

# E-Newsletter of the Organization of Chinese American Women

November 2024



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501(c)(3) Nonprofit Organization

*(from Linda Devine, Editor)*

My thanks as always to those who contributed material for the e-newsletter, and I appreciate my husband Ed's work on preparing the many photos in this issue.

I continue to encourage OCAW members to write articles or submit information if there is something you think would be of interest to the membership.

Please also feel free to send me any suggestions that you might have for the e-newsletter at:  
[devinefive@comcast.net](mailto:devinefive@comcast.net).

This is the final issue of 2024. I wish everyone a Happy Thanksgiving, wonderful end-of-the-year holidays, and a Happy New Year! See you in 2025! ☺

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## **News from the Virginia Chapter**

*(from Barbara York, President)*

Our National President Maria Yang who voluntarily teaches Intermediate Chinese in a Zoom class invited the students to join OCAW as lifetime members and thereby enroll in her class for no tuition. Four students accepted her offer, and the Virginia Chapter welcomed as new lifetime members: Margaret Harris, Irene Lee-Kim-OK, Lilian Sy, and Doug Wham.

Maria has graciously offered this opportunity to anyone who would like to join her class. If you are a lifetime member and would like to study (and/or refresh your) reading and speaking Intermediate Chinese, please

contact Maria at: [yangyutan@icloud.com](mailto:yangyutan@icloud.com). If you know anyone who would like to study with Maria, their only requirement would be to join OCAW as lifetime members. Please let Maria know.

### **Mid-Autumn Festival**

The Virginia Chapter Mid-Autumn Potluck Party was held on Sunday, September 15, 2024, and the venue was the 23rd floor Penthouse Party Room of Amy Lee's condo building in Alexandria, Virginia.

Among OCAW members and their families and friends, we had 18 in attendance. The food was wonderful, and was only outdone by a magnificent full moon.

It was a very successful event, and everyone had an enjoyable time.



Spectacular sunset



Florence Kwok and Glen Schwartz with his piece-de-resistance, a Chinese-style roast duck (covered in foil) that he cooked on a smoker



Chi Hua Yang carving Glen's duck





The mouth-watering spread





Feasting away



OCAW sisterhood: Chi Hua Yang, Cathy Roberts, Jane Pan, Barbara York, Christina Chang, Donna Byler, Amy Lee with Soleil, and Maria Yang





### Moon-gazing

Tony Byler, the lifeguard, Florence Kwok, Amy Lee with Soleil, Steve and Christina Chang, Maria Yang, Donna Byler, Francis and Jane Pan, Teresa and Jack Cohen. Dick and Cathy Roberts, and Glen Schwartz and Chi Hua Yang

### **Old Dominion Chrysanthemum Society Exhibit, Dance Recital, and Lunch**

On Sunday, October 27, 2024, a group of OCAW-VA members and friends met at the beautiful display of chrysanthemums organized by the Old Dominion Chrysanthemum Society which is chaired by Camilla Ng. Camilla is a former OCAW Maryland Chapter President and former Virginia Chapter Acting President. The event was held at the James Lee Community Center in Falls Church, Virginia. The flower display was breathtaking.





Camilla's dance troupe performed the Chrysanthemum Dance, and it was absolutely lovely.



(center) Chapter President Barbara York and Camilla Ng



Afterward, a few members and friends went for an excellent dim sum lunch at Vinh Kee restaurant in Falls Church, Virginia. A good time was had by all.



Wanda Chin, Gloria Valencia, Alice Ling, and Angeli Ansari



Irene Lee-Kim-OK (new member), Amy Lee, Barbara York, Ming Juan Pan with baby Grace Gu, Vicky Wu, Jenny Wu Gu, Margaret Harris (new member), and Pu-Chin Waide

### **Tour of a special National Museum of Asian Art exhibit**

On Saturday, November 2, 2024, Walter Woo, a friend of OCAW-VA member Amy Lee, led a tour of a temporary exhibit entitled, “An Epic of Kings: The Great Mongol Shahnama” at the National Museum of Asian Art in Washington, D.C. Walter is a docent at the museum. Amy and Christina Chang participated in the tour, which was very enlightening. Our thanks to Walter for his efforts!







Amy Lee, docent Walter Woo, and Christina Chang

If you are interested in seeing this exhibit, it will be on display until January 12, 2025.

