

NORTHWEST CHINA COUNCIL NEWSLETTER



#23, October — December, 1986

CHINESE-AMERICAN HEROES AND HEROINES

Lalu Nathoy was a pioneer woman, sold into slavery upon arrival in San Francisco and eventually settling on an Idaho homestead in the late 1800's. Poon Lim was a steward aboard a British merchant ship in World War II. When a German submarine sank his ship, he alone survived, drifting the Atlantic in a raft for 133 days.

Lalu Nathoy and Poon Lim are both heroes in their own right. What makes them special in American history is that they are both Chinese.

Few historians have chronicled the contributions of ethnic minorities in America. Even fewer words have been written about their courage and bravery. The deeds of Chinese-Americans have been all but overlooked.

Writer Ruthanne Lum McCunn has changed that, creating a body of work which gives readers strong Chinese and Chinese-American heroes and heroines, Chinese-American historical sensibilities and vivid re-creations of Chinese-American realities.

On September 10, in a lecture

before the Northwest China Council, McCunn spoke about the inspiration Lалу Nathoy and Poon Lim gave her to write about their achievements in her two biographical novels, Thousand Pieces of Gold and Sole Survivor. McCunn's own personal story added to that desire to write about the experiences of Chinese-Americans.

She was raised in Hong Kong, an Amerasian floating outside both the Chinese and English communities, never identifying fully with either group. A studious child, she idolized and dreamed of the heroes she read about in Chinese and English novels. Upon her arrival in the U.S. McCunn first came to Oregon to check on the college she had enrolled at, Willamette University. The totally non-Asian environment intimidated her and she immediately moved to San Francisco. It was this emotional tie with immigrants in a new land, and her fascination with the heroic that led her to write her heartfelt stories.

THOUSAND PIECES OF GOLD

In researching and writing Thousand Pieces of Gold, McCunn felt an obligation to present the memory of Lалу Nathoy (later known as

Polly Bemis) in the most factual way possible. However, because of the unavailability of written or oral histories by Nathoy/Bemis and her Idaho contemporaries, and the very sketchy information on her early life in China, McCunn chose to tell her story in the style of a biographical novel, allowing her the latitude to create scenes as they might have been in an historically accurate context.

While McCunn knows she has not betrayed the memory of Polly Bemis or the trust of the people in Polly's community in Idaho who cooperated in her research, McCunn herself indicated a feeling of betrayal by the filmmakers to whom she sold the option for film rights. The film treatment turns Polly into a prostitute, a helpless Asian woman dependent upon white men. In McCunn's assessment, it is an unforgiveable distortion of the historical truth. The issue between McCunn and the filmmakers has yet to be resolved.

SOLE SURVIVOR

Fortunately for McCunn in writing Sole Survivor, Poon Lim, now 69-years old, retired, and living in New York, was available for interviews. McCunn says, however, that it was not a simple task because the tale had become embellished and romanticized in Lim's own mind over the years. Through repeated meetings over a period of many months, McCunn established a rapport with Lim that ultimately allowed him to remember details and relate his true feelings.

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One example, McCunn recalled, was his insistence that he was never frightened during his time drifting in the Atlantic. In another interview months later, Lim spoke of breaking down and crying during his first days aboard the wooden raft. Additional interviews with Lim's wife, his brother, and even the submarine captain who torpedoed the merchant ship, helped give the truth and excitement to the story of a hero's survival against all odds.

RUTHANNE LUM MCCUNN

In response to questions from the overflow audience at the Chinese community hall, McCunn recounted some of her early experiences in America, such as her attempt to barter with a salesclerk in a department store. Realizing her mistake, McCunn backed off, only to think that she was bilked after all because the clerk charged her sales tax on her purchase!

Now a resident of San Francisco, McCunn has been writing and publishing since 1979. Her other works include An Illustrated History of the Chinese in America, a pictorial history of the 200-plus years of the Chinese-American experience, and Pie-Biter, a bilingual children's picture book about the Chinese-American answer to Paul Bunyan.

Terri Naito

CHINESE CONVERSATION CIRCLE

A challenging yet enjoyable way to practice Chinese is being offered by the China Council through its Chinese Conversation Circles, where native Chinese speakers talk on many topics with Chinese language learners. The first two circles, in August and September, have been quite successful, particularly with intermediate and

advanced learners who have enough vocabulary and grammar to communicate.

The third and last circle of the year meets three times in October, on the 9th, 16th, and 22nd, at an office, home, and restaurant. Tina Chang, Chinese instructor at Lewis & Clark College, organizes the Circle. She selects Chinese speakers from among the Chinese student/scholar population in Portland, and divides circle participants into small conversation groups according to their speaking ability. The cost is \$15 per Circle, or \$5 per session. You may register by calling 229-3049.

