CHANG KEE, KAUAI BUSINESSMAN AND PHILANTHROPIST (C. 1866-1924)

White sails billowed overhead as #4 and #5 sons boarded the sailing ship in Hong Kong. It was 1882 and the two teen-agers, 18 and 16, had traveled from their village of Oosyak in Jungshan District. They were tourists paying passage to see the world and to seek their fortunes. #1 brother had already settled in Manila, Philipines. The brothers would all leave home. #4 and #5 were traveling on the famous ships that traded Chinese goods worldwide. The first stop on their tour was California. Perhaps, it was the cold climate, or the unfamiliar terrain but whatever the reasons, they continued on to Hawaii. They disembarked in Honolulu and parted company.

#5 son was Chang Kee, who later became a successful businessman and philanthropist on the island of Kauai from about 1890 to 1924 when he returned to China with his ailing wife. He died a few months after her of a broken-heart some say, but his 5 children returned to Hawaii on the advice of relatives in 1928.

Chang Kee's first job in Hawaii was that of a cook in Hilo with Hip Wo. He quit and came to Honolulu to work as a general laborer at the Gong Hip Loong Store. The owner, another Chang, sent him to Koloa, Kauai in 1893 to close a branch store, the See Apui Store, which had been loosing money.

He liked Kauai and saw good business prospects in a store to supply the 4-500 Chinese rice farmers and the numerous sugar plantation contract laborers and their families living in Hanalei, Kekaha and Mana.

He approached Valdemar Knudsen who leased land from the Hawaiian government. Knudsen told Chang Kee that he could sublease anything he desired. Chang Kee chose a one-third acre parcel across the street from Kekaha school and near the sugar mill and workers' camps. He built his store and prospered. An astute businessman, he owned shares in numerous other businesses including, City Mill, Wing Sing Wo, and the Hawaiian Pineapple Company.

It was soon apparent to him that Chinese laborers had no proper burial ground, so he negotiated a 100 year lease with Knudsen for the land that the Waimea Bak Hook Tong Cemetery now Occupies. When Knudsen lease expired, Amfac purchased the land from the Hawaiian government. Chang Kee purchased the land under his store from Amfac for $500 and that of the cemetery which is in the name of the cemetery association to this day. 10 shares in the former Chinese-American Bank provides money for the upkeep of the cemetery by the association's treasurer on Kauai.

Chang Kee's generosity was well-known. He sent old men back to China to bring back wives. He also provided for the education of relatives that he would later bring to Hawaii. Young Chang would graduate in the 1920's from the university of North Carolina before returning to China. American-Chinese dental and medical students benefited from Chang Kee's loans and gifts and had opportunity to practice at the store clinic.

Chang Kee was 5'8" tall, very strong and husky. Affectionately called "Momona" (Fat) by everyone, he spoke fluent Hawaiian and pidgin plantation languages. He was well acquainted with Prince Kuhio who would spend many an hour at Momona's coffeeshop-restaurant talking story, or would take him riding in his motorcar. The affable Kuhio after all was a Koloa boy and Momona was a Hawaiian citizen in 1892 and consequently an American citizen in 1898.

In 1908, Momona returned to China and married his beautiful and very young neighbor, Tong Lin Hoy. She proved a clever and able companion, adapting herself quickly to the rigors of life on Kauai. She taught herself to sew on a sewing machine. She gardened, raised chickens and tended the coffeeshop-restaurant while raising five children. After the first two, Clara in 1910 and Sing in 1911, the young family returned to build a two story brick home with 90 acres of land in the village. The house and some land are still occupied by relatives and belongs to the oldest son, Sing. The 3rd child, Clarence Chinn, was born there. They returned to Kauai with the young men, Dan Fong chang and Young Chang.

The Kekaha store sold every imaginable item necessary for plantation and farm life, including Lin Hoy's home sown tabis, pants, shirts and underwear for the laborers. To the rear of the property was a large warehouse that stored rice and provided sleeping quarters for visitors and a few hired workers. Next to the store was a coffeeshop-restaurant. The family compound was nearby with vegetable garden and chicken yard.

Life was idyllic for the children who played with the multy-national plantation workers kids and the few haole managers' kids who wandered near the store. There were fields to roam, horses to ride, and Paleka Ono's cow to milk. Dorothy Mewha and Yuk Hung were born in 1916 and 1919 respectively.

Plantation workers left their "bungos" or paycheck tickets at the store. Momona would deduct the amount of their monthly purchases and return the remaining amount in cash, or kind. Farmers brought their produce to sell, doctors and dentists treated their patients, people bought coffee or a meal, and the store was a lively place. An excellent cook, he held an annual 9 course dinner that brought people from miles around and also proved quite profitable.

By 1918, Momona had a Ford truck, Besides business use, the family often drove to Mana Pond to watch the flocks of ducks, and visited along the way.

In 1924, Lin Hoy knew that she was dying of kidney failure. Several doctors told her that there was no hope for her and that she didn't have long to live. She was in her thirties. She asked her husband to take her back to the village. So they leased the store to Dang Fong and returned to Oosyak.

Before Lin Hoy died, she left a chest of jewelry in care of her brother, Tommy. Chang Kee died suddenly without a will. The orphaned minors were sent back to Honolulu in 1928 with only that chest of jewelry and a house and lot on 6th Avenue newly purchased with Chang Kee's insurance money. A sad indictment of those he generously helped, not one except Tommy Tong would aid any of Chang Kee's children. The second generation would learn to survive alone in the city.

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