



Exotica and Respectability in Chicago's Chinatown

Chinatown is exotic—exotic, not because it is a colony of Chinese, but because it is a colony of Chinese in an alien land.

Ruth Soong, *A Survey of the Education of Chinese Children in Chicago*

Chinese in Peru occasionally attempted to isolate their activities into a distinct sphere of uniquely Chinese interests. Their status was also limited by the negative perceptions surrounding their history as plantation laborers and a general discourse favoring all things European and white. Nonetheless, in the 1920s, the migrant elite attempted to climb the Peruvian social hierarchy by drawing attention to their modernizing ambitions, transnational and domestic business activities, and their status as foreign nationals. These attempts were not entirely successful, but, as the observations in the *West Coast Leader* show, they still managed to project an image that was different from that in the United States, where Chinese were seen as dirty and isolated. The *Leader* suggested that it was the Chinese themselves who were different, but Chinese in Peru moved through much the same transnational networks as those in Chicago. Rather, migrants and migrant institutions interacted with local environments, creating images and activities that facilitated their transnational interests in accordance with the possibilities and constraints of local concerns. Chicago presented a situation in which social mobility was more difficult, and it was more in the interest of the Chinese to fortify their limited spheres of local autonomy.

During the early twentieth century, Chinese in Chicago built an increasingly sequestered Chinatown and Chinese economy. They established spheres of residence, gambling, laundry regulation, and social control free from the interference of government and gangsters, and later attracted a clientele for restaurants and curio shops by manipulating images

of the exotic oriental. The migrants and migrant elite in Chicago were no less sophisticated than those in Peru, but the social context of Chicago and the weight of historical precedent in the United States created a situation in which they were less able to mobilize transnational resources in a bid to move up the local status ladder. Links to China and migrant associations could rarely be presented as anything more than the parochial attachments of immigrants. At the same time, migrant associations formed the nexus of power in Chicago rather than businesses. Competition and anti-Chinese attitudes made it difficult for Chinese to gain great success as businessmen. Within this context, Chinese on the West Coast had built a complex of powerful associations in the nineteenth century. The precedents and organizational strength of these associations continued to shape Chinatowns that emerged in the eastern United States after the turn of the century.

The condition of Chicago as a polyglot migrant frontier at the cutting edge of global industrial society actually helped to isolate the Chinese. Not only did the wealth of Chinese in Chicago not measure up to that of the most successful Chinese in Peru in absolute terms, but whatever commercial importance they did attain was completely overshadowed by the modernizing glory of Chicago. In Peru, Chinese could also develop a status as foreign nationals with diplomatic representation, whereas in Chicago they could never be anything more than one of many struggling immigrant groups, and a strange and marginalized one at that. Even when local migrants did have the resources to appeal to the Chinese legation in Washington, the history of Sino-American relations offered only a legacy of accumulating humiliations. Revolutionary transformation and the modernization of China were, at best, only amusing sidebars in Chicago newspapers.

The difficulties of obtaining wealth were one consequence of the weight of anti-Chinese history in the United States. Not only were anti-Chinese activities in the nineteenth century much better organized in the western United States than in Peru in the nineteenth century, but the racial gaps that Chinese had been able to exploit as middlemen in Peru were unavailable. As a result, Chinese were successfully excluded from many lucrative occupations in the United States. Opposition to Chinese also resulted in the formation of a strong and defensive institutional structure that continued to shape migrant politics in the eastern United States. Given these strong institutional resources and potential difficulties of economic diversification, fortifying the borders of an isolated enclave was the best strategy available for a migrant elite to consolidate its power. In this context, ties to home and to strong transnational credit networks

were not mobilized as cosmopolitan commercialism but as a narrow parochialism which helped shape migrant isolation. Similarly, limited potential resources meant that conflicts among the migrants were more divisive and violent, and dominance, when achieved, was much more complete. In a city that had become a laboratory for the development of assimilation theory, the Chinese offered an image of old world traditional bonds. To paraphrase Ruth Soong, Chinatown in Chicago was exotic—exotic, not because it was a colony of Chinese, but because it was a colony of Chinese that had become invested in a status quo.

I focus here on a period of particularly intense conflict among Chinese migrants in Chicago between 1904 and 1912. This conflict is interesting not only for its open violence and undisguised hostility, but for the insight it provides into the way that migrants negotiated a dense intersection of kinship networks, Chinese nationalist politics, Chicago municipal politics, local economic interests, feuds between nationwide sworn brotherhood societies, and public identities as respectable local merchants. These struggles culminated in the relocation of Chinatown in 1912 and the consolidation of a predominant power faction. This faction combined a local numerical predominance based on kinship networks and control over migration opportunities with the resources provided by a multi-city sworn brotherhood association and privileged access to local law enforcement. With the rise of this faction, control was consolidated under migrant elites who presented themselves as sophisticated local businessmen capable of providing exotic pleasures to a city of consumers and of representing their peaceful and unique ethnic constituency to otherwise uncomprehending outsiders. At the same time, they never completely suppressed the images of violent retribution, inscrutable intrigue, and insularity that clung to them and had effectively discouraged gangsters, unions, politicians, social workers, and other competitors from interfering in their turf.