Amy comments: "This exhibit is not to be missed." She encourages members to try to see it before it closes. She adds that "it's well worth the time spent."

### **Upcoming event**

#### **Lunar New Year Potluck Lunch**

The OCAW-VA Chapter cordially invites all OCAW members and their families and friends to our 2025 Lunar New Year Potluck Lunch to welcome in the Year of the Snake. If you are in the Washington, D.C. area (to include Northern Virginia and a good part of Maryland) for the Lunar New Year next year, please plan to come Saturday, February 1 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. The place will be the Penthouse Party Room of Amy Lee's condo building, which is located at 400 Madison Street in Alexandria, Virginia. You don't have to bring anything; the Virginia Chapter will be happy to host you.

If you plan to attend, please RSVP to: [york.barbara2023@gmail.com](mailto:york.barbara2023@gmail.com)

Last but not least, all best wishes to all OCAW members and their families: Happy Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas, and a very Healthy, Successful, and Wonderful New Year!

*(All photos in this section taken by, or courtesy of, Amy Lee)*

### **News from the Silicon Valley Chapter**

*(Yufan Lu, President)*

#### **OCAW-SVC Members Reconnect and Welcome New Faces**

*(from Anne Hu, Communications Officer)*

On Sunday, October 20, 2024, the OCAW Silicon Valley Chapter held a delightful social event at Aqui Mexican Fusion restaurant in Cupertino, California. This gathering, running from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., was a cozy meet-up designed to foster intimate conversations among the members. It marked one of the few socials in recent times, the last being the officer installation and scholarship award ceremony back in August.

The event featured a small group that included OCAW-SVC's key officers: President Yufan Lu, Vice President Isabelle Guh, Public Relations Officer Cynthia Chang, and Communications Officer Anne Hu. Immediate Past President Jen Tsao also graced the event later in the afternoon, adding to the warm, familial atmosphere.

This social was not just about catching up; it was a time to welcome new and potential members into the fold. Among the attendees was a new member, Jacey Shuieh, a freshman in college and the daughter of a longstanding member. Her presence underscored the generational bridge within OCAW, highlighting the organization's appeal to both seasoned and younger members. Jacey shared her enthusiasm about joining OCAW-SVC, stating, "I was first introduced to OCAW through my mom, as she has been a member for a long time. Though the luncheon was my first day as an official member, I have attended the OCAW-SVC Youth Scholarship Award event twice before."

Jacey's decision to join the organization was motivated by her desire to connect with other Asian-American women in the Bay Area and contribute her skills in writing and journalism. "I'm not exactly sure what I want to achieve here at OCAW, but I enjoy writing, so I might help out with writing some pieces in the future!" she added.

The luncheon was filled with laughter as members exchanged personal stories and travel adventures, truly making the most of the reunion. There was also talk of upcoming social events of other local organizations, keeping everyone engaged and excited about future opportunities for community involvement and networking.

OCAW-SVC's October social event not only provided a platform for reconnection among longtime members, but also opened new avenues for involvement and contribution, particularly from the younger generation. As the organization continues to grow, it remains a significant force in fostering community ties and supporting the ambitions of Asian-American women in the region.





*(beginning at left and moving clockwise)* Jacey Shuieh, Aichu Wang, Helen Chiang, Cynthia Chang, Jen Tsao, Yufan Lu, Isabelle Guh, Anne Hu, Elaine Han, and Yuhua Chen

### **Annual Silicon Valley Walk to End Alzheimer's**

*(from Carol Yuan, Secretary)*

This is the 10th year the Silicon Valley Chapter participates in the “Silicon Valley Walk to End Alzheimer’s” to raise awareness and funds to fight Alzheimer’s disease. The goal of the Silicon Valley Walk is to raise \$2.125M this year. Nearly \$2M has been raised so far. The event is organized by the Alzheimer’s Association. The Association is the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer’s care, support, and research. Its mission is to eliminate Alzheimer’s disease through the advancement of research; to provide and enhance care and support for all affected; and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, Alzheimer's disease accounts for 60-80% of dementia diagnoses in the United States. Most people with Alzheimer's disease also show brain changes linked to other types of dementia. More than 6 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's. By 2060, this number is projected to rise to nearly 13.9 million. Estimates of the total medical payments related to healthcare and hospice care for dementia in 2023 are as high as \$345 billion, according to the Alzheimer's Association.

