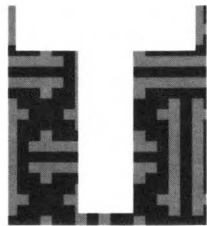


# Pittsburgh's Chinese Church and the Preservation of Chinese Identity

by Patricia Schulte



THE RELIGIOUS HISTORY of the Pittsburgh Chinese Church, and of the Chinese Christian community which it serves, has received almost no attention in the media or by scholars. The PCC has succeeded where others had failed. It did so, in part, because it avoided efforts to "Americanize" the Chinese,

which typically was one of the principal goals of more established denominations. Because of its evangelical orientation, the PCC stresses adherence to Biblical injunctions rather than assimilation into American culture. In doing so, it has allowed the Chinese to become their own church leaders and to adapt Christianity to their own imperatives.<sup>1</sup>

## CHINESE IMMIGRATION TO THE PITTSBURGH AREA: 1872-1920

Chinese immigration to the Pittsburgh area, and efforts to convert the immigrants to Christianity, have reflected national patterns. Chinese began coming to America in the late nineteenth century. Because American laws prevented the immigration of most Chinese women, the immigrants typically came as single male laborers.<sup>2</sup> Once they arrived, American workers tended to see Chinese laborers as a threat, and ministers tended to see them as opportunities for conversion. While the former tried to drive them from the American workplace, the latter tried to entice them into the American church. In addition, most missionaries saw religious conversion as part of an effort to assimilate immigrants more broadly into American culture. Most religious leaders had ambivalent relationships with the Chinese. While they disapproved of much of Chinese culture and viewed it as incompatible with Christianity, they also tried to preserve their missionary efforts by shielding Chinese immigrants from racial attacks. Many did this by assuring whites that Christianity would change the moral character of these immigrants and make them, culturally, into Americans. This, of course, tended to alienate many of the Chinese immigrants, who were being asked to give up their own culture, adopt a new religion, and patiently suffer the abuses of whites who did not want them here in the first place. Consequently, early missionaries had little success in converting Chinese immigrants. A report to the World Missionary Conference in 1910 estimated that of the more than 100,000 Chinese who immigrated around the turn of the century, only 6,500 had been baptized.

The first group of Chinese who came to the Pittsburgh area were largely Cantonese-speaking laborers and merchants from Toisan and Hoiping, two counties in Guangdong Province near Hong Kong. They arrived in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and quickly experienced both labor resentment and missionary efforts. Indeed, they had been brought here by a local religious leader, Reverend Dyer. In 1872, Rev. Dyer helped arrange for them to come from California and replace striking workers at Beaver Falls Cutlery, 30 miles west of Pittsburgh.<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly Rev. Dyer thought that their presence would create an opportunity for missionary efforts. In 1873, he reported in the *Beaver Argus*, the Chinese arrival in Beaver Falls was an act of "Providence," an opportunity to teach people who "have long remained in darkness and superstition." Rev. Dyer lauded the successes of local Bible study classes:

The effect of these schools is already becoming manifest in the manners and general appearance of this people. In the evening



Providence Mission was in Chinatown in the 500 block of Second Avenue. The hard-to-read sign in the window says, "Jesus Never Fails." Here, some of the original members stand out front in 1937. From left, top row: Mable Voelzke, Aunt Nellie, who is holding Doris Lee, and Mrs. George

Lee (partially hidden) holding her daughter Clara Lee. Middle row: founder Mrs. Shaw holding Harriet Yee, Lily Yee Haim, Mrs. Yee Foy, Mrs. Gib Lee, Mrs. Yee Wing NGEP, and Mrs. Lena Harrison holding Albert Lee. Bottom row: Billy Yee Haim, Ruth Yee, and Rose Lee.

## A TESTIMONIAL FROM ONE MEMBER — 'HOW I BECAME A CHRISTIAN'

**I WAS** born in Southern China, inheriting the Chinese custom of multiple faiths and philosophies, such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. Such a combination of beliefs has been the rule for thousands of years. Because these philosophies tend to borrow doctrines from each other, they all share one ancient and deep-rooted practice — namely ancestor worship. Christianity did exist in some parts of China at that time, and was referred to as an alien doctrine. For this reason, it was very difficult for me to comprehend it.