THE LEGACY OF THE WEST

The "Companies"

In its reporting on the Chin Wai murder trial of 1908, the *Chicago Tribune* wrote that one would have to go back two thousand years for "a knowledge of ancient Chinese history . . . necessary to a proper understanding of the case."¹ Two thousand years was certainly excessive, in keeping with tendencies by both Chinese and non-Chinese to mystify Chinese social organization, but the reporter was correct in sensing that the context

of the murder was more complex than just the economic struggle over control of gambling described by the prosecuting attorneys. We probably need to go back only about fifty years and as far as San Francisco to develop an understanding of that context. I have already mentioned (and much has been written on) the ways in which discrimination pushed Chinese into marginalized service occupations like household service, laundries, and, to a lesser extent, restaurants. Although the profits to be gained from these occupations were limited, laundries in particular were easily adaptable to eastward expansion because of the low start-up capital and vast potential clientele in towns and cities throughout the United States. The lack of diversification in this migrant economy made it easily contained and regulated, which, in turn, discouraged new attempts at diversification.

The organizational structure of the Chinese in Chicago was also linked, through precedent and direct institutional connections, to the history of Chinese associations on the West Coast. Sworn brotherhood societies, native place associations, political parties, kinship groups, and the CCBA were all established in Chicago by migrants aware of the models provided in other American cities. Some of these organizations were affiliated with larger institutions elsewhere, and others were just reproductions of familiar forms. Reproduction did not mean cloning, however, and slight differences in institutions and the relations between them always emerged as they moved across North America.

The beginnings of Chinese migration to California in the 1850s were quickly dominated by native place *huiguan*. These *huiguan* provided the usual mutual aid services, such as mediation, a place to stay, and care after death for people from the same part of China, but their original purpose was to serve and regulate the interests of merchants channeling migrants from Chinese villages to the gold mines of the Sierra Nevada. Migrants had their passage funded by a credit-ticket system in which they borrowed money for their passage and either worked directly for the man who loaned the money or were held to a fixed repayment schedule until the balance and interest were repaid. Although the *huiguan* were known as Chinese "companies," they did not directly earn profit so much as help manage the investments of the recruiters and employers who did. In this context, mutual aid became a form of social control in which migrants were met by *huiguan* representatives as soon as they stepped off the boat, quickly distributed to branches set up near the gold mines, and forbidden to return to China unless they had paid a fee and cleared all of their debts. As the gold mines were exhausted, the *huiguan* retreated to more circumscribed activities in San Francisco, but the transnational recruitment

networks they initiated to take advantage of the gold rush still channeled laborers into railroad work, agriculture, and canning factories throughout the nineteenth century. Many employers preferred to deal with Chinese labor because they were efficiently mobilized and controlled by responsible Chinese foremen.² The responsiveness of these networks to non-Chinese industry could still be seen in 1924, when the Chinese consul in Vancouver remarked that whenever the Canadian Pacific railroad needed laborers, it could easily "tell someone here, who tells someone else in China. Over there they start a sort of new immigration society and send over so many men."³

Violence between migrants in California was present from the beginning. In the 1850s, the largest incidents were between *bendi* and Hakkas. By the late 1860s, lines of conflict had broken from precedents set in China and revolved around the competing interests of *huiguan* in the United States. With the end of the gold rush, many *huiguan* came to be associated with particular occupations or other economic interests in San Francisco, and they formed, split, fused, and regrouped with amazing fluidity in the early years as these spheres of control were negotiated. In 1862, the Consolidated Chinese Benevolent Association was formed in San Francisco as a centralizing institution intended to promote harmony within the Chinese community and present a unified front in dealings with non-Chinese. The CCBA was popularly known as the Six Companies because it was established at a time when six *huiguan* were in existence. Its functions mark the extent to which *huiguan* had already developed beyond merely organizing business and labor. Its membership included representatives from each of the *huiguan*, and offices were to be rotated between these representatives, although the distribution of representation was violently debated over the next decades as various *huiguan* grew and declined in size and power. The arrangement nonetheless impressed the Qing government, which delegated some formal diplomatic responsibilities to the Six Companies in the 1880s and used it as a model to promote the establishment of similar organizations in other countries. On their part, the *huiguan* also imported degree holders from China to act as presidents, although they rarely amounted to much more than figureheads. In this way, the Six Companies positioned itself at the nexus of interaction among the kin and native place organizations, the Chinese government, and the non-Chinese world.

CCBAs, native place, and surname associations were soon set up in communities around the western United States and in New York, following the examples of those in San Francisco. The San Francisco institutions claimed most of these new associations as branches but generally left

them to act independently, although when local associations had a serious dispute they could not handle, they often referred it to San Francisco for mediation. Thus, local associations could potentially be part of two hierarchical networks, one leading up from small family associations to the local CCBA and another leading to larger branches in other cities. These latter networks also served as channels through which merchants could cultivate and maintain dispersed connections and arrange lodging for less wealthy members when traveling.

"Fighting" Tongs

The rapid growth of Chinese population in California, an economic depression, and the completion of the railroad projects brought many unemployed Chinese to San Francisco in the 1870s, and conflicts came to a peak.⁴ Migrants increasingly criticized the *huiguan* as exploitative institutions that defended the interests of merchants without providing the legal and other kinds of protection they promised in return. The surname associations that grew over this decade were smaller organizations that often offered better personal services and participation but still tended to emerge under the influence of ambitious merchants. Although they sometimes came into conflict with the *huiguan*, they generally tended to integrate themselves as subdivisions of those larger institutions. On the other hand, the sworn brotherhood societies that rose in the 1870s positioned themselves as a clear challenge to *huiguan* dominance.