On top of this, around 11 million family members and unpaid caregivers provided around 18 billion hours of Alzheimer's disease care in 2022, which the Alzheimer's Association valued at around \$339.5 billion. The total Medicaid payments for those ages 65 and over with Alzheimer's disease were around three times as much as for those without the condition.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, around two-thirds of people who receive an Alzheimer's disease diagnosis are females. More research is coming to light that highlights sex-specific causes of this increased Alzheimer's disease risk in females. For example:

- One 2019 study found links between a female's age at first menstrual cycle, their age of menopause, and their risk of developing Alzheimer's disease.

- Some research has connected the biology of the female brain to increased production of an Alzheimer's disease-linked protein called tau.

- Increased participation in the workforce and greater levels of education of females over the last 100 years may have resulted in lower rates of Alzheimer's disease. This could explain why older females who make up today's data might experience Alzheimer's disease more often than males, and this may change over time.

I've been very happy to be the team captain for the 10th year. Our team's name is OCAW-SVC Friends and Families. We have 30 team members and donors this year. As a team, we've raised \$3,574 so far. Fundraising will continue until the end of this year. We welcome any donations to support the fight to end this disease. Our team link is: [http://act.alz.org/goto/OCAW\\_SVCFriendsandFamilies](http://act.alz.org/goto/OCAW_SVCFriendsandFamilies)

This year's walk took place on Saturday, September 28 and was again at Lake Cunningham Park in San Jose, California. More than 3000 people took part walking either a one-mile or three-mile route around the park. Sophia Yang and her friend Debbie Lu, our President Yufan Lu, Immediate Past President Jen Tsao, SVC member Yuhua Eve Chen, and I joined the Walk and completed the 3-mile route. We were happy to run into Aichu Wang, SVC member and long-term supporter, on the Walk. Aichu joined her high school alumni team in support of the Walk this year.



We are a Champions Club team.

At the Champions Club station  
before the Walk

Yufan Lu, Jen Tsao, Sophia  
Yang, and Yuhua Eve Chen



Yuhua Eve Chen, Jen Tsao, Carol Yuan, Yufan Lu, Sophia Yang, and Debbie Lu



At the Walk start point



A beautiful reflection on the lake's surface

Debbie Lu, Jen Tsao, Aichu Wang, Yufan Lu, Sophia Yang, and Carol Yuan





A Mexican singing and dancing group performing at the Walk



An Asian American youth musical group performing at the Walk





Yufan Lu with a group of student volunteers



Jen Tsao ran through a lively arch formed by cheering volunteers, who all had their hands raised high.





Happily resting in front of the stage after the Walk

\* \* \* \* \*

In addition to the Walk, I hosted two gatherings in my backyard to create succulent pumpkins arrangements and invited a group of my coworkers to come for this year's fundraising efforts. These events were held on Thursday, September 26 and Thursday, October 31, from around noon to 4 p.m. I prepared a light lunch of bagel sandwiches, salad, fruits, and drinks. My guests brought snacks and goodies.

I'm pleased to share that twelve of them participated, and eleven made donations for the first time and one for the second time! ☺







Yvonne Lee, Leh Yuh Tsai, Debbie Wen, and Carol Yuan



Kathy Chien, Leeland Wong, Kao Chin, Mary Lai, Jessie Chou, Christina Kao, and Angie Chen





*(Editor's Note: Kudos, Carol, for your admirable work and great success!)*

### **Community Spirit: OCAW-SVC Members Attend Charity Concert**

*(from Jen Tsao, Immediate Past President)*

We, the OCAW-SVC members, are always ready to support our community.

On Saturday, November 2, 2024, SVC members Cynthia Chang, Sophia Yang, Isabelle Guh, Helen Chiang, and Jacey Shuieh attended a charity concert benefiting the Alzheimer's Association. It was held at the Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Saratoga, California.

The event featured local musicians, including sopranos Keiko Kagawa and Masae Nagai, and pianist Kumiko Nishikawa, who performed beautiful music by Handel, Mozart, J. Strauss, Lehár, and Bernstein, and selections from various musicals.

All proceeds went to the Alzheimer's Association.



