Chinese Students and Scholars Association (*UCSD Zhongguo Xuesheng Xuezhe Lianyihui*), SDSU Chinese Students Association (*SDSU Zhongguo Xueshenghui*), and the San Diego Beijing University Alumni Association (*Shengdiyage Beijing Daxue Xiaoyouhui*).

2.6 Chinese Historical Society and Other Organizations

If traditional Chinese overseas community organizations are based on kinship, regional affiliation, political interests, occupation and trade, the community organizations established within the last two decades represent a trend toward diversification. Among more than fifty organizations in San Diego's Chinese American communities, there are varied types of new organizations that cut across national, geographical, and business-interest boundaries.

Chinese Historical Society of Greater San Diego and Baja California

In 1984, the Grand Horton Hotel bought Bing Gung Tang's building. The Hotel decided to open a small exhibition room for Chinese artifacts to compensate for the loss of the old Chinese building. This became the springboard for some concerned Chinese Americans to establish a Chinese historical society to bring together people interested in preserving the history of the Chinese in San Diego and to promote better appreciation of Chinese American heritage.

On June 3, 1986 the Chinese Historical Society of Greater San Diego and Baja California (*Shengdiyage Lishi Bowuguan Xiehui*) was registered under the State of California's Nonprofit Public Benefit Corporation Law for charitable purposes.⁴¹⁾ The specific aim was to operate an organization which emphasized the historical, scientific,

literary, and educational contributions and influences of people of Chinese decent in the Greater San Diego and Baja California region.

The Society completed its first exhibition, "In Search For Golden Mountain: Photographic History of San Diego Chinese Americans" in 1991. Having no exhibition room, some of the members carried the exhibit boards around to schools, universities, churches, museums, and wherever there was a request for the exhibition. Meanwhile, the Society spared no effort to save the historical Chinese Mission building and finally converted it into the San Diego Chinese Historical Museum. The mission of the Chinese Historical Museum is to provide an avenue for sharing the Chinese American experience with fellow Americans and other interested people. This experience includes the rich heritage of the Chinese immigrants and the contributions of people of Chinese decent throughout history.

San Diego Chinese Art Society

The San Diego Chinese Art Society (*Shengdiyage Zhonghua Yishu Xiehui*) was established in 1991 and registered as a non-profit organization under California law. It started from a salon-style meeting among artists and individuals interested in art. Most of the members of the first group were immigrants from Taiwan. They invited artists from Taiwan and mainland China to share their interests and to enjoy their works. Later, as the group expanded, Chinese immigrants from the mainland, and a few Caucasians joined the Society. The common language of the society is English due to the varied backgrounds of its members.

The Society now has about fifty regular members. It organizes special lectures every other month and sponsors large-scale concerts or art exhibitions twice a year. The concerts and exhibitions are well known in the communities for their high level and their quality, and they attract many community members from different backgrounds and different groups.

Lien Hwa Chinese Music Society

The Lien Hwa Chinese Music Society (*Lian Hua Yinyueshe*) was established in 1987 by a group of Cantonese music fans. Members practice music regularly and sponsor small-scale concerts on traditional Chinese festival days, such as the Chinese New Year, Moon Festival, or the Dragon Boat Festival. They also volunteer to give concerts for elderly community members.

Other organizations are the Chinese Buddhist Association (*Foguang Hui*) for those who interested in Buddhism; the San Diego Yan Tai Friendship Society and Taichung Sister City Society, which work on exchange activities between the city of San Diego and its sister cities, Yan Tai and Taichung; U.S.-China Peoples Friendship Association, a grass-roots organization that seeks to create a bridge between the United States and China; and the San Diego Chinese Golf Club, which seeks to promote interest in the sport of and the spirit of golf among its members.

III. Conclusion: Changes in Chinese American Community Organizations

The organizations of the Chinese American communities in San Diego have changed

in size, make-up, and aim. While the organizations of ethnic Chinese refugees from Indo-China still very much resemble traditional Chinese overseas community organizations, most organizations in today's San Diego Chinese communities are more diversified in nature. The many new organizations represent the great diversity that came to exist in the Chinese American population. This diversity has brought new energy to the San Diego community, but it is also a source of conflict as the variety of communities expand and as the number of generations active within each community grows. This conflict shapes the way the contemporary Chinese American communities have come to exist.⁴²⁾ In addition to occasional increased friction we can also see five areas of change within the organizations. These are diversity, structure, function, political orientation, and international networking.