The tongs (I follow the practice of calling sworn brotherhoods in the United States *tongs*—a romanization of the Chinese word meaning "hall"—to emphasize the particularities of their development here) depicted themselves as egalitarian institutions supporting the interests of the working man in the face of merchant exploitation. Their initiation rituals and rhetoric of loyalty and sworn brotherhood removed them from the hierarchies of family and place that structured the *huiguan* and surname associations. They also provided a means for tighter organization and discipline. Whereas other associations were forced to accept anybody who fit the unrigorous qualifications of name or hometown, the admission rituals of the tongs provided for selectivity at all levels of membership, as well as a mystifying initiation with the potential to heighten the sense of inclusion and difference from outsiders. These rituals were accompanied by written by-laws and well-defined internal organizational hierarchies.⁵

The first tong in San Francisco had been established in 1852, but the early ones tended to restrain the scope of their interests and were not

significant on the migrant political scene. Their importance developed within the context of an increasing hostility between Sanyi and Siyi migrants. Although Sanyi migrants were fewer, they controlled much of the migrant economy and were politically dominant in the Six Companies. The numerically superior Siyi migrants were mostly laborers unable to develop significant power as individuals or through their institutions. The tongs' outspoken anti-merchant rhetoric and activities led to a strong identification with Siyi interests. They were therefore excluded from representation in the Six Companies and disparaged as disreputable groups of outlaws, as Chinese merchants cooperated with non-Chinese in propagating images of "fighting tongs," "dens of hatchetmen," and "high-binders." The activities of tongs often lived up to these images, but so did the activities of many surname associations and *huiguan*.

The disrepute surrounding the tongs grew with the criminalization of gambling and prostitution. Before 1877, police did not include the San Francisco Chinatown within their regular jurisdiction, and vice establishments could openly pay five dollars per officer per night for protection. The extension of police jurisdiction in 1877 was just one of many attempts to "clean up" Chinatown, both physically and morally. In addition to constituting the Chinese quarter as a unique racial problem, these movements also pushed vice underground, as payments and protection took on an aura of corruption and bribery. Conscious of their roles as representatives of the Chinese community and respectable merchants, *huiguan* officers disassociated themselves from these practices as much as possible, and the tongs stepped into the void. Individual *huiguan* leaders continued to own many of the establishments, but protection was organized by the tongs.⁶

By the 1880s, violent tong wars had become a significant aspect of migrant life in San Francisco. Some of the hostilities could be described as class conflict, such as the battles of tongs against the wealthy Wong clan and the Six Companies or the celebrated war against the Sanyi Huiguan, which ended with the killing of the powerful, American-educated Sanyi gangster Little Pete in 1896. Many wars, however, were between the tongs themselves. They often started on emotional public pretexts of wounded honor and indignation, such as a stolen woman or a slap in the face, but the conquest of protection territory also provided practical economic motivation. These wars developed into cycles of revenge that continued through the first years of the twentieth century, often following a standard progression from insult to negotiation, battle, and resolution, which included a banquet and formalized peace treaty.⁷ The Zhigongtang (not connected to the network of fraternal associations carrying the same name

throughout the mining communities and railroad camps in the Pacific Northwest and Canada) was established in the 1880s as a forum for the reconciliation of these differences, a sort of Consolidated Benevolent Tong. As the Zhigongtang had no other representational or economic functions to bind it together, it was much less successful than the Six Companies, and by the early twentieth century it had become much more interested in Chinese politics than in mediating local conflicts.⁸

The dominance of the Six Companies was most severely challenged in 1893, after it failed to have the Geary Act requiring the registration of all Chinese laborers in the United States declared unconstitutional. Not only was this a great loss of face for the Six Companies, but it was one more instance in which the United States government bypassed the mediating services of the CCBA to establish direct control over migrants. A boycott of Sanyi businesses and a new rash of wars pitting the tongs against the *huiguan* flared through the West Coast Chinatowns. The Six Companies identified itself with the cause of public order and attempted to enlist the San Francisco police to fight on its side. It was a losing battle, however, and the struggle resulted in the removal of many Sanyi businesses to Mexico and a reorganization of the Six Companies so that representation was based on the numerical size of a *huiguan*, a change which led to Siyi domination. Despite the reorganization, Six Companies prestige among the Chinese was impaired by the struggles. The persistence of Americans in treating it as the legitimate organ representing the Chinese community contributed greatly to whatever status it regained.

Despite occasional outbursts, armed conflict between Chinese migrants on the West Coast declined in the first decade of the twentieth century. A variety of factors coincided with this growing peace. The Chinese Peace Association was established as a federation of tongs working together for mutual harmony, similar to the Zhigongtang thirty years earlier. It is sometimes given credit for fostering cooperation and reducing violence, although if the founding date of 1913 is correct, it was more a result of reduced hostilities than a cause.⁹ More ideologically motivated interpretations have credited the nationalist movements and revolutionary agitation after the turn of the century as laying the groundwork for a sense of unity among the migrants. Reformers and revolutionaries all emphasized how internal divisions were detrimental to the greater goal of establishing China as a respected modern nation. This view ignores how the enmity between competing nationalist groups and their supporters often exploited and aggravated previously existing differences within migrant communities. It also ignores the concurrent rise of tong violence in the eastern United States.