In the summer of 1955, I visited a Congregational church in Hong Kong for the first time. Thereafter, I attended a Presbyterian church only on rare occasions without any knowledge of what Christianity was all about. For seven years it was a stop-and-go affair. In 1962, I started to attend a Presbyterian church with my family. Gradually, I began to learn the gospel through my wife and from the church. When I was shopping in Chinatown one Sunday afternoon in 1967, I ran into a group of church-going children and I followed them to the Pittsburgh Chinese Church. ●

after work, they wash and dress up neatly for the night school. On the Sabbath, they frequently go out to the various churches of the place and behave themselves with decorum during the services.<sup>4</sup>

Dyer clearly was pleased by the inroads Christianity was making among the Chinese. Local white workers were less impressed, however, and in 1877 they drove all of them out of Beaver Falls, abruptly ending Dyer's missionary efforts.<sup>5</sup>

Additional efforts to Christianize Pittsburgh's Chinese occurred some 30 years later. In the early 1900s, the city's booming economy attracted a small group of Chinese who settled in a downtown Chinatown neighborhood, principally on Second and Third avenues, and worked in two of the restricted number of businesses then open to Chinese immigrants — laundries and restaurants. As before, local religious leaders attempted to convert them, primarily through Sunday school classes and English lessons. Once again, outside events undercut missionary work. In 1909, a Chinese man in New York City murdered his American Sunday school teacher, and many Pittsburghers generalized this incident to condemn all Chinese immigrants. Lurid articles under headlines such as "Yellow Fiend Wrote Message to the Parents" appeared in the local papers, and missionary teachers, fearful

perhaps both of the public and of their pupils, cancelled Sunday school classes.<sup>6</sup> To control the damage to their efforts, ministers came to the defense of the immigrants. Revered Dr. Warren G. Partridge, pastor of the Fourth Avenue Baptist Church, argued that "the mass of the Chinese in Pittsburgh, on the best authority, have been industrious, exemplary, law abiding citizens.... It is estimated that at least one-half of the Chinese in Allegheny County are members of some Christian church or attendants at Sunday school."<sup>7</sup>

If overt racial hostility was one reason for the absence of many converts among the Chinese, another was that established American churches — those affiliated with major denominations — had Caucasian teachers and gave minimal opportunities for the Chinese to assume leadership roles or to shape Christianity to their own needs and preferences. Mainline Christian churches failed to attract more than a handful of converts. For example, the Sunday school records of the East Liberty Presbyterian Church between 1918 and 1943 show an average attendance of only five to eight Chinese students.<sup>8</sup>

Another reason for the lack of success in converting Chinese was that there were fewer potential converts. The number of Chinese in Pittsburgh has always been small, but between 1920 and 1950 their numbers actually declined. This was partly caused by the lack of females, who were excluded by discriminatory immigration laws. In 1930, for example, there were only 67 females in a population of 507 males.<sup>9</sup> As older members of the community died, there were few families to produce a new generation. In addition, some immigrants returned to China, or migrated to other parts of the United States.

Declining population, however, was not the entire story. During the 1940s, as the Chinese membership in the East Liberty Presbyterian Church virtually disappeared, membership in an unaffiliated Bible school — the Chinese Christian Mission — grew steadily.<sup>10</sup> This mission ultimately evolved into the only successful, and permanent, Chinese Christian community. Now known as the Pittsburgh Chinese Church, it was never under the auspices of a particular church or denomination. Moreover, it was free of external church hierarchy, its leadership eventually was taken over by the Chinese members themselves, and it never pressured the Chinese to abandon their culture and their ethnic identity. Consequently, newcomers who felt uncomfortable within the larger Pittsburgh community could enter a familiar environment.