Diverse Nature

The traditional form of organizations can be found in the numerous organizations based on region of origin, such as the Fukienese Association of San Diego, the Taiwanese Association, and the Chongqing Association, but most organizations are formed in ways different from the traditional community organizations. For example, there are those based on professions, such as the San Diego Chinese American Science and Engineering Association, and the U.S.-China Entrepreneurial Association. And, there are those based on common interests in sports or arts, such as the Taiwanese Tennis Association, the San Diego Chinese Art Society, and the Lien Hwa Chinese Music Society. Others are based on religions, such as the Chinese Buddhist Association, or the various Chinese Churches; on common political interests, such as the Friends of the New Party. Finally, there are those that clearly cut across regional divides, such as the Historical Society.

Structural Changes

The traditional community organizations used to be led by community leaders, mostly those who wielded comparatively more economic power. The social organizations today have structurally shifted to democratically elected boards of directors and are more open than before.

Functional Changes

Traditional community organizations aimed to protect the economic interests of Chinese immigrants and to perform certain charitable and social functions for fellow countrymen living away from home. In particular, they helped recent immigrants adjust to their new surroundings by providing shelter, jobs, and, in some cases, English lessons. Now most community organizations perform the dual roles of maintaining ethnic identity, which is relatively new, and helping the members enter the larger society. Many now strive to help members maintain a sense of ethnic identity through Chinese language classes, sponsorship of Chinese festivals and arts projects, and the like. Or, as in the case of the Historical Museum, they seek to create a sense of Chinese ethnic identity by cutting across regional identification boundaries and putting forth presentations based on a unified sense of Chinese ethnicity (such as calligraphy or painting expositions). On the hand, instead of serving as support centers for new

immigrants by providing jobs, training, language classes, loans and the like, community organizations now operate mostly as social clubs or provide on a limited basis for the needs of the elderly. Some, focused on business, also provide the opportunity for creating networks to support business opportunities, but even these do not exert the influence they once did. With the exception of the five organizations of the VCL communities, they also have come to represent broader communities.

Fading Political Color

Chinese community organizations used to play an important role in China's political struggles. They were also strongly influenced by the changes of China's political affairs. The isolation of Taiwan and mainland also caused great schisms among Chinese American community organizations. With the changes in the world situation, and especially in the relationship between the both sides of the Taiwan Straits, today most organizations claim to be politically neutral. If anything, there is a growing call for greater political representation and action within the United States.

International Network

Before World War II, there were no worldwide ethnic Chinese organizations. Since the 1960s, and especially after the 1980s, more and more organizations with international networks developed. For example, organizations such as the World Federation of Chinese Organizations from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, and The World Federation of Hakka Chorng Jeng Association link local communities to worldwide ethnic Chinese networks. It remains to be seen what effect these networks will have on the development of Chinese American communities. There is clear evidence, however, that they can serve to increase the visibility and position of Chinese Americans abroad.

Taken together these five changes (diversity, structure, function, political orientation, and international networking) show the ongoing transformation of the nature of Chinese American community organizations. If we are to better understand the changes going on in Chinese American community organizations, we cannot rely merely on studies of past organizations that depend predominantly on evidence gathered in Chinatown communities, rather we need to expand our investigations to include non-Chinatown communities and the great variety of organizations that have developed within them over the last several decades.

Notes

- *) This essay is based on work conducted while the author was Professor Shiba Yoshinobu's Ph.D. student at ICU. The author would like to thank Professor Shiba for his support and guidance.
- 1) Fang Xiongpu and Xu Zhenli, *Haiwai Qiaotuan Xunzong* (Searching for the Track of Chinese Overseas Organizations) (Beijing: Zhongguo Huaqiao Chubanshe, 1995), 1; Li Minghuan, *Dangdai Haiwai Huaren Shetuan Yanjiu* (A Study of the Contemporary Overseas Ethnic Chinese Organizations) (Xiamen: Xiamen Daixue Chubanshe, 1995), 1.
- 2) See Li Minghuan, 5. The data do not give a full picture of all Chinese overseas community organizations, since they are based on the numbers of organizations registered with Taiwan's government. Many organizations are, thus, out of the picture.
- 3) The literary meaning of Huiguan is "meeting hall." The word occurred during Yongle period (1403-

