

CHINESE AMERICAN MUSEUM

425 North Los Angeles Street Los Angeles, CA 90012 Tel 213 485-8484 Fax 213 485-0428 www.camla.org

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Contact: Ellen Endo
(818) 512-8791
pr@camla.org

Chinese American Museum Spotlights Rise of Communities

Origins: The Birth and Rise of Chinese American Communities in Los Angeles, has officially opened as a permanent addition to the Chinese American Museum (CAM) at El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. It marks the first time a permanent exhibit is devoted to the contributions and historical evolution of Southern California's diverse and vital Chinese American communities.

Friends of the Chinese American Museum (FCAM) board members joined museum Executive Director Dr. Michael Duchemin and FCAM president Al Soo-Hoo in welcoming the first visitors to the new exhibit opening and reception, which

Origins features a multimedia journey through three distinct areas--Historic Chinatown, New Chinatown, and Monterey Park and culminates more than a decade of meticulous curating, artifact collection, and content development and is CAM's largest and most ambitious exhibition to date, reports Dr. Duchemin.

"The notion of Chinatown as a quaint commercial district comprised of restaurants and gift shops no longer adequately defines the depth, diversity, and growth within the Chinese American community," emphasizes Duchemin. "Our goal is to reflect how each of the communities has evolved and how each has its own distinct character and attributes."

Curator Steve Wong adds, "Each neighborhood tells the story of the accomplishments as well as the struggles that occurred in establishing these three geographic neighborhoods in the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area—neighborhoods where Chinese Americans settled and still live."

Wong notes that Historic Chinatown is rooted in L.A.'s own history. Chinese began to settle in the city in the mid-1800s. By 1870, a small community of about 200 Chinese immigrants occupied Calle de Los Negros, a one-block long alley that became known as "Chinatown." Despite racial discrimination and passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Historic Chinatown's population grew to over 3,000 by the turn of the century.

Today, more than a half million persons of Chinese descent reside in Southern California, the second largest concentration in the United States. According to United States Census figures, the Chinese population in America is the largest among all Asian groups and one of the fastest

growing. Among the ten cities in the United States with the highest proportions of Chinese Americans, the top eight are located in the [San Gabriel Valley](#).

Duchemin credited the CAM Board of Directors, Board President Al Soo-Hoo, and the museum's dedicated team of experts for making the important, comprehensive exhibition possible. On display will be treasured artifacts that have become iconic symbols of Chinese American pride.

Housed in the Beth and Wilbur Woo Foundation Gallery and Mezzanine Gallery, *Origins* complements existing permanent displays, *Journeys* and *Sun Wing Wo General Store and Herb Shop*.

Wong points out that museum displays are no longer static. For example, in the Monterey Park section of the new exhibit is built around advanced technology where visitors can to create and view real-time documentaries and post them to *Origins Online*, a digital history exhibition on the Internet (origins.camla.org). This new section expands the museum boundaries beyond its walls. Other sections of the exhibit look at livelihood, formation of social and political organizations, civic engagement, milestones, and the history and development of neighborhood geography.

Operated by the Friends of the Chinese American Museum (FCAM) as a part of El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument, CAM helps foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of America's diverse heritage by researching, preserving, and sharing the history, rich cultural legacy, and continuing contributions of Chinese Americans.

CAM opened its doors in 2003 after more than 30 years of planning, resource development, political advocacy, and community support. The museum occupies the historic 1890 Garnier Building, the oldest and last remaining structure of Los Angeles' original Chinatown, and the adjacent 425 N. Los Angeles Street building. The City of Los Angeles provides the building, housekeeping services, maintenance and security. FCAM does the fundraising necessary to create exhibitions and public programs in the Museum. Funds are raised through memberships, individual and corporate contributions, government and private foundation grants, and special events, including CAM's annual Lantern Festival and Historymakers Awards Banquet.

The museum is located at 425 N. Los Angeles St., just south of Olvera Street, and is open Tuesday-Sunday, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily, closed Mondays, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day, and Fourth of July (cross street Arcadia, enter from west side off Sanchez Street).

For additional information, visit the website at camla.org. Suggested admission: adults, \$3; seniors 60 and over, \$2; students with ID, \$2; and CAM members, free. All exhibits are wheelchair accessible.

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