



# CHINESE HOSPITAL: AN INSTITUTION OF, FOR, AND BY THE CHINESE COMMUNITY

By H. M. LAI

People call it "The Chinese Hospital" in English, but in Chinese it is more appropriately known as Tung Wah Yi Yuen (東華醫院), short for "Hospital for the Kwangtung Chinese" (廣東華人醫院).

This unique Chinatown institution was established by the Chinese in America, through their own efforts, to serve the Chinese in America. Ever since its opening almost half a century ago, thousands of Chinatown residents, and out-of-towners as well, have passed through its doors seeking medical treatment. Many Chinese-Americans have first seen the light of day in its maternity wards.

The hospital, which officially opened its doors 48 years ago, did not come into being overnight; rather, it was the logical end product of long decades of difficult struggles by the Chinese in America.

## INITIAL ATTEMPTS

When the Chinese first immigrated into this country during the 19th century, they were the target of much discrimination and racial prejudice. In the field of medical care, governmental authorities were totally disinterested in providing clinics or hospitals for their welfare. Most public or private hospitals refused to accept Chinese as patients. Also, such institutions were located at a distance from Chinatown. Thus to go to a hospital, a Chinese would have to venture out of the protective shelter of Chinatown and run the risk of exposing himself to rock-throwing attacks, beatings, or robberies by hoodlums.

Even if he should arrive at the hospital unscathed, the average Chinese did not know much English and thus could not communicate with American doctors. Moreover, in those early years, most Chinese had little understanding of, and less faith in, Western medicine. Because of these factors, the Chinese community was forced to establish its own medical care units.

## DISTRICT COMPANIES

Shortly after their arrival in California, district associations (會館) or companies were formed among the Chinese for social control, protection, and charitable activities. As early as the 1850s, each district association established buildings used as hotels and "hospitals" for their own constituents. These so-called "Halls of Great Peace" (太平房) provided only minimal services, and it did not take much deep thought to realize that such health facilities were inadequate.

Some progressive-minded Chinatown leaders early recognized the need for better-equipped and better-organized health institutions. As early as the mid-1870s, the directors of the Chinese Six Companies petitioned the Chinese minister in Washington for permission to establish a Chinese Hospital (中華醫院). In taking this action, they were probably inspired in part by the recent suc-

cessful opening of the Tung Wah Hospital (東華醫院) in Hong Kong.

## TUNG WAH HOSPITAL

The Tung Wah Hospital was established by Hong Kong Chinese merchants in 1872 to make medical treatment available to the Chinese population. Many of its directors came from business firms with close financial and personal relations with their overseas compatriots. Thus from the beginning it also provided services for Chinese abroad.

For many years, the Hong Kong hospital maintained a "Coffin Home" (東華義莊) as a temporary depository for coffins of dead Chinese shipped from abroad. The hospital then trans-

For many years, the Hong Kong hospital maintained a "Coffin Home" as a temporary depository for coffins of dead Chinese shipped from abroad.

shipped these on to the dead person's family or relatives in China.

Besides this, the Tung Wah Hospital customarily kept two to three empty coffins (金山棺) on board ships sailing between Hong Kong and the Americas, to be used in the event some Chinese passengers should pass away during the voyages.

The activities of the hospital extended also into other areas. For example, rescued slave girls kidnapped in China and sold in America were shipped back to the Hong Kong hospital to be reunited with their families or relations. Failing this, the hospital would then endeavor to find a suitable husband for the girl.

In times past, overseas Chinese have contributed generously to the support of the institution. Similarly, the Tung Wah Hospital reciprocated by helping to raise funds in Hong Kong for charitable undertakings among the Chinese abroad.

## BUILDING ATTEMPTS

But the wheels of progress turned slowly, and it was not until a decade later that the San Francisco Chinese consul general and the presidents of the Chinese Six Companies were able to complete plans to the proposed facility, using the Hong Kong Tung Wah Hospital as a model.

The Chinese raised a sum of money and purchased a parcel of land in the southern outskirts of the city. Construction was about to begin when the authorities stepped in and forbade further proceedings on the grounds that the promoters only intended to use "objectionable" Chinese systems of medical treatment!