SPECIAL EVENTS

"THE NEW CHINA: EMERGING LEADERSHIP IN THE PACIFIC REGION"

Thursday, October 23
6 PM, dinner and lecture

Lewis & Clark College
Templeton Center

Admission: \$15; reservations:
293-2758

This dinner talk, in conjunction with a major business conference, "American Business and the Future of East and Southeast Asia," features one of the nation's most articulate and knowledgeable China experts, Robert B. Oxnam.

Oxnam's talk will examine China's role in Asia in terms of trade patterns, political leadership and power balance, and modernization. Among the issues he will address will be China's impact on Asian trade, Sino-Soviet ties, and its leadership in such political issues as Korean unification and the future of Kampuchea.

In 1975, Oxnam, now President

of The Asia Society in New York, founded the Society's China Council (with which the Northwest Regional China Council is affiliated). The Society is an educational organization putting on a wide array of programs, including fine arts exhibitions, performances by Asian artists, film and lecture series, curriculum guides, and publications.

At The Asia Society, Oxnam moderated a 30-part CBS-TV series, "Asia: Half the Human Race," and has frequently been interviewed on Asian affairs. His publications include Ruling From Horseback (a study of the Manchu conquest of China); Dragon and Eagle (on Sino-American relations); and China Briefing, 1980 and 1981. His Ph.D. in Chinese History is from Yale University and he taught at Trinity College from 1969 to 1975.

Dr. Oxnam will also give the keynote address ("What Business Leaders Need to Know about Asia") at the Lewis & Clark conference October 23 and 24. Other noted speakers include Frank Ching, author of Hong Kong and China: For Better or For Worse and a number of local trade experts. China Council members will receive notice.

CHINA RESOURCES

Opportunities for learning Chinese in the Portland area have increased in recent years and a variety of learning situations exist, from the university classroom to the business-oriented conversation class.

A brief summary of the fall offerings is given below.

CCBA Chinese Language School
Run by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, this school

has classes in both Cantonese and Mandarin, from beginning to advanced levels. The school meets on Saturdays, 10 AM to 1 PM, at the CCBA Hall, 315 NW Davis. The term begins September 6 and ends June 6, with enrollment possible throughout the year. While the focus is on the needs of Chinese American children, anyone is welcome to take part. Teachers are native Chinese speakers. The cost is \$60 a year, and only \$30 for students under 18, plus \$5 for books and supplies. Call Mr. Tom Jun Sing at 236-8175 or 223-9070 (Saturdays only).

Early Morning Chinese Classes

James R. Newcomer & Associates, 519 SW Park, Suite 610, a China trade firm, has initiated a unique program especially for business and professional people. The classes are held at 7:30 - 8:30 AM, with the Beginning I section on Monday and Thursday, Beginning II on Tuesday and Friday. Classes run for 10 weeks and began in early September. The cost is \$150. Taught by Lan Jin, a graduate of the Foreign Trade Institute of Beijing and currently a business administration student at PSU, the class concentrates on spoken Chinese. Call 222-9771 for information.

Portland State University

The most comprehensive Chinese language classes (and surely the most demanding as well) are given at PSU, with three morning sections of Chinese 101, a noon class in Chinese 201 and an 11 AM third year class. A Division of Continuing Education class in Conversational Chinese will be taught Monday evenings, 6:40 - 9:20 PM for beginning and intermediate students.

The addition of new Chinese language professor, Jonathan Pease, who comes to PSU from Dartmouth College, will enhance the program, which also includes Charles Liu, an instructor with long experience and knowledge of traditional Chi-

nese culture.

Finally, two classes in classical Chinese to be taught by John Emerson, are being offered by DCE in the evening, one using the works of Lao Tzu, and designed for students with no previous knowledge of Chinese.

Portland Chinese School

Another school designed for Chinese-American children (as young as kindergarten age), the Portland Chinese School also welcomes adults and non-Chinese who wish to take classes in Mandarin. The school meets at Cramer Hall, Portland State University, every Sunday, 2 - 4 PM, beginning in mid-September and ending in mid-June. The cost is only \$50. Both writing and conversation are taught, with the advanced class taught by Tina Chang, an experienced university instructor. To register, call Principal Chalin Lin, 645-9400.

Powell's Travel Store Chinese Class

Taught by Leslie Slocum, who has lived and taught in China and is now a China trader with Atiyeh International, this class in beginning Chinese will be taught on Saturdays, 10 - 11:30 AM, November 1 to 22, for \$25, at the Powell's Travel Store, Pioneer Square. Call 297-2707 to register.