A more likely explanation was the reorientation of the Chinatown economy. With the rebuilding of the San Francisco Chinatown after the earthquake of 1906, tourism was a growing source of income. Previously, non-Chinese who entered Chinatown with the intention of spending money and enjoying themselves were mainly in search of gambling, opium, and prostitution. As vice districts were driven underground, Chinese merchants began to consider the possibilities of attracting non-Chinese patronage to restaurants and curio shops. Plenty of money and an improved public reputation could result from restricting vice to a Chinese clientele and keeping it out of the public eye. The previously hostile division between tong and *huiguan* became an amiable division of duties. Merchants careful about their images avoided any public association with the tongs or claimed to have joined tongs only for self-protection. Behind the scenes, merchant capital and tong organization worked together in the maintenance and extraction of profit from vice. By the 1920s, tongs were often seen as rigidly controlled by businessmen with their eyes on the bottom line, and many Chinese had begun to romanticize the tongs of the previous century as brotherhoods of noble braves fighting together for honor and self-protection. The tongs of the 1920s were not seen as less dependent on violence, but as exercising that violence in acts of coldly calculated and cowardly assassination.¹⁰

Entrepreneurial Tongs

Just at the time that West Coast violence was dying down, tong violence in the eastern United States bloomed, and Chinese nationalism was swept up in its wake. The new breed of entrepreneurial tongs proved well suited to the goals of accumulating wealth and influence within the younger and less organized Chinatowns of the east. Most of them had very small populations in the nineteenth century, usually focused around a handful of village networks. Most native place and surname associations in the eastern United States date back no earlier than the late 1890s, consciously modeling themselves upon organizations in San Francisco. By this time, the western *huiguan* were no longer flexible vehicles of merchant influence but had become somewhat static vehicles of symbolic prestige for their officers. Moreover, most of the migrants to the eastern United States were from Taishan county, which usually meant, if the San Francisco model were to be followed, only the establishment of a Ningyang Hui-guan, with the few migrants from other parts of China banding together in a Liancheng Huiguan (Allied Association) as a counterweight to Ningyang power.

These broad-based eastern *huiguan* were unable to articulate any coherent interests within the community. The aggressive tongs, newly reorganized around commercial interests, could much more actively and flexibly promote the interests of their leaders in the context of these growing Chinatowns. As they grew more powerful, the tongs even pushed aside CCBAAs as the dominant organizations in most eastern Chinatowns. Even the powerful New York CCBA—which had been established in 1883 with a membership of prominent merchants rather than *huiguan* representatives—was forced to allow tong representation in its councils, although it did not submit as completely as other eastern CCBAAs to the centrality of tongs as the dominant Chinatown organization.¹¹

Although evidence is scanty, the first organizations created by Chinese migrants to the eastern United States seem to have been sworn brotherhood associations. Most of the Siyi men in Philadelphia in the 1880s belonged to the Yixing Association, which the wealthier Sanyi men held in contempt.¹² A branch of the Zhigongtang was established in New York by the 1890s, and various sources have mentioned other fraternal societies that existed in New York around the turn of the century.¹³ One Chinese source from the 1920s dated the establishment of the Chinese Free Masons (a common reference to the Zhigongtang) in Chicago back to 1881.¹⁴ By 1905, however, the On Leong Tong (Hall of Peaceful Conscientiousness) and the Hip Sing Tong (Hall of United Victory) had begun to displace all these organizations and become the most powerful Chinese institutions in the eastern United States.

The Hip Sing Tong had been established in San Francisco in the 1870s, purportedly by a scholar who had failed in business. By the 1890s, it had developed a reputation for aggressive expansionism, tight organization, and the ready acceptance of Christians into its ranks, for which it was sometimes known as "the Church."¹⁵ A branch was established in New York around the turn of the century. The On Leong Tong first appeared in New York some time before 1903, led by local migrants who perceived the arrival of the Hip Sing as a threat to their interests. It was probably a reorganization of one or more previously existing fraternal associations. Tom Lee, the "Mayor of Chinatown" and a deputy Sheriff of New York County, was the public figurehead and patron, although Louie Yong Hock and Moy Dong Yue, "The Silver Tongued Orator," are generally credited as founders.¹⁶

Although the two tongs were similar in their goals and forms of organization, a popular distinction arose between them which defined the Hip Sing as an organization made up of working men and the On Leong as an organization of merchants. Sources sympathetic to the Hip Sing

have claimed it was a more democratic organization, which resulted in gunmen who were more daring and less likely to harass innocent bystanders without provocation. The On Leong Tong, on the other hand, was widely considered to be a wealthier tong dominated by merchants and restaurateurs who felt threatened by the arrival of the Hip Sing.¹⁷ It was a distinction of rhetoric more than fact, that probably had roots in the timing of their establishment. The rhetoric of democratic brotherhood that had surrounded the growth of tongs in nineteenth-century San Francisco seems to have clung to the Hip Sing, whereas the On Leong was founded in the early twentieth century, when the image of respectable local merchants had once again become more potent than that of egalitarian brotherhood and loyalty. Despite these popular perceptions, each tong commonly characterized itself to white reporters as an "association of respectable merchants," while accusing the other of being a "den of highbinders."