The next attempt came in 1899 when a group of 21, including both Chinese and whites, incorporated as the Chinese Hospital of San Francisco. The hospital and dispensary, known as the "Yan Chai I Yun" (仁濟醫院), was to be located in the vicinity of Chinatown. Only Western medicine was to be practiced. However, this project apparently did not proceed further, perhaps because

Western medical practice was too radical an innovation for the Chinese to accept at that time.

## TUNG WAH DISPENSARY

Instead, about a year later, on February 6, 1900, another institution opened its doors to serve the health needs of the Chinese community. A new dispensary was established under the leadership of Chinese Consul-General Ho Yow (何佑) and the Chinese Six Companies. Called the Tung Wah Yi Kuk (東華醫局) in Chinese, it was the namesake of the Tung Wah Hospital of Hong Kong.

The facility was first located at 828 Sacramento St. (approximately the site of the present Chinese Playground). After the 1906 fire and earthquake, it moved to 14

Trenton St. (behind the present site of Chinese Hospital).

An interesting fact is that patients of the dispensary had a choice of consulting either Western doctors or Chinese herbalists; for at that time, U.S. Chinese were still in a transition stage in their acceptance of Western medicine. This Tung Wah Dispensary, then, was the first community-estab-

lished medical institution among the U.S. Chinese and the forerunner of the Chinese Hospital.

## HOSPITAL PLANNING

The dispensary served the Chinese well for almost two decades. But housed in a small 25- by 60-foot building, the facility was inadequate for the needs of the community. Around the end of the second decade, the Six Companies headed a drive to raise money for expansion and remodeling of the institution. However, the \$20,000 raised fell short of the required amount. Moreover, no land was available adjacent to the Dispensary and the plans had to be shelved temporarily.

In 1920, a parcel of land near the Dispensary was acquired. Now at last perhaps the renovation could be realized, and the Six Companies convened a meeting of 15 representative community organizations to make more concrete plans.

Certain community leaders with vision pushed a bold proposition—why not establish a modern hos-

pital? This put the situation in a new light.

It was a greater undertaking than had at first been envisioned and would require more thorough planning and more funds than were then available. Also, at that time, donations for a great drought and famine in China were already straining the slender financial resources of the Chinese community. Hence, the project was again tabled.

## 15 ORGANIZATIONS

In October 1922, the representatives from the same 15 community organizations reconvened. These groups represented a rather broad spectrum in the community as it was constituted at the time. Heading the list and generally speaking for the community were the Chinese Six Companies (中華總會館) and its seven component district associations (寧陽, 肇慶, 合和, 岡州, 陽和, 三邑人和).

Chinese business interests were represented by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce (中華商會). The Chinese American Citizens Alliance (同源會) spoke for the growing number of native-borns. Chinese Christians found their spokesmen in the Chinese Christian Union (華人基督



The Chinese Dispensary in the early 1900s.

教聯會) and the Chinese Young Men's Christian Association (基督教男青年會). The list was completed with delegates from the three largest political forces then in Chinatown: the Chinese Nationalist Party (國民黨, Kuomintang); the Constitutionalist Party (憲政黨); and the Chee Kung Tong (致公堂, Triads). These 15 organizations became the founding members and today each has a seat on the Hospital Board of Trustees.

The assembled made a bold decision: Forget the expansion of the Dispensary; go all out to build a new hospital. The hospital will be named the Chinese Hospital or "Tung Wah Yi Yuen" (東華醫院). \$200,000 to be raised by donations will defray construction and equipment costs. In August 1923, the lot where the hospital now stands was bought for \$10,500.

## COOPERATIVE SPIRIT

At this time, the Alien Land

Laws banned alien Asians from buying real property. However, native-borns were eligible, and three Chinese-Americans on the hospital planning committee allowed their names to be used on the property deeds and on the various other necessary licenses, permits and legal documents to conform to the law. Such was the cooperative spirit exhibited in the community in those days.

Rev. Chan Lok Shang (陳樂生) was the sparkplug of the project; therefore, he was elected to lead the fund drive. By early 1923 the campaign was in full swing. In spite of the limited financial resources of the Chinese in America, the drive was a great success. In the Bay Area alone, where about 20,000 Chinese dwelt, \$145,000 was raised! Money flowed in from all parts of the country and even from Hong Kong and Shanghai. By the beginning of 1925, the goal of \$200,000 had been reached.