At its inception in 1937, the church was nothing more than a Sunday school for 13 children from Pittsburgh's Chinatown. A European-American woman, Lizzie Shaw, founded the church's Sunday school and held Bible study classes in a building that had been previously occupied by the Methodist Providence Mission.<sup>11</sup> According to a written account by her daughter, Lizzie Shaw had been teaching English classes to a few Chinese members of the old Second Presbyterian Church when one of them asked if she would conduct Sunday school classes for his children.<sup>12</sup> Shaw ran the mission with the help of volunteers and friends every Sunday, leading the children in prayer and devotions, and then splitting them into grade levels for Sunday school classes. One early member, a second-generation Chinese-American engineer,

described these classes as a time for “Bible stories.”<sup>13</sup> Shaw taught primarily children, most likely because of the language barrier she faced with adults and because few adults could take time away from work. One early member recalled that his parents could not attend Sunday school because they worked seven days a week.<sup>14</sup> The mission remained in the building at 513 Second Avenue for seven years, and moved into a Salvation Army building on Boulevard of the Allies in 1945.<sup>15</sup>

When Shaw retired in 1941, her work was taken over by her daughter, Mable Voelzke. By this time, there were approximately 75 children attending Sunday school. The recollections of the earliest members suggest that parents did not feel threatened by the way the school was run. A member recalls an occasion when a child was sick and the child’s mother made offerings at the ancestral altar and asked the daughter to pray to “her God” to save her brother. Other members, such as a Chinese-American housewife and one of the original 13 Sunday school members, recall that Mabel Voelzke was like a social worker. Because many of the parents could not speak English, she often took children to doctor’s appointments, and when the need arose she ran errands for the parents.<sup>16</sup>

In 1963, Voelzke and her husband retired to California, and Lydia Ott, one of the original Chinese members, took over the mission with the help of her husband. At this time, the mission also acquired some members who were students from Hong Kong attending the University of Pittsburgh and other area universities.<sup>17</sup> Many of these immigrants had converted to Christianity in Hong Kong, and the Chinese mission offered them a comfortable environment in their new surroundings.

In 1965, the mission was legally incorporated as the Pittsburgh Chinese Mission. Its first pastor was Ben Au-Yeung, a Chinese minister from Canton who had a Southern Baptist training in theology.<sup>18</sup> In 1968, Au-Yeung was replaced by Reverend Wally Yew, who was trained at Dallas Theological Seminary. At this time, new members joined from both Hong Kong and Taiwan. Then, in 1971, the church moved its location to the First Presbyterian Church. Again in 1973, there was a change of pastors, and the addition of still more members, including families from Hong Kong and Taiwan; attendance averaged 112 at that time.<sup>19</sup> The church made several more moves, and in 1984 finally purchased its own building on Perrysville Avenue in the North Hills.

## ETHNIC MAINTENANCE AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

**T**he emergence of Chinese leadership was followed by the addition of Mandarin and Cantonese to church services. Members regard these as important developments. In the 1975 church anniversary brochure, the author comments on the progression from “Caucasian” to Chinese leadership between 1937 and 1965.

Note the trends: Leaders — Caucasian to lay Chinese to professional ministers; Teacher — all Caucasian to Caucasian/Chinese to all Chinese; Congregation — 13 Chinese children from Chinatown expanded to include international Chinese

## CHINESE PLOT AT HOMEWOOD CEMETERY

**MEMBERS OF** Pittsburgh’s early Chinese community bought a large hillside plot in Pittsburgh’s Homewood Cemetery in 1901. Additional sections were purchased in 1903, 1918, and 1929, and many members of Pittsburgh’s Chinese population, both Christian and non-Christian, continue to be buried in the Chinese Cemetery. Funeral services over the years there have varied considerably. In 1928, Reverend Chester A. Clark, pastor of the Schenley Heights Methodist Church, was said to have given a Christian funeral service in “an atmosphere of paganism....”<sup>36</sup> In 1924, at a funeral for one of Chinatown’s leaders, a Christian minister read from the Bible and afterward the mourners carried out traditional Chinese ancestral rites, offering roast duck, eggs, and rice wine, and burning paper money and joss. ❷

professionals; Language — English to English/Chinese to Mandarin/English/Cantonese....<sup>20</sup>

These transitions allowed the church to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse membership. Because of easing immigration regulations after World War II, and successive political upheavals in China beginning in 1949, the number of immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, The People’s Republic of China, and southeast Asia has grown steadily. The PCC has welcomed each new wave of immigrants, including ethnic Chinese who were political refugees of the Vietnam War. Consequently, membership in the PCC has grown since 1965 from 29 to nearly 200 members by 1995.