*(Photo taken by Angel Tu)*



*(Photo taken by Kou-Loon Soong)*





OCAW-SVC members attended the concert.

*(kneeling) Sophia Yang (2nd from left), Cynthia Chang (center), and Isabelle Guh (right)*

### **From and About Our Members**

#### **Continuing community volunteering: About Tina Au**

*Editor's Note:* I continue to admire community involvement by volunteers who give of their time to help others and make their communities better. One such individual who gives ongoing efforts is Tina Au, Hawaii Chapter member and former Chapter President. I asked Tina what she has been doing of late, and she wrote back about many projects with which she's been involved, a number of which were special events. Many, however, were continuing activities.

As just a very small sampling:

On Saturday, August 17, 2024, she participated in a Chinatown Clean Up day. The Honolulu Police Department and other societies, organizations, and banks joined together to make this happen.

On Saturday, September 28, she volunteered to serve hot meals to the homeless at one of the Waikiki shelters.





Tina Au (4th from the left)

Tina participated on October 13 in the Susan G. Komen “More Than Pink” Walk to raise funds for breast cancer research. These walks are held in multiple locations all over the country, and Honolulu’s walk took place on this day.





Tina's efforts are to be commended, as are the efforts of other OCAW members who give selflessly of their time. Tina and others should be an inspiration to all of us. If other OCAW members are involved in community service, I would love to hear from you and highlight your efforts in our e-newsletter!

### **Madama Butterfly and Me**

*(from Jen Tsao, Silicon Valley Chapter Immediate Past President)*

During the pandemic, when outdoor activities were permitted, you might have spotted a group of ladies from Silicon Valley Opera in Cupertino, California, gathered in Memorial Park, music scores for *Madama Butterfly* in hand, singing, acting, and laughing together.

With the obstacles at that time, facing restrictions on indoor performances, the opera team members moved out of the area and also lost contact with the owner of a set of kimonos. We were unable to proceed for a while. However, we regrouped earlier this year and rehearsed intensively.

On Sunday, September 22, 2024, we finally brought *Madama Butterfly* to life at the Historic Hoover Theater in San Jose, California. I felt truly honored and delighted to be part of the Opera Chorus for this performance.

On the day of the show, I spent an hour in the stylist's chair as they crafted an elaborate hairstyle befitting an ancient Japanese lady. It took another 50 minutes for the kimono professional to dress me in a beautiful kimono. With the heavy makeup, I was fully transformed; my classmate even walked past me without recognizing me!



Jen Tsao (2nd from the right)

The 200-seat theater was packed, with audience members even standing in the hallway. The subtitles effectively guided everyone as the performance unfolded.



Jen Tsao (with the pink parasol)







Now, whenever I look at photos from that day, I still feel a thrill. According to our director, this will be the final production of *Madama Butterfly* by our opera group for the foreseeable future. We are preparing to perform *Carmen* next year. However, the experience of participating in *Madama Butterfly* will always hold a special place in my heart.



Jen Tsao flanked by OCAW-SVC members Carol Yuan and Sophia Yang

### **Federal Asian Pacific American Council event**

*(from Maria Yang, National President)*

I was honored to be invited by the Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC) to attend their appreciation luncheon and 2024 officers installation ceremony on Friday, October 4, 2024, at the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C.

The new president, Fahmida Chhipa, is beginning her second term. She has been a valued friend of OCAW and has played a crucial role in helping me develop more vital leadership skills since I volunteered as President of the Virginia Chapter many years ago.

The event featured several distinguished guests, including keynote speaker Krystal Ka'ai, Executive Director of the White House Initiative on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (WHIAANHPI); Major General Roy J. Macaraeg; and Sanah Baig, Deputy Under Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.





Krystal Ka'ai, Executive Director, WHIAANHPI



Maria Yang and Fahmida Chhipa

### **In Memoriam: Jeanie Jew**

#### **Letter from Christina Poy to APA community leaders and advocates**

*(Editor's Note: Christina is a former President and current Advisor of the Maryland Chapter.)*

It is with deep sorrow that I announce the passing of my godmother, Jeanie Fong Lee Jew, who created Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. She passed away at home on October 23, 2024.