It should be noted that throughout this period practically all in the community were in support of the enterprise. There was little petty bickering. There was certainly no fear that the funding may have been inadequate. Everyone knew that here was a job to be done, and all were ready to help overcome difficulties as they cropped up.

## OUTSIDE OPPOSITION

The only vocal opposition came from outside the community. The site was on the fringes of Chinatown at that period. Several whites in the neighborhood petitioned the Board of Supervisors, declaring that the proposed hospital was not within the boundaries of Chinatown. They feared that the proximity of the facility would spread communicable diseases. Also, they argued, after the Chinese moved in, real estate values in the surrounding area would depreciate. However, the Chinese Hospital planners presented their case effectively and the Board of Supervisors finally gave the go-ahead signal after a public hearing.

Construction began in 1924 and was completed a year later. On April 18, 1925, Chinese Hospital held its grand opening before a proud Chinese community. Week-long festivities accompanied the opening. Indeed Chinatown had a right to celebrate; for here was a modern hospital the Chinese community could call its very own. It was a facility comparable to the best in the country.

## HARD TIMES

After the opening of the new hospital, the old Dispensary building was dedicated completely to the Chinese medical department; for at that time, many Chinese still preferred the tried and true traditional practices of their native land. Thus both institutions carried on as before, administering to the poor and sick free of charge.

Within six months after the start of operations, the donated funds were exhausted. Many staff members resigned, disgruntled because of the alleged low remuneration. The Chinese Six Companies and

(continued on page 7)



Continued from page 6

Community Chest had to donate money toward the hospital's operating expenses. The Hong Kong Tung Wah Hospital and the Bank of Canton also came through with sums earmarked for purchasing income property to help fund hospital operations.

In 1928, the Chinese Six Companies organized a committee to take care of hospital maintenance. A goodwill lion dance sponsored by this committee during Chinese New Year in 1929 was so successful in raising funds that this was adopted as an annual event to solicit money to support the hospital.

The fledgling hospital was learning to stand on its own; but the depression of the 1930s nearly prostrated it again. Donations to the hospital declined sharply. Because of the hard times, many patients delayed payment of bills or did not pay at all. Concurrently, Chinese in America were also donating huge sums to help the motherland fend off Japanese aggression, thus reducing even further potential sources of funds.

PROSPEROUS TIMES

World War II brought an end to the Great Depression. Wartime prosperity also brought better times to the hospital, as income from rental properties and the hospital increased. In March 1941, the hospital finally was cleared of all debts, and by 1945 it had even accumulated a \$23,000 surplus in its books, for the first time in its history. In subsequent years, additional rental properties were purchased to further strengthen the hospital's financial position.

Repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Laws and the entrance of thousands of Chinese war brides made the hospital even busier as Chinatown experienced a population explosion and expectant mothers practically had to stand in line as they awaited their turns to enter the hospital's maternity ward. These indeed were prosperous times for the institution. The hospital's future seemed assured.

PRESENT PROBLEMS

More than two decades have passed since the hospital's newly found "affluence." Today, payments from medical insurance carriers and patients just about meet the hospital's day-to-day operating expenses. Capital expenditures and improvements, however, still depend on money derived from other sources. In recent years, approximately half of this money is provided by rents collected from 12 pieces of real property owned by the Chinese Hospital Foundation. A quarter comes from gifts and donations, and an eighth from the annual Chinese New Year lion dances and scroll sales.

For the last two decades the hospital, as a facility, has not been able to keep up with the latest developments in modern practice. A 1962 report (the Anderson Report) pointed out major deficiencies in the physical plant, the administration, and the medical staff organization of the institution. It could not even meet the minimum standards set by the Federal Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals (JCAH).

Also, a study by the State Engineer's office has revealed that the hospital does not meet 1947 safety standards for earthquake and fire. And according to the Bay Area Comprehensive Health Council

master plan, all such non-conforming hospital facilities will be phased out in San Francisco before the end of the 1970s.

What was a modern hospital in 1925 has become substandard. Time has left her behind. However, a modernization program will require major financial outlays, and while a hospital could be planned, constructed, and equipped for a quarter of a million dollars back in 1925, today that sum is barely enough to pay the architect's fee for the recently proposed outpatient facility!

