Locke Foundation Newsletter 樂居鎮基金會

Preserving Locke's history and legacy

lockefoundation@frontiernet.net Spring 2021 www.locke-foundation.org

Ching Ming or Sweeping the Graves on April 4, 2021

Ching Ming (clean and bright) is the only festival that follows the solar calendar, typically celebrated on April 4,5,or 6, even in China. Similar to spring festivals of other cultures, it celebrates the rebirth of nature, while marking the beginning of planting season and other outdoor activities. The Chinese have observed Ching Ming for over 2500 years with generations of families gathering to commemorate lost loved ones and enjoy time together with activities like kite flying, singing, picnicking and playing games. For many, the day is one of happiness and tears, kneeling to offer prayers before gravesites of ancestors and relishing in the beauty of a spring day.

On this day, Chinese visit family graves to sweep away weeds or debris, place flower arrangements and freshen the paint on the gravestone's lettering. A clean gravesite lets your relatives know that they remain in your thoughts. Offerings of food, incense and joss paper are meant to convey gifts from this world to the afterlife. Taking time to care for ancestors in the afterlife ultimately reflects the value the Chinese place on filial piety and respect for one's elders and ancestors.

The food may consist of a steamed whole chicken, a whole roast pig, BBQ pork, fruit, dim sum, pastries or other dishes the deceased favored. Accompanied by rice, the dishes and utensils are carefully arranged to bring good luck. Three sets of chopsticks and three wine cups are arranged above the food close to the headstone. The head of the household will bow three times with the wine cup in hand, then pour the wine on the ground just in front of the headstone. Each member of the family comes in front of the headstone and bows three times. Some families will eat the food together at the gravesite similar to having a picnic with their deceased relatives.

Sometimes a family will burn incense with offering to expedite the transfer of nutritious elements to the ancestors. Burning joss paper provides the opportunity to remember the loved ones in your life. Other families will set off firecrackers to scare off evil spirits and to alert the deceased relatives they have arrived to pay respects.

Gold ingots

The earliest joss paper rituals date back more than a thousand years to when paper coins were burned to please the spirits. Burning paper money at funerals became standard in the 12th century and the custom arrived in the US with the first Chinese immigrants during the 19th century. The Chinese believe that the deceased have needs similar to those in the natural world. Joss paper is burned at funerals and during important dates thereafter to help the deceased pay off debts, trade for goods and exist comfortably in the spirit world. They are physical representations of money and daily necessities burned and conveyed into the spirit world through smoke. Joss paper ingots and currency with denominations reaching into the billions serve an obvious purpose. More contemporary additions include joss paper clothing, shoes, cell phones, iPads, even luxury cars.

Today the responsibility for "hahng saan" or "walking the mountain" as visiting the cemetery is commonly known, still falls to the eldest son. One of the key virtues of Confucianism is filial piety: respect for one's parents and ancestors. Ching Ming is a time for mourning the loss of close relatives rather than worship. Many Chinese Christians families still continue the tradition of going to the cemetery on this day. This festival is not really ancestor worship, but enhancement of kinship within the clan and remembering its history. The social or non-religious function of ancestor worship is to cultivate kinship values like filial piety, family loyalty, and continuity of the family lineage.

Family members gather at gravesite, offer food and incense, and burn joss paper.

Originally a festival of agrarian China, modernization and urbanization have transformed the nature of this festival. Migration to urban areas has separated families from the village setting. They can mourn only close relatives (3 generations) instead of all their ancestors back several centuries. Land reform has reduced access to large family estates filled with graves; cremation is more popular; clan consciousness has declined.

Source: Tom, K.S. Echoes of the Past, Hawaii Chinese History Center, 1989.

Jeff Kan Lee: The Journey From A Chongshan Village in California

By Carol Lee

Jeff Kan Lee, born in 1945, is the first son of the first son of Lee Bing, the leader of the delegation that approached George Locke about the establishment of Locke.

Jeff's childhood memories of Locke are of a Chinese town past its prime. He ran and played freely, ventured "downtown" to explore all the Chinese businesses and visit the old bachelors seated on the benches scattered along the main street. At Hoy Kee Soda Fountain and Pool Hall he was treated to beef jerky ("*ngow yuk gon*"). He visited relatives at Wah Lee Dry Goods Store, where Mom showed him how to slide down the banister of the wide staircase connecting Main Street with the levee.