In order to fill the needs of this diverse membership, the church has created a variety of activities and Bible study classes which allow them to reach out to various language speakers and to Chinese who live in a variety of areas. In 1965, Cantonese language was added, and in 1973, Mandarin. Now, there are separate Bible study groups held in English, Mandarin and Cantonese. There are “fellowship” groups for recent immigrants, and for both graduate and undergraduate students near local college and university campuses. One group, called the Cottage Group, was designed specifically to work toward the conversion of some of the older immigrants from the Toisan district. Fellowship meetings are often held in member’s homes in areas such as the South Hills and Wexford, for those who live some distance from the church.

The PCC’s growth spawned a daughter church, the East Suburban Chinese Church. Located a few miles east of Pittsburgh, in the town of Murrysville, the ESCC grew out of one of

## THE OTT FAMILY

**BETWEEN 1960** and 1965, Bill and Lydia Ott led the Pittsburgh Chinese Church after Mable Voelzke left, and before the church found its first pastor. Lydia Ott was one of the original 13 children who attended the Sunday School along with several of her siblings. William Ott visited the original Sunday school on Second Street as a child, but did not attend regularly until 1950. They have four sons, and have continued to be actively involved in the church. Over the past several years, they have made several short-term missions to Taiwan, Africa, and China. While in China, they visited the neighboring villages in Guangdong Province where their parents had been born. ❸

the home fellowship groups begun in 1982 to serve members of the PCC who lived in the eastern suburbs. In 1989, they began to hold Sunday worship services of their own, and the group was formally established as a church in 1990.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to the PCC, most members of the Murrysville congregation are first-generation immigrants — primarily Taiwanese, but with some from mainland China (often via Taiwan) and Hong Kong. Members of both churches maintain that the ESCC exists simply to serve residents in the eastern suburbs, and in fact they do occasionally participate in joint activities. Nonetheless, the two have no official connection, and it is obvious that they are separated by differences in style and interpretation as well as by geography.

Currently, both congregations have relatively high proportions of professional members. In the early days of the PCC, many more members were local restaurant and laundry workers and owners. Today their sons and daughters, as well as newcomers, are mostly professionals. The fact that so many are better off financially than their parents may account for some of the growth in both churches. Not only do they have more leisure time to give to the church community; they are better able to finance the running of the church.

As of 1995, the PCC had two pastors. The senior pastor is Taiwanese, while the junior pastor is a European-American who did missionary work in Taiwan and speaks Mandarin fluently. There are two Sunday worship services, held simultaneously. One, held in the upstairs of the church, is lead by Rev. Joseph Cheng, the senior pastor, and is entirely in Mandarin with simultaneous translation into Cantonese. This service is attended by members who are generally first-generation immigrants from Taiwan, mainland China, and Hong Kong. Pastor Bucknell, the junior pastor, conducts the downstairs service entirely in English. This service accommodates primarily second- and third-generation Chinese-Americans who speak only English. After worship services, members break into groups for Bible study classes which

are divided into language and age groups, and which are taught by both members and pastors. Immediately following Bible study, all members meet downstairs for lunch.

The East Suburban Chinese Church, by contrast, is a smaller church with approximately 70 members. It follows a similar pattern of worship, however, and shares an almost identical constitution and system of governance.<sup>22</sup> Services are held in a Reformed Presbyterian Church in Murrysville, though they are held separately from that congregation. The services are generally held in Mandarin, with simultaneous translation into Cantonese and English. Until recently, church deacons gave the weekly sermons, and it was only in August of 1993 that the church acquired a full-time pastor, Ray Sung, a Taiwanese man trained at the Dallas Theological Seminary. Services are followed by Bible study classes (for adults) and a luncheon.

The members of the Pittsburgh Chinese Church and the East Suburban Chinese Church do not form homogeneous groups. They feel differently about being immigrants, Chinese-Americans, and Christians. They give different explanations of why and how they came to convert to Christianity. There is much that could be described as “American” about this heterogeneous group, as well as some things that they would define as Chinese, and others as Christian. However, all members identify so strongly with the labels “Chinese” and “Christian” that, despite their diversity, they form a stable community.