Jeanie wore many hats over the years. To name only a few, she was a former national president of the Organization of Chinese American Women, a founding member of the Organization of Chinese Americans, a television producer, a former chair of the Fairfax County Commission for Women, a board member of a financial institution, Miss Chinatown DC in 1961, and an official for the National Association for Multicultural Education.

But she was best known for speaking around the nation about Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. Here is an article in *TIME* magazine about how it all began:

<https://time.com/5592591/asian-pacific-heritage-month-history/>.

A bit of inside the beltway trivia for you, the May recognition of Asian and Pacific American Heritage Week was first observed by our neighbor Fairfax County in Virginia the year before it was nationally recognized, because Jeanie Jew lived in Fairfax, VA.

Please keep her family in your thoughts and prayers. Rest in Paradise, Auntie Jeanie!

Sorrowfully,

Christina Poy

Administrative Director

Maryland Governor's Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs

Maryland Governor's Commission on South Asian American Affairs

Maryland Governor's Office of Community Initiatives



Christina Poy and Jeanie Jew  
at the Celebration of the AAPI Members of the 115th U.S. Congress, January 5, 2017

### **In Memory of Jeanie Jew**

*(from Maria Yang, National President)*

I received the sad news from Faith Breen and Christina Chang that Jeanie Jew passed away on October 23, 2024. Jeanie served as OCAW's National President from 1997 to 2001. The organization lobbied the federal government on issues such as immigration laws. OCAW also coordinated with the Immigration and Naturalization Service to help Asian immigrants apply for permanent residency and supported get-out-the-vote campaigns to improve Asian American voter turnout.

I first met Jeanie in the 1990s, when she took a Chinese class with me at George Mason University in Virginia, every Saturday morning. Before long, she and Donna Byler recruited me to join OCAW-VA. Jeanie deeply loved language, culture, and literature beyond her professional expertise. After she retired, she



continued taking classes at GMU and occasionally sat in on a literature class I taught in English.

Jeanie was the one who inspired me to stay involved with the organization and to take on a volunteer role, which gave me an opportunity to learn how to serve the OCAW community. Her passion and dedication will be greatly missed.



Jeanie Jew spoke at Maryland's 2016 Asian Pacific American Heritage Month Observance in Annapolis. Jeanie and Director Christina Poy of the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives presented Yumi Hogan, First Lady of Maryland, with a Chinese painting on behalf of OCAW.

Jeanie was a fourth-generation Chinese American. She was influenced by the example of her grandfather, M.Y. Lee, a worker on the construction of the first transcontinental railroad who was murdered during a time of racial strife. She also learned about the challenges faced by her parents at a time of national hostility towards Chinese Americans. She was an advocate for Chinese American rights and played an important role in creating Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month. She created the idea of a proclamation that gave us the identity and recognition that we richly deserve. With the support of hundreds of other groups, OCAW and OCA joined her in a national effort to walk the halls of government in Virginia, Congress, and the White House to have our history accepted as an integral part of the making of our nation.

Jeanie worked as a staffer on Capitol Hill. After witnessing the 1976 U.S. Bicentennial celebrations, she became frustrated that there was nothing to honor Asian and Pacific Americans. According to the U.S. census, from 1970 to 1980 the population of Asian Americans doubled during the decade from 1.5 million people to 3.7 million people. The significant number of contributions Asian Americans provided was something that Jew thought needed recognition.

Jew approached Representative Frank Horton of New York with the idea that there should be a month dedicated to Asian Americans. She created and lobbied for legislation to be passed and worked closely with representatives to bring more representation for all Asian Americans.



At Maryland's 2016 Asian Pacific American Heritage Month Observance in Annapolis, Jeanie Jew received the Governor's Proclamation for APAHM from Yumi Hogan, First Lady of Maryland, and Steve McAdams, Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives.

In May 1990, we celebrated the inaugural Asian Pacific American Heritage Month (APAHM), honoring the leaders and advocates whose vision and hard work made this designation possible. As the Chair of the Fairfax County Commission for Women in Virginia, she championed this recognition of our community's heritage and contributions. As we commemorate APA Heritage Month, we remember Jeanie's legacy with profound gratitude, honoring her unwavering commitment to public service and her spirit that inspires OCAW.

Jeanie has found peace in Heaven now, and her memory lives on warmly in our hearts, cherished and never forgotten. Jeanie, we love you and will miss you!