Jeff recalls an event he still defines as a "right of passage". He had asked Mom to prepare his favorite craving, Chow Mein. But this day was different. She sent him with money in hand, unaccompanied, to Dick's Café. Winding through the narrow alleys, between the buildings, and up the hill, the trip "across town" seemed far for a hungry boy of five years. Mom's instructions were to tell Mr. Wong what you wish to eat and stay there to eat if you wish. As Jeff sat to eat he felt emboldened by the big adventure. Until the age of five, Jeff lived in a Chongshan Village where everyone was from predominantly one dialect group. Basically, Jeff lived in China--it just so happened to be in California.

Chinese upbringing does not provide comfort or prepare one for the outside American world. Speaking only Chinese when everyone in school spoke English was traumatic and would take some adjustment. There was one friend in class with whom Jeff could speak his native language, at a price. The teacher would hit Jeff on the head with her pointer if she overheard his Chinese. Jeff learned early that having been born in America he needed to be an American- "to mainstream". For Jeff, this meant acknowledging his inner voice and not always doing what others expected of him. Soon, Jeff started expressing his own will and as elders would say, "being contrary". Jeff would later refer to this period as his strength of conviction as he stood up to his father. Usually it was Mom who disciplined him and she was always very fair. However, this one time Dad stepped up for no apparent reason, unreasonably and extremely heavy handed. Jeff, at age five, fought back with such strength and determination that his father never did it again.

Jeff grew up in a very traditional multi-generational household. Grandma, Lin Bo Ying, emigrated from China in 1915 to join her husband, a prominent and prosperous businessman in Locke. She had bound feet, (see family photo), which reflected her status of privilege, having come from a highly educated family with a father who was the Literary Advisor to the Emperor. In America she bore two sons, Ping and On ("ping on" means safe and well).

This family photo is a prized possession and a rare glimpse of three generations. Professional photographer Chester Gan of San Francisco took the photo in 1946. Note Lee Bing, age 73, dapper in his three-piece suit, smiles brightly as he sports a mustache. Bo-Ying, as always, is wearing her traditional "Cheong Sam" with feet bound and hands holding her prized grandson. Ping, a clothes hound, is wearing a sporty shirt and jacket. Mirroring his father, On is optimistic and bright in his business attire. Daughter-in-law Grace is proudly flanked by Ping and On. Jeff, not yet two, in his patriotic sailor suit, is the reason for the gathering for this momentous photograph.

Jeff's arrival as the first-born grandson brought much celebration that rippled from parents to grandparents. His birth signified a fulfillment of an expectation and an obligation that Grace, Jeff's mother, had provided this prominent Locke family with a male heir. Typical of any traditional extended family, Grandma's first grandson received all of her attention as she indulged and doted over Jeff. Lin Bo-Ying had both of her daughters-in-law, Grace and Ruth, living in adjoining houses in Locke. Under her guidance they did her bidding in minding the household. This was the ultimate in the idyllic life of Grandma's expectations.

Lee Bing spent much time with his grandson, taking Jeff along as he oversaw his businesses. Lessons

learned from Grandpa included a onetime visit to the Dai Loy, a local gambling establishments that Lee Bing owned. He said to Jeff, "Look around at all these people here. When they play, I win." With that said, Jeff has never gambled.

Reminded by his elders of the value of education, Jeff attended Dad's and Uncle On's alma mater, University of California Berkeley, majoring in Life Science. With his love of photography Jeff joined the staff of the Daily Cal, UCB's daily newspaper. This was during the period of the Free Speech Movement. He covered national news, capturing relevant images of student/cop conflicts, and saw his work published in the next day's paper. He found the camera to be a better optical device to view life than a microscope.

Jeff subsequently transferred to State Sacramento College (now California State University Sacramento) to pursue a degree in Journalism. After one year, he began working for the Sacramento Union, one of the few newspapers in the national that published color photos. Jeff had found his calling - a profession that integrated his need to earn a living with his passion: photography. Later, Jeff moved to Santa Rosa, CA to begin a 45 year career at the Santa Rosa Press Democrat, distinguishing himself as the first Asian American to work in a Bay Area newsroom.