ANACHRONISTIC BOARD

To face these problems is a hospital board of trustees, anachronistic in structure. It was approximately representative of the community's composition when it was

For the last two decades, the hospital has not been able to keep up with the latest developments in modern practice.

set up half a century ago; however, political and socioeconomic relations have changed drastically in the intervening years. New groupings have arisen, reflecting changed conditions in the community. On the other hand, some of the old organizations are practically moribund and of no significance as far as their influence on Chinatown society is concerned.

Sometimes it is even questionable whether the trustees themselves are representing their organizations, as can be seen in the recent confused voting on the proposed outpatient clinic. Representatives from some organizations cast their votes contrary to the expressed wishes of their own board of directors, as if these individuals represented only themselves! Also, the events of the past few months have uncovered the fact that some trustees are not even familiar with the complex issues they are voting on; and what's more, they are unwilling to learn.

It is clear that some change must be made in this area to make the board more representative and knowledgeable, if the hospital is to be a genuine community-run institution.

NUMBERED DAYS

In 1968, the hospital was finally

accredited by JCAH. Other small improvements have also been made. A plan was presented in 1966 to modernize the hospital; however, since the demise of this plan in 1970 because of failure to obtain Hill-Burton funding, there has been little or no long-range planning.

Many on the board of trustees appear to be mesmerized into a passive acceptance of the status quo, with a complacent attitude that if a problem is ignored, it will somehow go away. In the meantime, the hospital's days are numbered.

The Chinese Hospital fills a need in the Chinese community. It has served the people well for almost five decades. But it cannot continue to do so for too many more

years without major changes. Some long-range goals are needed.

The need now is for men of vision to provide forward-looking leadership in this direction, not for men who will stoop to engage in petty personal politics to the detriment of the common good. The need is for men who will work for the benefit of the community, not for those who will seek positions on the hospital board for status, and yet be unwilling to do the work required to earn those positions.

Time is rapidly running out. The Chinese community has met challenges before and has overcome them. Can this be done again for Chinese Hospital?

(Mr. H. M. Lai is scheduled to speak on the history of Chinese Hospital at a "Chinese Hospital Forum" January 18, 1 p.m., at the Senior Citizens Center, 832 Kearny St. The entire lecture will be conducted in Chinese and is open to the public. Also on the agenda will be a discussion on the outpatient clinic, services of the hospital, and community input in the operation of the hospital. Future forums on the same topic in English are being planned —Ed.)

HOSPITAL BOARD

(continued from page 1)

the matter up at the next Sam Yup meeting. After he departed, Hum called for a vote to elect a new chairman. When chairman Louie refused, Hum questioned his right to be chairman, at which point Louie took a swing at him and narrowly missed. With five board members physically restraining him, Louie finally closed the meeting.

LEGAL OPINION

According to Ronald Wong, staff attorney with Neighborhood Legal Assistance Foundation, the legal opinion as to whether Young can be ousted from his board seat by Sam Yup will be rendered by the presiding judge of the municipal court at City Hall January 22 at 10 a.m.

A temporary restraining order

preventing Sam Yup from ousting Young on grounds of violation of the association's by-laws was served to president Quock Friday evening. The association violated its by-laws when it did not file a formal complaint and did not have the full board review the case before ousting Young, said Wong.

Young is on welfare and therefore is eligible for legal aid from Neighborhood Legal Assistance.

Meanwhile, Sam Yup met Saturday, made formal charges against Young for not voting according to the association's wishes on hospital matters, and unanimously voted to have him removed from his position on the hospital board.

Asked how this recent, speedy action would affect the upcoming court suit, Attorney Ronald Wong replied that the judge will have to decide that January 22. —J.Y.

CHILDREN TO MARCH IN NEW YEAR PARADE

OAKLAND — The Chinese Year of the Tiger, 4672, will be welcomed January 26 in a celebration by hundreds of costumed young people marching in the annual Children's Chinese New Year Parade here.

And to reign over the colorful event, a princess will be crowned this week in ceremonies at the Lincoln elementary school in Oakland's Chinatown. The parade princess and two honor maids traditionally are selected in a contest among the school's first through third grade girls of Chinese descent.

The children's parade, which annually attracts close to a thousand young marchers, will be sponsored for the seventh year by the Lincoln Square Recreation Center Advisory Council and the Oakland Parks and Recreation Department.