Without the competition of effective native place associations, On Leong and Hip Sing quickly moved beyond the limited activities of their western predecessors and became locked in an intense territorial rivalry throughout the east, not only over the protection of vice operations, but over the right to collect from all Chinatown businesses. In cities with smaller Chinese populations, such as Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Indianapolis, one tong would usually dominate, but in larger cities they would hold competing territories. The On Leong also extended its operations into Hip Sing territory in the Southwest, and violence between the two tongs occurred as far away as Mexico.¹⁸ At first, the various branches of the Hip Sing and On Leong were loosely allied through a system of common symbols and mutual recognition. Traveling members could expect assistance from branches in other cities, and local branches could even make appeals to the resources of other branches, but activities were rarely coordinated. Over time, their organizations became much more centralized. The On Leong formally unified around 1910 as a federation under national officers and with annual meetings. The older Hip Sing had to overcome more deeply entrenched local interests, but in order to remain competitive it also coordinated itself as a federation in 1918 at a San Francisco convention.¹⁹ Hostilities originating in a single locale could then quickly spread across the nation.

Bureaucratic Tongs

The On Leong and Hip Sing each developed a dedicated military branch in the service of the central organization, which facilitated their expan-

sion. As mentioned in chapter 4, sworn brotherhoods often had a military aspect, although not all of them were committed to military organization. The violent history of tongs in the United States, however, had made it a standard feature by the time of the On Leong and Hip Sing. The control that tongs had over the lives, deaths, and loyalties of its members can easily be exaggerated, but, as early as the 1880s, the vocabulary of loyalty and brotherhood had already been supplemented by an explicitly hierarchical military rhetoric. A letter to a Zhigongtang soldier in the Northwest in 1888 was much less egalitarian and mutual-aid oriented than the Zhigongtang rules quoted in chapter 4, leaving little doubt as to his subservient place in the scheme of the organization:

It has been said that to plan schemes, and devise methods, and to hold the seal is the work of the literary class, while to oppose foes, fight battles, and plant firm government is the work of the military. Now this tong appoints salaried soldiers to be ready to protect its members and assist others. This is our object. All, therefore, who undertake the military service of this tong must obey orders, and without orders they must not dare to act. . . . When orders are given, you shall advance valiantly to your assigned task. Never shrink or turn back upon the battlefield. You must be punctual and use all of your ability for the good of the Commonwealth.²⁰

The letter went on to outline the financial compensation that would be provided to him or his family in the case of injury or death.

These soldiers were just one part of well-developed tong bureaucracies. An ex-tong officer in 1930 described the internal organization of a tong as composed of three groups: the officers who directed the military actions and handled the daily affairs of the tong, the elders who acted as advisors, and the ordinary members from whom the "armed guards" were recruited. The office of interpreter was especially important because it had the exclusive responsibility of dealing with outsiders. Important decisions were made at joint meetings of elders and officials. A committee of twelve elders was also established to act as a tribunal for the settlement of all grievances. This committee was also responsible for raising funds in case of war, often providing the money out of their own pockets and getting it back by a levy on all of the members.²¹

Even if this ex-officer's description of tong organization was somewhat sensationalized (published in a book entitled *Tong War!*), it still shows some of the advantages a prominent Chinese merchant could gain by joining. The ready-made structures of hierarchy, discipline, and paramilitary corps were easily put to the service of building commercial

monopolies and territorial control. Domination through a tong could easily bypass the much more difficult process of building up networks and alliances through kinship, debt, and the constant manipulation of social relations. Tong affiliation, however, also came with negative aspects, such as their poor public reputation. One of the first steps taken by the On Leong and Hip Sing in the east was to reject the word *tong* in favor of names that often included references to workers or merchants (although, in accordance with popular distinctions, the On Leong has stuck with the English name "On Leong Merchant's Association," while the Hip Sing eventually settled on "Hip Sing Association"). This image renovation was part of a larger attempt to appropriate the images of public benevolence and inclusive membership enjoyed by CCBA's and *hui-guan*, and to take over their functions of business regulation, conflict mediation, and public representation.

The minutes from the annual national Hip Sing conferences in the 1930s read like meetings of the board of directors of a joint stock company specializing in tribute extraction.²² Concern with the efficient accumulation of profit and the management of territory was expressed through a vocabulary of morality and gratitude. References to egalitarian brotherhood and democratic procedure were mixed in with hierarchical expressions of generosity and gratitude. Prospective brothers (*kunzhong*) were to be given a careful background check and a trial membership period in order to determine if they were "virtuous and law-abiding types" (*liangshan fenzi*). Weekly payments from businesses were called "incense and oil contributions" (*xiang you yin*), and the five-hundred-dollar fee required to open a new business in Hip Sing territory was demanded as gratitude to the tong for having "endured ten thousand difficulties and persisted unflinchingly through a hundred troubles" (*qian xin wan ku, bai zhe bu nao*) in making the opportunity possible. Modern republican rhetoric was also thrown into the mix, as branches from throughout the United States each voted for a "congressman" (*yi yuan*) who would be sent to the national conference. Other common topics included membership dues, the setting of extortion prices and payment deadlines, the distribution of profits throughout all the branches, the naming of a national "foreign affairs" (*waijiao*) representative, the granting of scholarships to children of members, donations to universities in China, and solvency qualifications for officers.