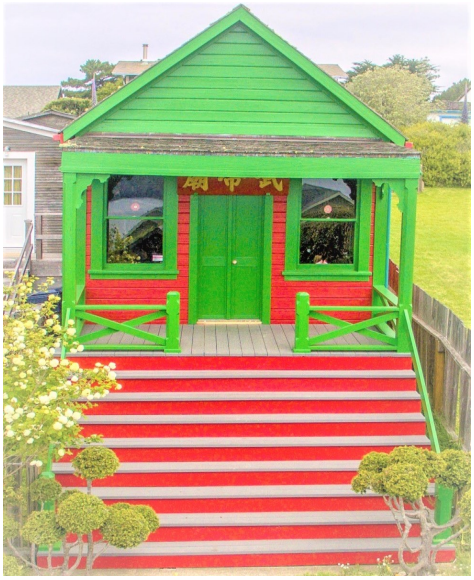
Jeff is father of two sons (John and Ryan) and a daughter (Sara). Each actively embraces their Chinese American heritage, as exemplified by son Ryan, who identifies himself as the first Chinese American Police Chief in Boise, Idaho. John, the creative son, is responsible for polishing Dad's lifetime of writings. Sara, in addition to working on her PhD at Oregon State University is Director of the Asian Pacific Cultural Center located on the OSU campus. Jeff also has 3 grandchildren. Granddaughter Piper is a Lion Dancer for the Lee Family Association in Portland, Oregon. Jeff credits his family's appreciation for their Chinese roots to their Jewish mother, Judy. "Judy and I are still good friends and are proud parents. Our children are doing what they love and loving what they do".

Now retired, Jeff has returned to his two loves. The first is obvious; Jeff's keen eye lures him out daily to capture the next photographic image. From the lens of his camera he has discovered the rich and vibrant culture of the Hispanic communities. Following his retirement, he found he missed working with people - but no longer. He has been embraced by the warmth and diversity of the large community with similar interests and goals as his own. Jeff now volunteers for the bilingual Hispanic publication, *La Voz*. Knowing the owner/publisher previously, he chuckles, "one old Chinese guy and one even older Jewish woman" collaborating in the cause and efforts of yet another population and culture. Jeff is the photojournalist as well as features editor, addressing immigration issues similar to those experienced by Locke's Chinese immigrant community.

Jeff's second love is more of an obligation, a responsibility and a debt to Locke and his grandfather's legacy. He donates time at Mendocino's Kwan Tai Chinese Temple as a board member and docent. Similar in many ways to Locke, the Chinese who settled in the Mendocino area all spoke Chongshan as well. The temple is a California Historical Landmark and is the oldest original Chinese Taoist temple in rural California. It is the last physical reminder of the presence of the Chinese laborers who supported the lumber industry in the area. The temple is a time capsule. As a docent, Jeff is able to "cross-pollinate" historic sites by telling similar stories of people who share a common dialect.

Jeff is compelled to keep the history and memories of Chinese Americans alive. The compelling stories which have been omitting of the American narrative and educational institutions.

Hopefully his ancestors now know of Jeff's worth. Defying the traditional teachings of his elders and his culture, Jeff was authentic and pursued his passion. To this end he is fulfilled, content and happy as he continues full circle to tell the stories of Chinese Americans through Chinese eyes.



Kwan Tai Chinese Temple at 45160 Albion Street in Mendocino. Unlike other Chinese temples that used baffles or 90 degree angles to fend of evil spirits, the Kwan Tai Temple used nine steep steps to keep the altar from being seen from the street and keep the evil spirits out."

Chinese View of Death and Dying

By Eileen Leung

There are 3 subjects that Chinese do not talk about: death, sex and mental illness. Death is a taboo subject to the Chinese because it is associated with evil and bad luck. As children, we were told not to look at a funeral procession, and we were not allowed to look at the body or coffin. Pregnant women could not attend funerals. The Chinese never give handkerchiefs as gifts because they symbolize, tears, grief and death.

When old people die, the Chinese believe they have lived a long life. However, when children die, the family considers the death shameful and believe the gods have punished them. "People with white hair do not attend the funeral of people with black hair."

Most Chinese funerals consist of an open casket with funeral wreaths given by family member and friends. The body is often dressed in clothing pre-selected by the deceased. The more wreaths present, the more prestige and status associated with the deceased's family. A large photograph of the deceased (16 x 20) is displayed next to the casket. Family members are required to wear specific mourning clothing. Male family members wear a black sleeve band; female members wear white garments with and a colored yarn flower in their hair. Cosmetics or jewelry should not be worn.