Parade entries are still being accepted at the Lincoln Square Recreation Center, 11th and Alice streets.

The parade will start at 2 p.m. at the center and proceed through Oakland Chinatown to Jack London Square, where community dignitaries will occupy a reviewing stand.

S.F. MUSEUM OF ART FEATURES 25 ARTISTS

The San Francisco Museum of Art, Van Ness at McAllister, will be featuring drawings by 25 artists through March 3. This is the second of two graphics exhibitions presented by the Museum Intercommunity Exchange, a grant-supported program of the museum.

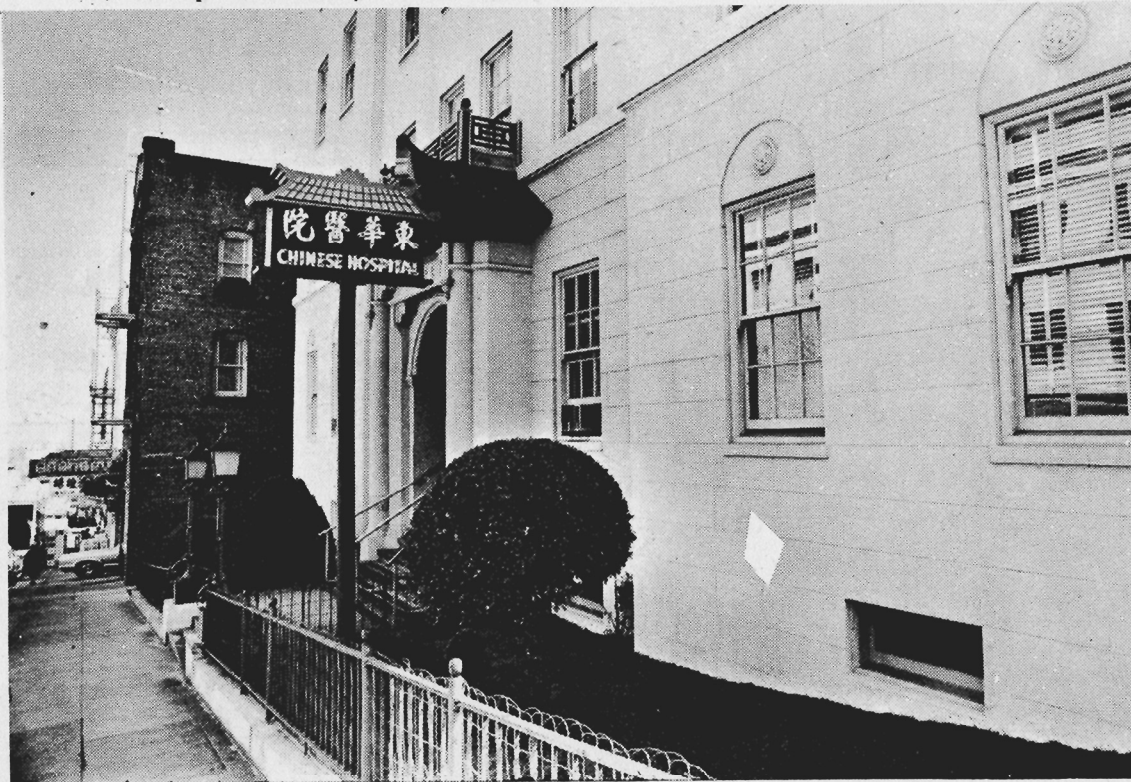
Among the featured artists are Charles Valoroso, Louvina Wong and Wayne Young. Museum hours are Tuesdays through Fridays from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The exhibition is free.

WANTED

Advertising assistant. Fantastic commissions. Call East/West, 758 Commercial St., 94108, 7813194.

ATTENTION! ADVERTISERS

Put a New Year's greeting in our January 23 or January 30 special, biggest circulation issues. Contact our ad dept. for a special price. Let our art department set up an ad at no extra charge. Call 781-3194.



A side view of the present-day Chinese Hospital.

(Connie Hwang photo)

行文煥 F.S. LOUIE & CO. 2423 FOURTH ST. Berkeley, Calif. 94710 Complete Restaurant Dishes Tel. 843-2824 534-1101

現貨齊備 全美批發 長碟圓碟均有 不銹鋼 厚餐館碗碟 專營