INTERVIEW

This is an interview with Edith Simester Roeder of Vancouver, Washington. She is one of many Northwesterners with longstanding ties to China, specifically with Fujian Province, Oregon's sister state. The interview was conducted in her home among her Chinese memorabilia on August 12, 1986.

WHAT IS YOUR CONNECTION TO FUJIAN?
I was born in Fuzhou in Fujian Province in 1902. My father, James Simester, was the second

of Anglo-Chinese College in Shanghai, Guangzhou, Fuzhou, and Beijing. In Fuzhou, over 200 students and friends entertained us. Even as recently as 1984 I was able to meet former students visiting here from Fujian.

Christine Richardson

CHINA COUNCIL NEWS

"CHINA IN OREGON" RESOURCE DIRECTORY NOW BEING PREPARED

The Northwest China Council's special project this year will be the publication of what is to be the first comprehensive reference work with descriptive listings of trade, education, travel, recreational, and cultural resources for Oregonians interested in China.

To be published by the Portland State University Division of Continuing Education, the book will be written and edited by Christine Richardson and Jeffrey Barlow. Student interns and China Council volunteers will be collecting the information, soliciting advertising, and inputting the data on computer.

A few of the section titles are:

"Oregon Agencies Serving China Traders"
"China-related Careers: Opportunities and Qualifications"
"Learning Chinese in Oregon" (high school, college, continuing education, private, non-profit classes)
"China Travel Aids" (travel briefings, guidebooks, getting visas)
"Academic/Research Exchange Opportunities"
"Museum Collections" (art, history, Chinese-American)

The book will also include articles on such topics as "Getting Along with the Chinese: A Guide to Social Amenities and Cultural

Sensitivities" and "The Fujian/Oregon Sister Relationship."

This directory, to be published in spring 1987, will be updated bi-annually.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Kyle Cook

The newest China Council board member is Kyle Cook, who has a long history of volunteer work with the organization. With a B.A. in Asian Art and History from Lewis & Clark College and graduate work in intercultural communications at Portland State University, Kyle first visited China as part of a Lewis & Clark study program. Later, he lived in Japan for two years, teaching English.

For the past two years, Kyle has been with Folkways Travel Service, where he is responsible for planning independent travel for individuals and small groups of three or four people, pre-arranging their hotels and transportation, according to their requested itineraries. He specializes in China and travels there frequently to do the on-the-spot planning and negotiations necessary for such unusual trips as an overland jeep and van journey from Chengdu (in Sichuan province) to Lhasa in Tibet.

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principal of the Anglo-Chinese College in Fuzhou. He was a missionary for nine years in China. He died when I was four and, my mother returned to the United States.

WAS THAT THE END OF YOUR CONNECTION WITH FUZHOU?

Goodness, no! After college and a Master's degree, I returned to Fuzhou in 1930. I taught in Anglo-Chinese College where my father had been principal before dying so suddenly. I was warmly welcomed and quickly learned Chinese, for I spoke Chinese as a child (we had a [Chinese] nurse or amah).

WHAT DID YOU TEACH WHILE AT ANGLO-CHINESE COLLEGE?

I taught English, Bible, and history. Also, the boys came to my home to talk about Christianity and to play the piano and sing.

HOW LONG DID YOU TEACH THERE?

I taught from 1930 to 1946, all through the Sino-Japanese War. By 1938, the Japanese were coming south and we feared they would soon occupy Fuzhou. We planned an evacuation and when the Japanese arrived within 50 miles [of us], we moved the senior high 250 miles into the mountains. That was six days up the Min River, one of Fujian's main rivers. Fuzhou merchants had two guild halls in Yangchow where we went. They offered to let our school use them.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EVACUATION FROM FUZHOU?

Well, the students and young teachers hiked, carrying small packs. We packed the necessary equipment on boats, and faculty followed two days later. The interior was difficult. Malaria was common. I had 13 attacks in one year. The mission board asked me to return to the States for my health, but my sister was in India with her family so I got permission to go there.

HOW DID YOU GET TO INDIA FROM CHINA DURING THAT TIME?
Walked to Chungking and flew in an airplane over the Hump to India.

WEREN'T YOU FRIGHTENED?

No, I was never frightened in China, of the Chinese. I could speak and there were many friends along the way. Besides, it was the only way. I was able to rest for six months and then returned to Yangchow with a good supply of medicine, quinine for the students and teachers.

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN YOU RETURNED TO YANGCHOW?

We were raising our own food with the help of the local people. We got some supplies from our students' families. Those were difficult times.

The mission board sent travel money for me to return. All Americans were requested to leave. I prayed over these orders but finally decided not to leave. I could not leave my Chinese family at the college in peril. I placed my money for travel into the common fund which helped to keep the college alive.