Layers of cloth or blankets are placed upon the deceased by the children to ensure the deceased will be warm when he/she arrives in the next world. The deceased's favorite items (eyeglasses, walking stick, pipe, slippers) are also included. A coin or pearl is often placed on the deceased's mouth to protect the body from decay and provide light for the soul. At the end of service, all the visitors walk up the casket for final viewing. When guests are finished paying respects, they are given a piece of candy and a coin wrapped in white paper. The candy should be eaten immediately to sweeten the sorrow and counteract the bitterness of death, and the coin is to be spent on something sweet. During the closing of the casket, all family members look away.

The funeral procession can be elaborate: the coffin is placed in the first limousine with the wreaths; the procession can circle the neighborhood where the deceased lived before going to the gravesite; the hearse driver will unlock the front door of the deceased's home; this offers any evil spirits residing in the home to leave, and it is important for the deceased's spirit to find the way home. One can often see Chinese funerals in San Francisco's Chinatown streets accompanied by the Salvation Army Marching Band, The most propitious site for burial is on a hillside where water drainage is good with 2 sides bounded by hills. Feng shui masters are often consulted before a burial site is selected; no expense is spared. The burning of incense, paper money and paper houses/cars ensures the deceased is well taken care of in the next world. During the lowering of the casket into the grave, family members must turn away because the soul might recognize such individuals and hold them responsible for confining the body in the casket and committing it to the ground.

After the burial, there is a usually a banquet at a local restaurant where a "funeral vegetarian meal" is served to the guests. The number of tables must be odd, not even.

The duration of the mourning period used to be 7 years in ancient China. All red decorations in the house are removed. Attending any festive or social occasion (such as wedding, parties, or having fun) is considered improper. The marriage of a son or daughter is prohibited. Now it can be as short as 3 days or 49 days. It is important to end the period of mourning to signify that everything has been done properly for the deceased. The future belongs to the living.

Death practices and rituals are influenced by superstition, folklore, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Many religious traditions originated from village agricultural life, where family life is the foundation of Chinese society. Confucius advocated a highly structured and hierarchical society, where every member had specific roles. Ancestor worship entails praying for the lineage on the male's line of descent so dead ancestors play a pivotal role in a family's wealth, heath and success. Paying the proper respect means the ancestors will bless the family. However, misfortune will be attributed to the ancestor's displeasure. Elaborate rituals are observed for the following reasons:

1. Saving face and filial piety
2. Chinese fear evil spirits and want to abate them.
3. Ancestors can bring good fortune or bad luck depending if codes of conduct are followed.
4. Maintain Chinese cultural identity.
5. Chinese do not favor donating organs because cutting out parts of the body would compromise its integrity. That is why Chinese restaurants serve fish and poultry whole.
6. Talking about grief is just not done.

Filial piety is demonstrated in many death practices. Commemorating an ancestor's death at Ching Ming (Sweeping of Graves festival in April) or placing a photograph in one's home allows descendants to continue to provide material, psychological and emotional support to the deceased parent. They aid in maintaining the centrality of the family. Wearing of funeral apparel and placement of wreaths reinforce adherence to Confucian principles of authority and respect. The oldest son is responsible for continuing Ching Ming rites. Observance by overseas Chinese serve to maintain Chinese identity even for those who have immigrated to other lands.

Chinese culture is collectivistic where family is paramount. Health care providers who often must discuss end-of-life decisions with family members need to be sensitive to taboo subjects such as death and dying. Often decisions are made by a group, not just next of kin. Intergenerational conflicts about funeral and burial arrangement can arise because children born and raised in USA may be influenced by Christian practices which are antithetical to Taoist or Buddhist rituals. The gradual assimilation of the younger generation into mainstream American culture has led to a hybridized outlook on death and dying and children try their best to respect their parents' and grandparents' wishes.

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2021 Scholarship Opportunities for High School Students

The principal mission of the Locke Foundation is educating the public about the rich history and legacy of the town of Locke and informing the public of the compelling Chinese immigrant experience that played an important role in the history of California and the nation. Another mission of the LF is to bring benefit to Locke and surrounding Delta communities.

For these reasons the Locke Foundation is pleased to announce the availability of five $500 scholarships to be awarded to graduating seniors from Delta High School and Rio Vista High School. Deadline for applying is April 3, 2020. The scholarships will be awarded virtually. Information and application forms can be accessed at: www.locke-foundation.org/scholarship

Clockwise: Tyrone Butcher, Valerie Rodriguez, Madison Myer—Class of 2020

9-Man Volleyball: Chinese Style

By Eileen Leung

In 1895, the first volleyball game, originally called "Mintonette" (referencing its similarity to badminton), was played in Holyoke, Massachusetts at a YMCA. The inventor of the game was the YMCA athletic director, William G. Morgan, who wanted to provide American businessmen with less strenuous alternative than basketball.