At the fourteenth annual meeting in 1931, regulations were drawn up for a new Chinatown being formed in Newark, New Jersey. A set of eleven rules demarcated the territory of the new Chinatown, set monthly fees and tong membership requirements for businesses established there,

made provisions for extra funds to be collected in the case of "harassment by Western officials" (*xichai nao luan*), made schedules for the repayment of start-up loans, and declared that tong members who started businesses outside the territory and any outsiders who caused trouble inside the territory would be regarded as enemies. It did not own any businesses, but worked closely with the Yongli Company in making start-up loans available to individuals and partnerships. Three-tenths of the "incense and oil contributions" would go to the central tong office in New York, one-fifth to the local branch, and one half to the Yongli Company. Despite the extensive regulations, local branches still acted with a certain amount of autonomy. One of the justifications for creating a new set of rules for Newark was that nobody was following the old rules in other Chinatowns anyway.

Tongs in the United States had become merchants of protection that assumed the form of tribute-extracting regimes. Individual tong members often had a large financial interest in gambling houses, lotteries, prostitutes, smuggling, and opium, and the tong itself may occasionally have owned a few shares in such enterprises, but most of the power of the tong came through dealing in protection. The services they offered to businesses and individuals under their protection included prevention of police raids, exclusion of competitors, mediation of disputes backed by the realistic threat of enforcement, and the promise not to victimize the patrons themselves. Their resources included the connections they cultivated with police, politicians, and the courts; the armed men under their control; and, perhaps most important, their reputations for taking revenge and enforcing agreements swiftly and ruthlessly. The isolation of the Chinese in American society was an asset that facilitated the tongs' rise to power, which they actively nurtured. By establishing firm boundaries around Chinese activities and monitoring interaction across those boundaries, they set themselves up as overlords and indispensable mediators. They also provided stable conditions which both fostered and circumscribed the extent of Chinese economic activities.

CHINESE IN CHICAGO

In the City of Progress

From the late nineteenth century through the 1920s, Chicago was known around the world as a showcase of the goods and ills of modernity. Progress and poverty, towering buildings and crumbling ghettos, mass production and insular neighborhoods of displaced peasants existed side by

side. Observers, investigators, and activists of any persuasion could find something there to capture their interests, fuel their visions, and ignite their moral fires. Except for the attention directed by a few University of Chicago sociologists toward what they perceived as the more exotic specimens in this social laboratory, the Chinese tended to get lost amidst this seething metropolis. Too many other causes, spectacles, stories, juxtapositions, injustices, and inspirations competed for the attention of onlookers and residents. As a result, Chinese migrants in Chicago generally escaped the fate of migrants on the West Coast, who sooner or later became the objects of one or another project of public scrutiny, reform, or rejection. Any public attention the Chinese in Chicago did attract was usually as one of many diverting pieces of exotica inherent to a big city like Chicago: an interesting shopping excursion, an amusing sideline to the normal glut of crime and delinquency that backed up the Chicago courts, or another bit of color in the circus of Chicago politics. A typical example occurred in 1924, when ex-mayor Bill Thompson launched his boat, the "Big Bill," on his ill-fated journey to the South Seas to find the elusive tree-climbing fish: "More fascinating than the customary political harangues . . . were the antics of a band of Chinese who rushed through the craft beating tom-toms and making weird noises designed to chase the devils away."²³

No legislation was ever passed against the Chinese in Chicago, and I have seen no newspaper article criticizing their presence in the city. When the newspapers editorialized about the "Chinese problem," it was as a distant difficulty in faraway states. There was some opposition to Chinese students in the public schools in early 1900s, partly due to their advanced age, but such students were still commonplace in the 1920s.²⁴ There was also some calls for police crackdowns after flare-ups of tong violence in the 1920s, but the only instance of organized anti-Chinese activity was motivated by an event that took place in New York in June 1909, when the murder of a Christian English-school teacher by her Chinese lover generated a brief wave of sensationalized press reports and local alarm directed at Chinese Sunday schools located in residential districts of Chicago. An English school on the South Side was invaded by police, and a few incidents of Chinese being arrested for approaching white girls for reasons as innocuous as the desire to offer an umbrella took place. More often than not, however, newspaper editorials condemned unjust treatment of the Chinese. Many teenage girls—the purported objects of the Chinese threat—seemed more thrilled than terrified; groups of them sought out Chinatown tours in New York and watched Chinese men on

their way through the alleys to and from English school. The attention proved to be short-lived, and active displays of prejudice soon faded.²⁵

The average Chicagoan was no more tolerant toward Chinese than anybody else in the nation. Day-to-day racial divisions could be seen even among Chicago dance hall owners who wanted to discourage Asian patrons (who were predominantly Filipino): "Our patrons are high-class people. They won't go to the same places where these Chinks or whatever they are go. . . . No really white guy is willing to go in and dance with these Chinks or Japs or whatnot."²⁶ What was different about Chicago was that the Chinese were rarely taken into account in the formulation of issues involving reform, hostility, and distinction. The bulk of the attention went to investigating, categorizing, and assimilating the masses of white European immigrants and to creating hard and fast boundaries against the growing black population.²⁷ Chinatown took up a relatively limited area, Chinese residents were dispersed throughout the city; they made no attempt to move beyond laundry and restaurant businesses and did not fit into the major black and white racial division that came to structure most racial perceptions and policy in Chicago. As with the few Mexican migrants in the early twentieth century, Chinese seemed to live in the cracks.