DID OTHER AMERICANS REMAIN?

I was the only one to remain on the faculty. We were cut off from all outside help and had to rely on the food we could raise and smuggle through the Japanese lines. We lived as a family working together to raise our food.

WHEN WERE YOU ABLE TO RETURN TO FUZHOU?

In 1945, we could go out to the coast in August when the war ended. My mother took ill and I took furlough to the U.S. but was unable to return to China after the liberation by the communists.

HAVE YOU RETURNED TO CHINA SINCE?

In 1980, I was able to return to China. It had been beyond my hopes to return to my birthplace. I was met by former students

BECOME A CHINA COUNCIL ASSOCIATE

You may combine World Affairs Council membership with associateship in the China Council, or become a China Council associate only.

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Please circle the option you wish and enclose a check to "World Affairs Council for NWRCC"

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The Northwest Regional China Council is formed to deepen public understanding of China's history, culture, and contemporary affairs (in the People's Republic, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and among Chinese-Americans). Our events are held all over Oregon and in Southwestern Washington and include exhibitions, lectures, conferences, tours, and business seminars. The Northwest China Council is a self-supporting program of the World Affairs Council of Oregon and one of twelve regional China councils in the U.S. affiliated with The Asia Society. There is a branch office in Seattle.

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 World Affairs Council of Oregon
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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

October

- 2 TAI CHI CHUAN: Gregory Fong, instructor. On-going class, Tuesdays & Thursdays beginning Oct. 2; noon - 1:30 PM; Dancers Workshop Class, 716 SW 16th Ave. \$40/month; information and registration 233-5772.
- 5 CHINESE FOOD FAIRE: Benefit for the Fred G. Lee Memorial Scholarship Fund, 5 PM, Melody Lane Ballroom, 615 SE Alder; tickets, \$25 tax-deductible contribution. Tickets & information, 224-4082 or 234-0591.
- 9 * CHINESE CONVERSATION CIRCLE: First meeting of Circle #3; registration and information, 229-3049.
- 9 "TELEVISION IN CHINA TODAY": Potluck dinner and lecture by Donna Wiench; sponsored by the U.S.-China Peoples' Friendship Association; Lewis & Clark College, Dubach Dining Room, Templeton Center; information, 222-6641 evenings.
- 14 CHINESE CONSOLIDATED BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION GOURMET DINNER: Fundraiser for the Chinese language school; a nine-course Chinese dinner; tickets, \$25 tax-deductible contribution. Tickets & information, 284-2592 or 231-4711.
- 16 * CHINESE CONVERSATION CIRCLE: Second meeting of Circle #3; registration and information, 229-3049.
- 22 * CHINESE CONVERSATION CIRCLE: Third meeting of Circle #3; registration and information, 229-3049.
- 23 - 24 * "AMERICAN BUSINESS AND THE FUTURE OF EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA": International trade forum, sponsored by Lewis & Clark College and Law School, co-sponsored by the Northwest China Council. Talks by national and local experts in Asian business, history, and culture, including Robert Oxnam, president of The Asia Society of New York, and Frank Ching, author of Hong Kong and China: For Better or For Worse. Lewis & Clark College, \$150; registration and information, Office of Continuing Education, 293-2758.
- 23 * "THE NEW CHINA: EMERGING LEADERSHIP IN THE PACIFIC REGION": Dinner and lecture by Robert Oxnam, president of The Asia Society and founder of the national China Council; 6 PM Lewis & Clark College, Templeton Center; \$15, for reservations, 293-2758.
- 23 * "A CELEBRATION OF CLASSICAL CHINA": The Northwest China Council's tour to Beijing, Hangzhou, Suzhou, and Shanghai departs Portland.
- 25 OREGON WORLD INFORMATION FAIR: Multi-theme conference on Oregon's international resources; sponsored by the Oregon International Council and Chemeketa Community College. Panel talks include: International Careers; Building Oregon Markets in the Pacific Basin; China in the Classroom. 9 AM-3:30 PM, Chemeketa Community College. \$10 general, \$7 OIC members, \$5 students; Registration & information, OIC 378-4960.
- 28 "CHINA TRADE UPDATE 1986": Conference on China trade organized by the Washington State China Relations Council. Keynote speaker is Dr. Michel Oksenberg of the University of Michigan, who served as China specialist to the National Security Council during the Carter administration. 8:30 AM- 5 PM, Stouffer Madison Hotel, Seattle; \$150, China Relations Council members, \$185, non-members, \$60, students, faculty, staff. Registration and information, China Relations Council, (206) 464-1409.

*Program sponsored or co-sponsored by the Northwest Regional China Council.

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