*(Editor's Note: Maria provided more detailed information below about the history of Jeanie's important legislation.)*

### **In depth: The origins of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month**

APAHM began with Jeanie Jew, a staffer on Capitol Hill and board member of the Organization of Chinese Americans. Jew was frustrated that Asian Pacific Americans were not included as recognized communities in celebration of the United States bicentennial in 1976, and she started a nationwide advocacy campaign to designate one week in May as Asian Pacific American Heritage Week. In addition, she also wanted to commemorate her great-grandfather, who helped build the Transcontinental Railroad.

Jew enlisted the support of Ruby Moy, an administrative assistant to U.S. Representative Frank Horton of New York. In June 1977, a bill was introduced by Horton and co-sponsored by U.S. Representative Norman





Jeanie Jew, flanked by OCAW Maryland lifetime members Pam Wong and Christina Poy,  
at Madame Anna Chennault's funeral

Mineta of California, urging the President to proclaim the seven-day period beginning May 4, 1979, as "Pacific/Asian American Heritage Week." A similar bill was also introduced in the Senate by Hawaii Senators Daniel Inouye and Spark Matsunaga. Eventually, both bills were revised to conform to the Census Bureau's designation of the community as "Asian/Pacific."

The week of May 4 was selected for Asian/Pacific American Heritage Week as a memorial to two historical events that took place during that period: the arrival of the first Japanese immigrants to the United States, recorded as May 7, 1843; and the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad on May 10, 1869.

The persistent efforts of Jew, Moy, and a coalition of national advocacy organizations secured 231 Congressional representatives to co-sponsor the bill, which passed by an overwhelming majority in the House and the Senate.

On October 5, 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed the joint resolution into law that proclaimed the week beginning May 4, 1979 as Asian/Pacific American Heritage Week. Carter issued Presidential Proclamation 4650, which spoke to the significant role of Asian/Pacific Americans in American history, with contributions to the sciences, arts, industry, government, and commerce.

As the adopted joint resolution did not contain provisions for following years, Presidents Carter, Reagan, and Bush continued to annually issue proclamations designating a week in May as Asian/Pacific American Heritage Week upon re-application by community organizations.

It took more than 10 years of advocacy before the celebration was extended to include the entire month of May. Bush issued Presidential Proclamation 6130 on May 7, 1990, designating that month as the first "Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month." Then in 1992, Horton introduced legislation that permanently designated May as "Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month."

*(Editor's Note: The month is now known as "Asian American Pacific Islander Native Hawaiian Heritage Month.")*

*(Photos courtesy of Christina Poy)*

## **Traditional Architectural Feature and Art**

**by Camilla Ng**

*(Editor's Note: Camilla is a former President of the Maryland Chapter.)*

This summer, I had the pleasure to travel with the Fairfax Chinese Dance Troupe (FCDT) to a part of Taiwan that most Taiwanese have not been to, Kinmen. Kinmen is a county of Taiwan that is comprised of a group of islands about 116 miles west of the island of Taiwan across the Taiwan Strait. It is only 6.2 miles from Xiamen, China, separated from Xiamen by Xiamen Bay. Kinmen was once a closed island fortress which has recently opened to tourism. Its strategic location in the Taiwan Strait has caused many confrontations.

The FCDT was invited to perform at a dance festival in Kinmen. The program included two other Chinese dance troupes from the U.S. and the local Kinmen youth dance troupe. The FCDT performed three pieces of choreography: feather fan, kungfu fan, and umbrella.



Camilla Ng (standing, 3rd from the left)



After the performance, we had two days of sightseeing in Kinmen. The tour stops included military frontline defense along the coast, landmarks that commemorate historic heroes, and of course shops that feature famous local products and foods. At two prescribed tour stops, I ventured off on my own to explore with great satisfaction. The following is my discovery.

The Shanhou Folk Culture Village is the most iconic and best preserved historic village.