Bachelortown

The setting of the Chicago Chinatown before 1912 offers a physical metaphor for how the Chinese in Chicago got lost in the melee of larger concerns. It occupied a block of South Clark Street between Van Buren and Harrison, just south of the central business district (known as the Loop; see fig. 12). The multiple reputations and notoriety of Clark Street strongly overshadowed the Chinese presence. An 1894 article referred to it as "that 'Midway Plaisance' of thoroughfares. . . . Here the representatives of almost every nation under eastern and western skies mingle in the heterogeneous throngs which ceaselessly, day and night, walk the pavements."²⁸ Local ward boss Bathhouse John Coughlin referred to this block as the "greatest little old stem in the world," meaning that it was an attractive place for transients and "sporting" men interested in gambling, sex, intoxication, and cheap lodging.²⁹ Indeed, the bulk of Clark Street's fame, and the attraction that brought visitors from around the Midwest, arose from its position as a main thoroughfare of the "Levee," the largest vice district in one of the most "wide open towns" in the United States.

Like many other Chinatowns throughout the world, the Chicago

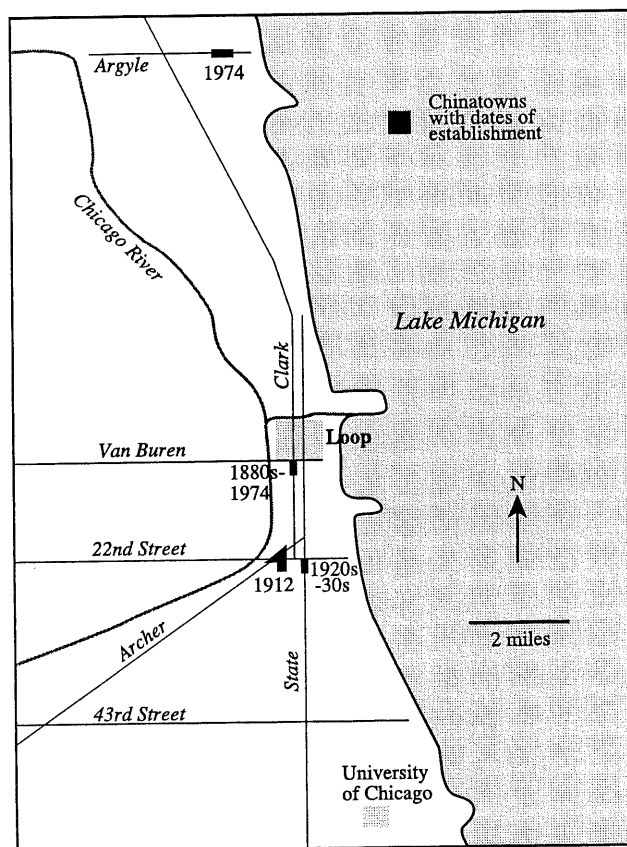


Figure 12
Chinatowns
in Chicago

Chinatown in this period was not a residential district so much as a collection of stores, dormitories, and recreational venues that served a dispersed Chinese population. The Chinese establishments provided services exactly like the other businesses with which they shared the street. Gambling halls and brothels were concentrated directly south and east of the Chinese. Chinese businesses and association halls shared buildings on Clark Street with the Salvation Army, bars, flophouses, pawn shops, barbers, dime museums, and oyster bays run by a variety of ethnic groups. The Hip Sing Tong shared a building with the "Deutsches Gast Haus," an Italian grocery, and Harrison's lunchroom (fig. 13). Black Mushroom Johnson's gambling house, famous for clientele of all races and bets as low as a nickel, was right next door to one of the earliest Chinese restaurants, the Bow Wo Fung. The Kenna Saloon, headquarters of Hinky Dink Kenna, John Coughlin's partner as ward boss, was one story below the King Yen Lo, an upscale restaurant with a citywide reputation. What the denizens



Figure 13 Headquarters of Hip Sing Tong, Clark Street, 1907. (Source: Chicago Historical Society, DN #5285)

of Clark Street had in common was that, except for the prostitutes, they were bachelors attracted to the area for entertainment and cheap lodging. Political and reform pressures gradually forced the brothels and gambling houses farther and farther south in the period from 1897 to 1909, but the flophouses and bars remained along with the Chinese on Clark Street between Van Buren and Harrison at least through 1912, when the expanding central business district and rising property values constituted a more unstoppable threat.³⁰

Colorful accounts of turn-of-the-century Clark Street usually depicted the Chinese as merely one more example of Levee decadence. One reminiscence described them as "the most respectable, or rather the least disreputable, part of the Levee."³¹ The most common reference was atmospheric: the smell of opium wafting up from the basements. The activities on Clark Street drew constant attention from reformers and moralists. The same discourses of hygiene and morality that were elsewhere conflated with constructions of race were here focused on the depiction and condemnation of a promiscuous lifestyle, and investigations usually ignored the Chinese in favor of flashier attractions like elegant brothels, gigantic beer mugs, enormous black madams, and other colorful figures like Bathhouse John and Hinky Dink.

Coughlin and Kenna represented the First Ward—which included the Levee and the Loop—in the Chicago city council from 1892 to 1936.³² They were commonly considered as two of the "gray wolves," politicians who tirelessly maintained Chicago's reputation for graft and corruption. Coughlin was also famous for his loud clothes, awful poetry, and pockets full of nickels which he shared liberally with everybody he passed on Clark Street. Kenna was much more reserved and thought to be the brains of the ward. From within the confines of the Kenna saloon at election time, he coordinated the packing of the local flophouses with voters from throughout the city, the stuffing of ballot boxes, and the provision of mugs of beer and shots of whiskey as the payoff for favorable votes. Their efforts were rewarded by the "boodle"—kickbacks and bribes that came with the granting of public works contracts—available to them after taking office, although Coughlin and Kenna had a reputation for not taking "the big stuff" and preferring to cultivate good relations with the mayors.

