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Asian Boyz shot-caller gets life in prison in 8 slayings and 10 shootings

Marvin Mercado, 37, one of the founders of the gang, was convicted last month in the attacks that took place in the San Fernando and San Gabriel valleys in the mid-1990s. Mercado eluded investigators by fleeing to the Philippines.

By Shan Li, Los Angeles Times

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A jury Monday voted for life in prison without the possibility of parole, rather than the death penalty, for a gang shot-caller convicted in connection with eight killings and 10 shootings in the San Fernando and San Gabriel valleys.

Marvin Mercado, 37, was convicted last month; the crimes all occurred in the mid-1990s.

Mercado was one of the founders of the Asian Boyz gang, which by the mid-1990s had 200 members, with the bulk of its members in Southern California, police said. Seven of Mercado's co-defendants were convicted in 1999, but Mercado eluded authorities for more than a decade by escaping to the Philippines.

During the trial of his co-defendants, a Los Angeles police detective described the spate of violence as "summer madness."

"They did it just for fun," Det. Larry Dolley said in 1998 on the eve of the first trial.

Mercado looked stunned when the jury's decision was read Monday.

His attorney, Robert Schwartz, said he had warned Mercado that the best outcome was probably a hung jury after emotional testimony by victims' relatives during the sentencing phase of the trial.

"Some jurors were so moved I thought they would never be willing to give life without parole," Schwartz said.

Schwartz said he believed the jury was swayed by a county jail chaplain who testified to the "process of redemption" that Mercado underwent while imprisoned. Mercado's wife's family also testified that Mercado lived a crime-free existence in the Philippines.

While there, he "lived a righteous life," Schwartz said.

Prosecutor Hoon Chun said the jury's vote is disappointing to the victims' families, who have still not recovered from the slayings.

Six of those slain were "completely innocent," Chun said. Two others were rival gang members who were murdered in Van Nuys in April 1995.

Chun also dismissed the argument that Mercado had redeemed himself. Chun said Mercado used a false identity and even deceived his wife after fleeing to the Philippines to escape punishment.

"He was on the run for 10 years and then fought deportation for a little less than two years," Chun said. "I'm not sure you can call that redemption."

The gang initially participated in property crimes that targeted Southeast Asian immigrant businesses. But their downfall began when they started targeting rival gangs, police said.