The use of English and Chinese (both Mandarin and Cantonese) serves to incorporate speakers of different languages and dialects, and also helps maintain ethnic identity. Most members speak English well enough so that the use of multiple dialects reflects a conscious decision to maintain the first language, as well as a desire to interpret sermons and Bible study through Chinese. Although the Murrysville church’s meetings are conducted in Mandarin, all members speak English fluently. When hymns are sung in either church, they are often sung in three languages simultaneously — English, Mandarin and Cantonese. First-generation members of both churches spend the entire Sunday morning at the church, then drive across the city for their children to attend Chinese language school. In addition, many of them reinforce these efforts to promote the language ability among their children by speaking Chinese at home.

Ministers and Sunday school teachers at both churches try to place Christian concepts in a Chinese or Chinese-American context. For example, a pastor might say “It is important to witness to others,” and quickly add, “This is particularly difficult for Chinese people.” At a summer retreat, the Taiwanese guest speaker asked the listeners to imagine what Christ would be like if he were a Chinese graduate student in engineering, or a housewife from mainland China. Examples used in English-language services are directed toward American-born members. The use of cultural examples tailored to a particular group’s cultural orientation helps make Christianity more accessible to members and newcomers alike.

Many social and political differences break down along lines of language. One member noted that after church services, the Taiwanese generally socialize with other Taiwanese, and those

who are American-born socialize with other American-born members. He maintained that while everyone identified themselves as Chinese, individuals' particular political beliefs and cultural values depended on their backgrounds. "Politically," he added, "I identify myself as Taiwanese." He said that he and other Taiwanese found identification with people from mainland China difficult, and that although the church conducted English, Chinese and Cantonese services, "usually, those people don't come together" to socialize.<sup>22</sup> This statement counteracts the image that many European-Americans have of a monolithic Chinese culture and community.

Church members are not pressured by pastors to assimilate into American society. Since evangelical Christians distinguish strongly between secular American and Christian culture, they no longer try to make conversion lead to assimilation. Rev. Paul Bucknell maintains that there is a lot about American society that is not compatible with Christianity, while some traditional Chinese values are.

I mean, the point is to let them be assimilated into God's Kingdom and to adopt his principles. And I could care less whether they eat Chinese, or English, or McDonalds... In fact I find that I have to warn most people about the dangers of adapting too quickly into American society... and not thinking through what it means..."<sup>23</sup>

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY

Christianity is incorporated into members' existing identities and cultural systems by the addition of new elements and the reinforcement of existing values and behavior. This is particularly the case regarding family relationships. The generally high value placed on familial roles among evangelical Christians gives Chinese immigrants an opportunity to maintain many of their own cultural values regarding family, such as a high degree of respect for parents. At both Chinese Christian congregations in Pittsburgh, pastors pay particular attention to Biblical references to the family, offering members guidelines for familial roles which reinforce many existing ones. For example, members often say that they have "turned their lives over to Christ." Yet they argue that part of his plan for them is to love their family. Members explained that loving their family is part of following Christ's teachings, and therefore they need not give up a Confucian sense of filial devotion when they become Christian. While many feel it is a constant challenge to balance devotion to God, family and career, they do not see these as being in conflict. One member, a second-generation Chinese-American professional, argued:

I think scripture is very clear about what is first and foremost; love for God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might...; however, I don't think loving God means just going to church.... [L]oving God is also doing what is best for your family... because God has commanded me to love my wife, to cherish her as my own body, to lead her... in a way, everything you do should reflect God.<sup>24</sup>

Conversion to Christianity does pose problems for some families. Sometimes not all members of a family convert. But, unlike their

## PAPER SONS

**BETWEEN 1882** and 1945, Chinese laborers were prevented from immigrating to the United States by the Chinese Exclusion Act. However, merchants and children of legal immigrants were allowed to immigrate. To bypass the strict exclusion laws, legal immigrants claimed sons they did not have, and subsequently sold the citizenship papers to other Chinese who became known as "paper sons." Consequently, "paper sons" went by the names on the papers they had purchased. In the Chinese section of Homewood Cemetery, there is evidence that many of Pittsburgh's early immigrants were paper sons. Several of the tombstones contain two different surnames. For example, the Romanized name on the citizenship papers might be Wu, while the surname written in Chinese is Lee, the man's real surname. In 1955, ten years after Chinese could again immigrate legally, federal authorities granted immunity from prosecution and deportation to those who wanted to "confess," and reclaim their true identity. ☉

earlier counterparts, the converts now have ways to resolve these tensions within Christianity. Instead of replacing old patterns of filial piety with American patterns, they have expanded their existing values to handle the new component of their identity as Christians. Most maintain that their acceptance of God has made them a better child or parent. For example, one young woman explained that her parents, who are not Christian, worried their children would grow away from the family as a result of their church affiliation. But instead, this woman insisted, she and her siblings have grown closer to her parents, and respect them more.