- 142) of Ming dynasty. The first recorded Huiguan is the Wuhu Huiguan in Beijing.
- 4) Him Mark Lai, *Cong Huaqiao Dao Huaren* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., Ltd, 1992), 29.
 - 5) Rose Hum Lee, *The Chinese in the United States of America* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), 144-46.
 - 6) Lai, *Cong Huaqiao Dao Huaren*, 33; Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 63-65; Melford S. Weiss, *Valley City: A Chinese Community in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1974), 35-37.
 - 7) Lee, *The Chinese in the United States of America*, 67.
 - 8) Weiss, *Valley City: A Chinese Community in America*, 38.
 - 9) See Stanford M. Lyman, "The Structure of Chinese Society in Nineteenth-Century America," Ph. D. Dissertation, (University of California, Berkeley, 1961).
 - 10) Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History*, 67.
 - 11) Lyman, "The Structure of Chinese Society in Nineteenth-Century America," 251.
 - 12) Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History*, 65.
 - 13) Lee, *The Chinese in the United States of America*, 148.
 - 14) Karl Fung, *The Dragon Pilgrims: A Historical Study of A Chinese-American Church* (San Diego, California: Providence Press, 1989), 48.
 - 15) Ibid., 49.
 - 16) *San Diego Union*, (January 10, 1888) 5: 4.
 - 17) Lawrence A. Palinkas, *Rhetoric and Religious Experience: The Discourse of Immigrant Chinese Churches* (Fairfax, Virginia: George Mason University Press, 1989), 21.
 - 18) Elizabeth C. MacPhail, "San Diego's Chinese Mission," *Journal of San Diego History* 23, no. 2 (1977), 11-14; Fung, *The Dragon Pilgrims*, 23-26; Palinkas, *Rhetoric and Religious Experience*, 21-22.
 - 19) Centennial Book Committee, *Centennial Celebration: One Hundred Years of Leadership and Service* (San Diego, California: Chinese Community Church, 1985), 20.
 - 20) Interview, July 29, 1996; interview, August 15, 1996.
 - 21) Lai, *Cong Huaqiao Dao Huaren*, 39-40.
 - 22) Karl Fung, 49.
 - 23) See articles filed by the Secretary of State of California on April 6, 1997.
 - 24) Interview, August 16, 1997; interview, August 23, 1997; interview, August 9, 1998.
 - 25) Since most of the old-timers and many native-born Chinese Americans speaks Cantonese, the common language of CCBA is English and Cantonese.
 - 26) Interview, August 19, 1997.
 - 27) Interview, July 18, 1998; interview July 24, 1998.
 - 28) Tianhou, Queen of Heaven, or Mazu, was originally a mortal girl named Lin Mo, who was alleged to have lived during the tenth century. She became the deity protecting seafarers, and further, became the most important deity among ethnic Chinese overseas. See Zhou Nanjing and others eds., *Shiji Huaqiao Huaren Cidian* (Dictionary of Overseas Chinese) (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 1991), 336.
 - 29) Interview, July 18, 1998; interview, July 27, 1998.
 - 30) There were some conflicts between the two groups in the early period, but since the world situation (including the situation regarding both Taiwan and mainland China) has changed a great deal, both Associations' political tendencies have gradually changed. They are now often working together to represent the whole community. Interview, August 25, 1997; interview, December 18, 1997; interview, July 18, 1998.
 - 31) Guanyin, Avalokitesvara, the Goddess of Mercy in Buddhism.
 - 32) Several different terms are used by the immigrants to describe themselves: Chinese, Taiwanese, Chinese from Taiwan, Taiwanese as well as Chinese.
 - 33) Interview, August 15, 1997; interview, July 21, 1998; interview, August 13, 1998.
 - 34) Interview, July 21, 1998; interview, August 13, 1998.
 - 35) Interview, July 11, 1998; interview, August 13, 1998.
 - 36) Interview, August 15, 1997.
 - 37) Interview, August 25, 1997; interview, July 22, 1998.

- 38) See *San Diego Chinese Association Directory*.
- 39) Ibid.
- 40) Interview, July 19, 1997; interview, July 23, 1997
- 41) Baja California is home to a large Chinese Mexican population. In recognition of this, and the close ties between San Diego and Mexico, the Society chose to include Baja California in its name. There, however, has been little effort since its inception to further ties with the Chinese Mexican community. The history of Chinese in Mexico is another subject that has been mostly overlooked by scholars in the United States.
- 42) See Zeng Ying, "The Changing Structure of Chinese American Communities: Conflict and Cooperation in San Diego," *Asian Culture* 24, June (2000), 26-43.