It is believed American missionaries or returning immigrants in the early 1900s introduced the game to villagers in Toisan, China, a southern Chinese district from where many of the earliest Chinese immigrants hailed. But the villagers modified the game: the courts are larger and the net lower, nine men, not six, play on each side, and there is no player rotation.

Chinese immigrants settling in America brought this variation of volleyball with them, said Ursula Liang, a filmmaker who produced the documentary "9-Man: A Streetball Battle in the Heart of Chinatown".
It's fast, chaotic, unpredictable, grueling; the rules are distinct and exist no where else in the world—imagine volleyball with 18 guys, dunks, and bloodied elbows. This is a sport that is completely unique to Chinese-Americans and therefore something very special to those who play it. Why haven't you heard of it? Because it's played only by men. And two-thirds of the players have to be "100% Chinese".

In the early 1900s, Chinese immigrants landing in Boston, Rhode Island, New York and other East Coast cities had few avenues for socializing with each other. Many toiled in laundries and restaurants, working six to seven days a week. During their off time they would play their nine-man volleyball in alley ways, hanging ropes between light posts and bundling towels and rags together as a ball.

The game and tournaments in the mid-1930s helped the immigrant community forge an important bond in a time when society looked at Chinese as racially inferior and the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act prevented the men from bringing their wives or family from China, creating a "bachelor society." The game became a critical social outlet for immigrants largely isolated from broader American society.

According to Tunney Lee, professor of urban studies at MIT, "part of the image of the Chinese was that of weaklings who were passive and servile. Volleyball was a skill sport with strategy, teamwork and aggressiveness." The game was a way for Chinese workers to escape the drudgery of menial labor during an era of extreme discrimination.

Since the 1930's, young men have played this gritty, streetball game competitively in the alleys and parking lots of Chinatown. When the community was a Bachelor Society (men outnumbered women 4-to-1) at a time when anti-Chinese sentiment and laws like the Chinese Exclusion Act forced Chinese restaurant workers and laundrymen to socialize exclusively amongst themselves, nine-man offered both escape and fraternity for men who were separated from their families in China and facing extreme discrimination and distrust.

Although most of us think of Chinatown as a great neighborhood to visit for authentic dumplings and dim sum, historically Chinatowns existed as urban ghettos for Chinese laborers. Volleyball was cheap and provided an outlet for men with limited mobility and time off. In fact, many of nine-man's rules and traditions can be traced to the resourcefulness and necessity of those early years. Without access to a proper ball, players would sometimes use a rolled up towel instead.

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 — the first U.S. immigration law targeting a single ethnic group — constrained the formation of Chinese families, effectively creating Chinatown "bachelor societies" where men outnumbered women by huge ratios. In the 1930's, a traveling 9-Man tournament emerged, and helped create fraternity within a community plagued by unjust stereotypes of Asian masculinity.
Labor Day Weekend was also the only extended period of time teams from different Chinatowns could get together and compete, which is how the first national Chinese volleyball tournament began in Boston all the way back in 1944.

"The game served as a place for these men to get their frustrations out," Liang said. "They could slam
the ball on the court at a time when they couldn't verbally express themselves outside of it."

At first, the tournament's location shuttled between Rhode Island and Boston, later adding in New York and Washington, D.C. The spirit of the Labor Day tournaments was less about who won or lost, but about friendship and community among Chinatowns. NY Strangers' player Mike Fan says it's an attitude among nine-man players that is still strong today. "It's a celebration, through volleyball, of community".

"I like traveling with my friends and my teammates and playing in different cities. I think San Francisco has a beautiful venue. It's a really different city than New York. [Los Angeles] is always fun just to go explore. We usually, my friends and I, go a week ahead and explore just everything in L.A. and then we play," Fan said. "So, you make it an event. It kind of enhances Labor Day. It gives you something to do and to plan around."

But according to Fan, who is originally from D.C., the move

to have the upcoming tournament on Pennsylvania Avenue and not in Chinatown is bittersweet. For a sport created due to forced isolation, there's a new challenge to keeping it alive: gentrification.
"There's no Chinatown in D.C. There's one block, there's an archway and then you walk through the archway and then there's nothing behind it," Fan said. Ever since they built the Verizon Center on top of the old Chinatown, it's pretty much 99 percent gentrified.