Those whose parents oppose their conversion to Christianity take words directly from the Bible to cope with their parents' disapproval. One explained, "God gives us all burdens in our lives, and for Chinese people, this is the biggest burden. But by giving ourselves over to His plan, we can learn to live with this burden." Although they describe their parents' opposition to their conversion as a burden, they are not forced to choose between Christianity and their family; rather they expand the meaning of respect for their parents by living with their disapproval and taking on the responsibility to pray for them.

Ancestor worship (more properly, veneration), is a strong element in Confucian tradition, and remains a concern for some Chinese Christians. Members of both churches have found ways to remain loyal to their ancestors while accepting the Christian notion that there is only one God. One member, a first-generation



## PITTSBURGH'S EARLIEST CHINESE IMMIGRANTS

**THE PARENTS** of the 13 original members of the Pittsburgh Chinese Church were among the earliest Chinese immigrants to the Pittsburgh area. Most of these families came from two villages in Guangdong Province. Approximately 70 percent came from the district of Toisan (Taishan), particularly the village of Tak Hoi. They had the surname Yee, and spoke Toisanese, a dialect quite different from Cantonese. Many never learned to speak English fluently, and today most members in the church (and even their own children) have difficulty communicating with them. Some have converted to Christianity through contact with a Christian fellowship group, but many others have not. Their children constitute a sizable proportion of the second-generation professionals at the PCC, and often describe their parents as the most difficult to convert, saying, "They worked hard, and were too busy to come to church.... They believed in their traditional religious practices." One member remembered that his parents worked seven days a week in their laundry, and had no time to attend Bible classes. Yet there are also many stories of these individuals converting very late in life. Many members commented, "Thank God my mother accepted the Lord as her personal savior before she died." ●

Cantonese-speaking immigrant from China, explained that when he works with older non-Christian Chinese, he suggests that they remember their deceased relatives by bringing flowers (a Christian symbol of commemoration) to the graves rather than food or money (symbols which signify that they see them as spirits involved in their lives).<sup>25</sup> Other members give similar accounts of how to maintain respect for the deceased in ways that are compatible with Christianity. One member, an immigrant from Shanghai who had been raised as a Christian in China, said that his family used to attend grave-sweeping day along with other families, but that they brought flowers to the cemetery while non-Christians brought offerings of food.<sup>26</sup>

Chinese evangelical Christians modify the ways they think about their ancestors, but they are not forced to forget them when they convert. One woman, a graduate student from Taiwan, described this transformation:

The Chinese really think this is...the spirit of our ancestors... [that] they can protect us. That is wrong. If we are Christian, we definitely know that this is wrong...We can remember them, we

can think about how they taught us what is good character they left for us, but we Christians can never think about their spirits have some kind of power to protect us, and we can ask some kind of benefit from them (sic). This is definitely the wrong idea if we are Christian.<sup>27</sup>

She went on to say, however, that this is a point that really needs clarification. Christ, she explained, does not ask Chinese people to suffer, or to stop thinking about ancestors, but Christian doctrine holds that ancestors do not have power over the living.<sup>28</sup>

Many others, such as an engineer from Taiwan, argue that "ancestor commemoration is not religion, it is a cultural tradition."<sup>29</sup> They do not see it as connected to Buddhism or Taoism in traditional Chinese society, but as coming from a Confucian tradition which is not religious, and so rather they view it as a way of showing filial piety and respect toward ancestors. Some maintain that God would accept their parents despite ancestor worship. One teenage boy stated, "I think God is very merciful and understanding. I don't think it [ancestor worship] is worship, I think it is commemoration."<sup>30</sup> His mother, a professional woman born in China, went on to say that her parents are Christian but still commemorate their ancestors. She added, "I think they shouldn't be expected to give up their entire culture — you can't wipe that out."<sup>31</sup> Clearly, the choice of language reflects the long and ongoing debate among Chinese Christians over the question of ancestor worship.

