



***THE HISTORY OF A
PHILIPPINE-CHINESE FAMILY***

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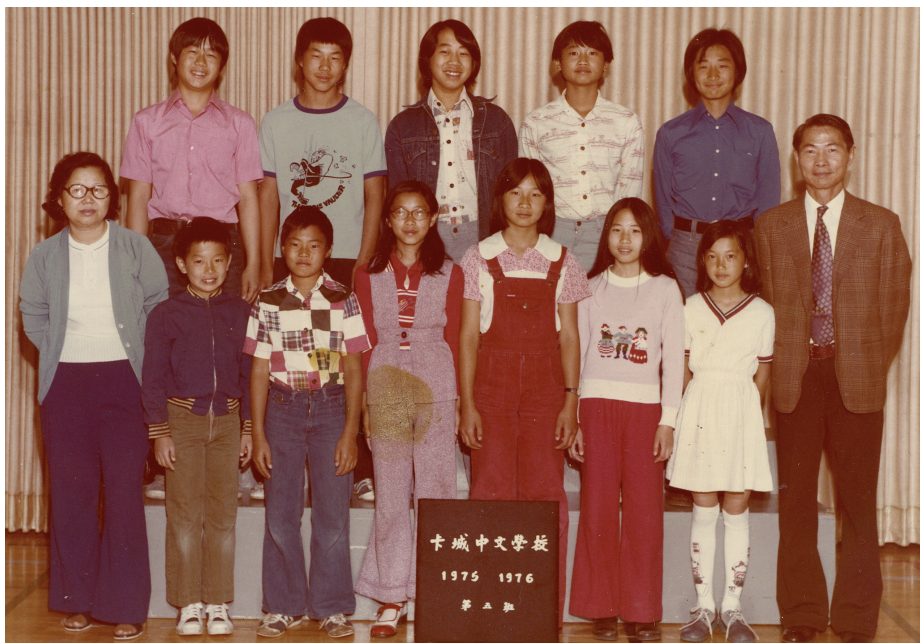
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JOSÉ'S VOLUNTEER WORK IN CANADA

José and his family emigrated to Canada in January 1973 and settled in Calgary in the summer of that year. About two years later, José began to get involved with Chinese community affairs in the city.

THE CALGARY CHINESE SCHOOL

In 1975, the Sino-Canada Culture Association and affiliated Calgary Chinese School were formed—to establish and operate a Chinese school in Calgary for the teaching of Mandarin; and to promote cultural exchanges between the Chinese and Canadian societies. In various years, José acted as the President, Vice President, and Principal of the Sino-Canada Culture Association and the Calgary Chinese School. Instruction at the school was given every Saturday morning for two hours a



José and the class he helped to teach at the Calgary Chinese School, 1976.

week, and the classes were held at the borrowed premises of a regular Calgary school. The teachers were volunteers—mainly parents of the children who attended the school. Most, but not all, of the parents involved had emigrated to Canada from Taiwan. They agreed to not let any political differences among them over support for the regimes in mainland China or Taiwan interfere with the operation of the school. José taught one of the classes at the school, and also sent his three youngest children to the school for some years, encouraging them to attend by promising to bring them to McDonald's for lunch afterwards.

Through his initial involvement in the Chinese community, José came to know K. W. Chang (Zhang Guohua 章國華), a math professor at the University of Calgary who was very active in the Chinese community. At the time, members of the Chinese community who could speak and write English with real fluency were rare. With José's ability to function in both Chinese and English at the level of a native speaker, and his community-minded outlook, he was regarded a natural potential community leader. He became a board member, and would later serve as the president, of a group called the United Calgary Chinese Association (UCCA).

In the autumn of 1982 the city authorities began talking about a plan to redevelop Chinatown. Prof. Chang asked José to help him oppose the plan. The city had put forward a land redesignation plan for Chinatown, which would permit skyscrapers to be built in Chinatown as in other parts of the downtown core. José gave a speech at the city council, stating

that by treating Chinatown as part of the rest of the downtown area without regard to its special characteristics, the proposal would lead to the destruction of Chinatown. He argued that the attachment of the Chinese to a special area of a city in Canada where they have settled is a part of the culture of the Chinese in Canada. When that special attachment is taken away, that culture is at risk of being lost. Under Canada's policy of multiculturalism, the Chinese community in Calgary has a right to maintain its cultural identity.¹⁰⁴ José emphasized that Calgary's Chinatown should remain a residential and commercial area, and that developments there should be limited to a certain height.

José and Doug Tims, a Chinese-Canadian active in Chinese community affairs, got together with officials of the city's planning department. After about a year and a half of constant meetings, they together came up with a plan to revitalize Chinatown, keeping it a distinct area of the city. The plan was to limit commercial developments in Chinatown to three stories, residential developments to twelve stories, and mixed developments to eight stories. Moreover, any new buildings constructed in Chinatown would have to have some Chinese cultural motifs. At the time, some property owners in Chinatown, including Chinese owners, were opposed to the plan. But, in the end, the proposal was passed by city council.