Entrance to the village

This living village has 18 houses that were built in 1900 in the traditional Fujian style with a swallowtail roof (swallowtail ridge). The swallowtail ridge is a distinct feature of Hokkien and Taiwan traditional buildings. The term refers to a roof that has an upward-curving ridge shaped like the tail of a swallow. The degree of curving may vary. The "swallowtail" can be single- or double-layered and is typically decorated with a large number of colorful sculptures. This feature originated in the 16th century (Ming Dynasty). At that time, Hokkien (a Han Chinese sub-group also known as Minnan people who originated in Fujian and Southern China) were doing business in Southeast Asia, Taiwan, Okinawa, and Japan. The returning successful businessmen decided that they would like to show off their newfound wealth. The result is this bright decorative architectural style. Due to its showy nature, this architectural feature is commonly found in major temples, mansions, and ancestral halls.



Shanhou Folk Culture Village



Alley showing swallowtails







The first temple I explored to see the ornate sculptures up close is the Hu Guo Si in Kinmen. These sculptures are of the traditional Chinese art called jiannian, cut and paste sculpture with porcelain shards. Similar to mosaics, jiannian is the practice of cutting pottery shards to shape and embedding them into roughly formed plaster to create decorative images. It is like painting with pottery shards. Using steel wire as “bones” and plaster as “flesh,” the jiannian artisans shape figures of humans, birds, beasts, and flowers. They then use pincers to clip bits of glass or colored ceramics. Embedded in the plaster “flesh,” these become the skin. Completed sculptures are mounted atop the roof ridges and under the eaves of Taiwanese temples.



Hu Guo Si temple roof ridge with jiannian dragon and Dharma wheel

I want to emphasize that this jiannian art is distinctly unique to the Hokkien architecture; it is not found in non-Hokkien architecture in China. Traditional Hokkien porcelain artists would gather small colored porcelain artifacts such as bowls and other eating utensils, cut and/or grind them into smaller fragments, and then paste these fragments onto sculptures attached to buildings for decoration. This art is used on the ridges, window frames, and doors of temples and large residences, with the swallowtail roof. These sculptures may depict plants, animals, dragons, beasts, characters from fables and parables, and legendary Daoist immortals.

In addition to the jiannian art, you would also find many cochin ceramic figurines on the swallowtail roof ridge. Together, these cochin figures and jiannian sculptures are not only decorative, but they are also auspicious symbols for warding off negative or evil forces, and serve as symbols of good fortune. Scenes from legends are depicted to tell stories of Chinese morals and values, to serve as cultural messages to the population. Cochin ceramic scenes and figures are closely bound to the people’s beliefs and religion, Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Despite modernity in Taiwan, her people hold dear to cultural traditions, and create a unique Taiwanese artistic architectural form.

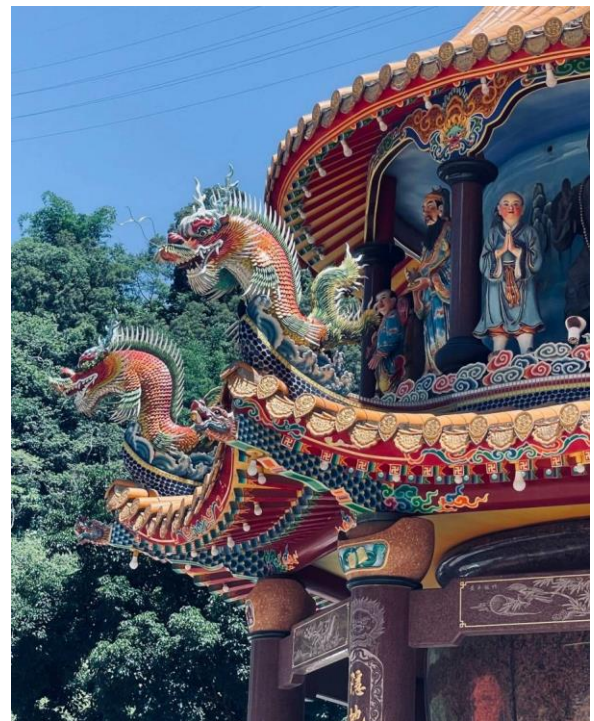




The Longyin temple in Chiayi has many cochin ceramic figures.  
Cochin figures of folklore on the roof of the main temple structure



Side building for burning offerings



Close-up of the jianian dragon on  
the side building





Shrine in a park

Shrines are found in many places. In the modernized city of Taipei, roadside shrines are preserved with high-rise buildings built around or over the shrines. It speaks to the strong spiritual beliefs and traditions of the people.

*(Photos taken by Camilla Ng)*