Filial piety is protected within the two Chinese churches in Pittsburgh by the evangelical emphasis on Christian education for children. For Chinese, this serves a dual role. As in other evangelical churches, children learn the Bible and are somewhat protected from the influence of secular society for religious reasons. This helps parents maintain their children's Chinese identity. Although the children may be subject to secular "Americanizing" influences in public school, they still spend most of their time with Chinese Christians, both children and adults. By attending Bible school classes and other church-related activities, their children grow up in an environment that is both Chinese and Christian.

Many first-generation members expressed concern over their children's future decisions regarding their Chinese identity. They hope that bringing them up in a Christian home would ease the pain of these future decisions by helping maintain positive aspects of traditional Chinese culture. For example, there is some variation in parents' desires regarding their children's choices in marriage. Some were very clear that they wanted their children to marry other Christians. Others maintained that their biggest priority was that their children marry Chinese or "Asians." Even some younger members who were second- or third-generation said they just "felt more comfortable dating and marrying other Chinese Americans."<sup>32</sup>

## CONTINUITY BETWEEN CULTURAL SYSTEMS

**S**ome members draw direct parallels between Confucian and Christian moral teachings. This facilitates their transition to Christianity and allows for the reproduction of family roles within the church. Yet there are differing interpretations among members of what family roles should be, and whether they should

be Christian or Confucian. One maintained that Confucian moral rules were similar to some Christian values. Confucianism, he argued, lacks the personal relationship with God, but its moral teachings on behavior and relationships are very compatible with Christianity.

Confucius says that in the society you have to have order...so the emperor has emperor's duties and position,...and the father has his position and his duties...and the same with the children... Confucius, he's trying to solve the human problems, the society problems by constructing...a very structuralized (sic) society...in that sense, everybody knows what to do, what not to do...that part is the same as Christian teachings.<sup>33</sup>

There are some differences in opinion about familial roles, and these seem generally to reflect existing differences in cultural interpretations. Those who uphold the Confucian ideal of a husband's dominance also interpret the Bible in the same way; those who reject the notion argue that the Bible should be interpreted with regard to changes in culture and history. For example, at a workshop on marriage, members debated whether the sexes are equal or not, and whether or not the wife should submit to the husband's will in all situations. Some argued that the Bible clearly stated that the wife should submit, while others held more liberal interpretations. Often it is not clear whether positions are based on interpretations of the Bible or of traditional Chinese values. When one member stated that she couldn't believe that a young man would expect his wife to give up her career to teach the children at home, she attributed this attitude to his traditional Taiwanese upbringing rather than to his belief in Christianity. She felt her belief in the equality of the sexes did not interfere with her Christianity.

## CONCLUSION

Pittsburgh's Chinese Church has succeeded in promoting conversion to Christianity without significant loss of cultural identity, and without the wholesale replacement of old values with new ones. What has happened, though, is that members transformed their existing cultural system through the addition of Christianity. Therefore, while Pittsburgh's Chinese Christian community is changing, it also reproduces existing beliefs and practice. For many, membership in the church is a means to preserve their Chinese identity while incorporating

Christianity in ways that are meaningful. In this sense, conversion to Christianity is a way of sheltering themselves from secular American culture and, at times, from American culture more generally. It

is the self-governing nature of this church, with its emphasis on conversion rather than assimilation, which allows for the transformation and reproduction of identity among Chinese Christians. They do not receive pressure from pastors or church members to accept all American practices because Christianity is no longer viewed as a strictly American religion as it was in the past. The availability of various activities which are designed to meet the specific needs of different groups also promotes diversity and the reproduction of old systems of values and practice, thus allowing individual ethnic identity to be fluid, while allowing a group identity to survive. Thus the PCC and ESCC permit Pittsburgh's Chinese residents to survive as cohesive communities, despite considerable internal diversity. In doing so, they continue to enrich the cultural fabric of the wider area. ☼