Wah Ying Mansion
(華英大廈),
the seniors' residence in
Calgary's Chinatown;
that

Apart from helping to preserve Chinatown as a distinct area of the city, José was also responsible for helping to tidy up the existing physical appearance of

the area. He suggested that the city authorities put up mudguards along the main street running through Chinatown, to keep the slush and mud from passing cars from splattering on sidewalks and storefronts. The mudguards were duly erected.

Also in the mid-1980s, José played an integral role in the construction of two structures that are landmarks in Calgary's Chinatown: the Wah Ying Mansion and the Calgary Chinese Cultural Center.

¹⁰⁴ In October 1971, the federal government of Canada formally adopted a policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau announced the policy with this statement: "A policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework commends itself to the government as the most suitable means of assuring the cultural freedom of Canadians. Such a policy should help break down discriminatory attitudes and cultural jealousies. National unity if it is to mean anything in the deeply personal sense, must be founded on confidence in one's own individual identity; out of this can grow respect for that of others and a willingness to share ideas, attitudes and assumptions. A vigorous policy of multiculturalism will help create this initial confidence. It can form the base of a society which is based on fair play for all." (Alberta Online Encyclopedia Website: <http://www.abheritage.ca/albertans/speeches/trudeau.html>, accessed on June 2, 2008).

THE WAH YING MANSION (華英大廈) (SENIORS' BUILDING)

José single-handedly obtained the funding for the sixteen-story Wah Ying Mansion, a senior's residence in Chinatown, located on 122 3rd Avenue S.E. This came about in the following way: In 1985, Peter Lougheed, the long-time premier of Alberta, retired from politics. Don Getty replaced him as head of the province's Conservative Party. In the run-up to the 1986 provincial elections, Getty attended a seniors' party held by the Chinese community. During that party, José sat beside him and told him that the seniors in Chinatown would like to have a building to house them. At the time, there was a government department that helped organizations to build housing for seniors. Getty promised to help. And, indeed, when Getty was elected as the premier of Alberta, he came up with the land for the seniors' building. He also managed to get matching funds from the federal government. In the end, half of the funding for the building came from the provincial government (under the Alberta Heritage Fund) and half from the federal government (under the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation). The UCCA set up an organization to run the Wah Ying Mansion. José was a director of the organization from its inception until about 1998 or 1999, when he resigned because of his increasing deafness. He still retains the privilege of free parking in the building's underground parking lot.

THE CALGARY CHINESE CULTURAL CENTER

The Calgary Chinese Cultural Center had its beginnings during the talks over the land redesignation plan for Chinatown in the early 1980s. There were two blocks of land in the downtown area between

3rd and 4th Avenue, and 1st and 2nd Street West: one owned by the company Mobil Oil, and the other by the developer Eau Claire. Mobil owned the block between 1st and 2nd Street West and 2nd and 3rd Avenue. Mobil and Eau Claire did not want these plots to be designated part of Chinatown, within which they actually lay. José and Doug Tims, representatives from Eau Claire, and the director of the city planning department and his assistant, all sat down together and engaged in discussions. José said that the Chinese community were hoping to build a cultural center and would appreciate getting the help of Mobil and Eau Claire in building it. The director of the planning department immediately came up with the idea of asking the two par-



José helping to raise funds to build the Calgary Chinese Cultural Center.



The Calgary Chinese Cultural Center

ties to each donate a piece of land for a Chinese cultural center. The city would then close off the street at that point and join the two pieces of land. One half of Mobil's block of land would not be subject to the new guidelines applying to Chinatown, while the other half would; and the same would apply with Eau Claire's block of land. With this free land as a donation, José and other leaders of the Chi-

nese community who were on the organizing committee for the construction of the Chinese Cultural Center could begin approaching people for contributions to build this center.

The largest single donations came from Henry Chow, the owner of Food City in Calgary, who donated US\$300,000; and from the Hong Kong tycoon Henry Fok. The design of the center was modeled after the Temple of Heaven in Beijing. It was Henry Fok who made this possible, thanks to his connections with the Chinese government. The Chinese government provided artisans to build the entire roof of the center in Beijing, without the use of a single nail. The roof was then disassembled and shipped to Calgary. Eighteen craftsmen, who had been involved in the restoration of the real Temple of Heaven, were sent to Calgary to reassemble the roof and also to decorate the main hall of the center with gold leaf.

The Calgary Chinese Cultural Center opened in 1992. It is located in the heart of Chinatown, and is open seven days a week. It contains a hall/gymnasium, a Chinese library, a museum, and a Chinese medicine center. It also contains several businesses, such as a restaurant, travel agency, arts and crafts store, and convenience store. It was the first Chinese cultural center in Canada, and remains the largest Chinese cultural center in North America.¹⁰⁵ As one of the most distinctive structures in Calgary, it has also become a tourist attraction.

There is little doubt that Calgary's Chinatown, as it exists today, owes a great deal to José's efforts.

¹⁰⁵ "Chinatown, Calgary," Wikipedia Website: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinatown,_Calgary, accessed on February 25, 2008.