Dr. Robert Guen, Boston dentist, agrees with Liang's assessment that 9-man needs to maintain its unique cultural traditions. 9-man has also helped shatter stereotypes about Asian-Americans. When he was growing up, he says, Chinese boys only joined three teams: the chess club, the soccer team, and the track squad. "We didn't have any kids on the football team," he explains, "because we weren't big enough. We didn't play hockey, because we didn't have any equipment. We didn't have any kids on the basketball team, because we weren't tall enough, even though we had some really good players."

But the ability of Chinese-Americans to excel at 9-man and regular volleyball helped American coaches see a previously untapped wealth of athletic potential. "The game served as a place for these men to get their frustrations out," Liang said. "They could slam the ball on the court at a time when they couldn't verbally express themselves outside of it."

"Chinatowns were formed out of legislated discrimination against Chinese people. They had to cluster together for physical and emotional safety," Liang said. "9-man was a game that could be played in tight urban spaces. It wasn't baseball, with these wide-open fields. You could erect a 9-man court in whatever place you had available to you, like a back alley or a parking lot."

9-man's identity rules mostly apply to big annual tournaments like the North American Chinese Invitational Volleyball Tournament, which takes place over Labor Day weekend. Thousands of players come from Chinese American communities in Boston, New York, Toronto, Montreal, San Francisco and elsewhere.

But there is racial controversy surrounding the game. Just about everyone playing has roots in China. That's no coincidence — it's the rules. To be eligible for the sport, players must have some Asian or pan-Asian heritage. At any given time on the court, six out of the nine players on each team must be 100% Chinese. The other three players can be half Chinese or have a background from another East Asian country. But these strict heritage rules may have to change as Chinese American communities evolve and demographics shift.

The North American Chinese Invitational Volleyball Tournament, one of the biggest nine-man volleyball tournaments, requires that "all teams must have at least 2/3 of the players on the court at all times who are 100% Chinese to participate in any of the games of the tournament. The remaining players must be of Asian descent." This has stirred some controversy, particularly among non-Chinese Asians, who sometimes feel isolated from the community.

For his entire athletic life, Chung says, he's faced questions about the most polarizing aspect of 9-Man: its codified racial parameters. The NACIVT rules, which are set by the North American Chinese Volleyball Association, require that two-thirds of the players in the tournament must be 100 per cent Chinese; the rest must be of Asian descent to some degree. "Asian descent," though, leaves room for interpretation — as it can be difficult to prove definitively, disagreements on eligibility often come down to following an honor system.

Chung remembers being asked by non-Asian friends about the game. Some thought it was exclusionary, even racist. "It really made me think as to why I participate and why I'm so loyal to the game," he says. "When my friends would ask me, I never had an answer. Because when you grow up in Chinatown, it's almost like you're naturally allowed to participate. When you get older, the questions come: 'How come it's only Asians? How come I can't play?' The analogy I give my friends is, look, it's like a fraternity. Everyone has social events. 9-Man is our social event.

Cameron Ponce is a Filipino-American with the Boston Hurricanes, one of the three non-Chinese players allowed. He said he doesn't mind the strict rules. He said he feels more included playing with 9-man than with mostly white volleyball teams. There is an ongoing conversation about whether 9-man identity rules need to evolve. As US demographics change, there may be fewer than 100 Chinese players interested in the sport. What happens when more mixed-kids want to play? Will the rules be adjusted to allow more diversity? Urban development has encroached upon inner city volleyball courts. In Boston, not many asphalt lots remain that have not been slated for high rise buildings.

Nine-man volleyball, a little-known Chinese-American street sport, has held the Chinese community in America together for almost a century. Though the game is surrounded by racial controversy, the Boston Hurricanes led the way by creating a booming volleyball passion among teenagers in Newton, regardless of their ethnicities.

Today, some 90 years later, 9-man is a lasting connection to Chinatown for a community of men who know a different, more integrated America and it's a game that has grown exponentially in athleticism. 9-man punctuates each summer with a vibrant, aggressive, exhausting bragging-rights tournament that unites thousands of Chinese-Americans and maintains traditional rules and customs.

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Locke Boarding House Museum will remain closed to the public until Sacramento County allows opening of indoor museums. Information will be posted on our website: Www. locke-foundation.org