## Notes

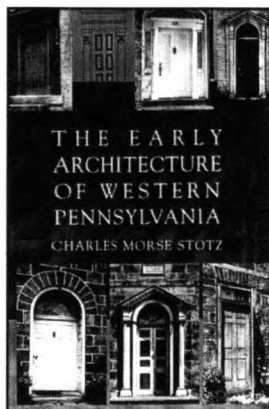
- <sup>1</sup> Today among Chinese Christians there is little discussion of "assimilation" or "Americanization;" rather, Pittsburgh's Chinese community supports a diverse group of people of Chinese ancestry from America, Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China. Their cultures not only are tolerated in this Christian church, but in many ways are viewed as quite compatible with Christianity.
- <sup>2</sup> Sucheng Chan, "The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1870-1943," in Chan, ed., *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America* (Philadelphia, 1991), 138; George Anthony Peffer, "Forbidden Families: Emigration Experiences of Chinese Women Under the Page Law, 1875-1882," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 6 (Fall 1986): 28-67.
- <sup>3</sup> Charles Reeves May, "Beaver Falls Chinatown," reprinted by the *Harmonie Herald* (Feb. 1973), 3-4.
- <sup>4</sup> *Beaver Argus*, May 21, 1873.
- <sup>5</sup> *Pittsburgh Post*, June 25, 1909; *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Dec. 10, 1936.
- <sup>6</sup> *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, July 11, 1909.
- <sup>7</sup> Sunday school records of the East Liberty Presbyterian Church.
- <sup>8</sup> Chien-shiung Wu, "The Chinese in Pittsburgh: A Changing Minority Community in the United States," (Ph.D. diss.: University of Pittsburgh, Dept. of History, 1982), 128.
- <sup>9</sup> Mable Voelzke, "Early History of the Pittsburgh Chinese Mission," unpublished paper, not dated.
- <sup>10</sup> Mable Voelzke, "Early History of Pittsburgh Chinese Mission"; Bill Ott, paper on history of church.
- <sup>11</sup> Mable Voelzke, "Early History."
- <sup>12</sup> Interview, July 25, 1993.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview, July 25, 1993.
- <sup>14</sup> Voelzke, "Early History," 1.
- <sup>15</sup> Interview, June 26, 1993.
- <sup>16</sup> Interview, June 26, 1993.
- <sup>17</sup> *Pittsburgh Press*, Dec. 19, 1965.
- <sup>18</sup> The Pittsburgh Chinese Church, *Tenth Anniversary* (1975), 3-4.
- <sup>19</sup> Pittsburgh Chinese Church, *Tenth Anniversary*, 2.
- <sup>20</sup> Jane Chu, "Thy Neighbor — ESCC," in *The Grace Vine*, newsletter of the Grace Reformed Presbyterian Church, Nov. 1991.
- <sup>21</sup> East Suburban Chinese Church, constitution.
- <sup>22</sup> Interview, July 20, 1993.
- <sup>23</sup> Interview, July 27, 1993.
- <sup>24</sup> Interview, July 18, 1993.
- <sup>25</sup> Interview, August 9, 1993.
- <sup>26</sup> Interview, August 7, 1993.
- <sup>27</sup> Interview, July 8, 1993.
- <sup>28</sup> Interview, July 8, 1993.
- <sup>29</sup> Interview, July 10, 1993.
- <sup>30</sup> Interview, July 4, 1993.
- <sup>31</sup> Interview, July 4, 1993.
- <sup>32</sup> Interviews, July 25, 1993; July 18, 1993.
- <sup>33</sup> Interview, July 10, 1993.
- <sup>34</sup> "Chinese Plot" sidebar information from *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Jan. 4, 1928. Three years earlier (April 21, 1925) a funeral which included a similar mixture of Chinese religion and Christianity was reported in the *Pittsburgh Post*.



Both English and Chinese writing are found on the headstones in the Chinese cemetery.

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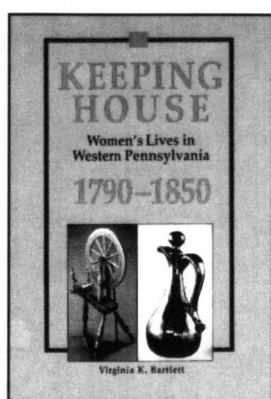
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