Reform-minded citizens consistently attacked such local bosses for fostering patriarchal dependence and a lack of civic morality. Other writers have romanticized them as a buffer against the exploitative and invasive practices of a cold, heartless society, depicting them as always ready with personal attention, sympathy for the common man, an open pocket, and perhaps even a job for friends in need. Beyond moral posturing and personalized favors, Kenna's and Coughlin's power also depended on the systematic organization of services most in demand in their ward. Not only were they tireless in making deals and fighting legislation that threatened the segregated vice district in Chicago, but they also established a fund to buy off police and politicians, to send prostitutes with tuberculosis to the sanitarium, and to keep lawyers on retainer if any of their constituents got in trouble. Most of the money for the fund was collected through mandatory contributions levied on brothels, and

protection was given in return only if food and liquor was purchased from approved merchants. Such stipulations mirrored the kinds of arrangements established by Chinese surname, native place, and sworn brotherhood associations.

Being ineligible for citizenship, the Chinese could not vote and were therefore of little political interest to Coughlin and Kenna. This was probably in Bathhouse John's mind in 1894 when, as a new alderman trying to build his image in the city council, he scapegoated the Chinese by introducing anti-opium laws into the city council and organizing vigilante groups to raid Clark Street basements. He professed shock at seeing "young American girls in the arms of Chinamen whom I knew to be as degraded as any human beings ever become," and continued with the warning that, "So long as those who know nothing of the habits of the Chinese pamper them and raise the cry of persecution whenever an effort is made to raid their dens, they will feel comparatively secure. As for me, I know their methods, and opium smoking don't go in the first ward."³³

This negative attention marked an uncharacteristic low point in relations between the Chinese and local politicians. As Coughlin and Kenna became more secure in their position as local vice lords in succeeding years, they developed a peaceful coexistence with the Chinese, which was almost certainly based on contributions to the Kenna-Coughlin protection fund, as the Chinese were often able to secure the use of lawyers held on retainer there. By 1905, Kenna even found a use for the migrants in his political campaigns. Republican mayoral candidate Harlan had attempted to besmirch the virtuous demeanor of Democratic candidate Edward Dunne by questioning his relationship with Kenna. In response, Kenna "got old King Yen Lo, the manager of the Chink joint on top of my place on Van Buren Street, to write the answer. I don't know what he said, but if it is anything like I told him it's a peacherino." The broadside, written in Chinese characters, was printed up in green ink and distributed throughout the first ward. Whether or not King Yen Lo expressed any insight into the relationship of Kenna and Dunne is unknown, but the form of the response shows the gap between issues that were considered serious in first-ward and citywide politics.³⁴ Local Chinese proved useful again when the municipal government began police raids with the intention of closing down the Levee for good. Businesses closed for liquor violations sometimes reopened behind documents and licenses issued to Chinese companies, such as when Freiberg's, a notorious bar and dance hall, and favored hangout of Coughlin and Kenna, reappeared as the Hop Ling Company in 1915.³⁵

The powerful rackets of Chicago also tended to leave the Chinese in

peace. The gambling rings controlled by men like Michael MacDonald and Monte Tennes around the turn of the century created a system of fees and regulation as rigorous as anything the municipal government could devise: "[Tennes] established systematic exclusion. Anyone wishing to enter the gambling business had to apply to this ring. The man and the location would be investigated, the leading gamblers in the city would be asked to approve the applicant, and if disapproved he would be placed upon the 'dead list.'" ³⁶ Chinese houses appeared to be free from this interference, possibly having made arrangements with the rings as a collectivity. Even the Allied Laundry Council—one of the most vigilant rackets in Chicago, violently devoted to assuring that no laundry would undercut the prices they set for the city—seemed to leave the Chinese alone, although they energetically organized laundries run by members of other ethnic groups. The common perception was that Chinese were "poison" to racketeers, their tight insularity preventing successful interference by outsiders.³⁷

CONFLICT AMONG THE CHICAGO CHINESE

The Rise of the Moys

In 1926, Moy Dong Chew, by then frequently referred to as the "patriarch" and "historian" of Chinatown, recalled some of his first impressions of Chicago in the 1870s to Ting-chiu Fan, a Christian Chinese graduate student in the School of Social Services at the University of Chicago: "[The residents of Chicago] never said to me that the Chinese have got the perfection of crimes of four thousand years. They never asked me whether or not I ate rats and snakes. They seemed to believe that we had souls to save and these souls were worth saving. The Chicagoans found us a peculiar people, to be sure, but they liked to mix with us. I was destined not to return to my fatherland, I thought."³⁸ Moy was a chronic politician, and everything he said must be evaluated as part of a calculated strategy of social relations. Over his nearly fifty years as one of the most prominent Chinese in the city, he was instrumental in the development of Chinese public relations and social organization. In further conversations with the graduate student, Moy continued to emphasize souls, the mild but unobjectionable exoticness of the Chinese, the friendly but limited interest that non-Chinese had in the Chinese, and a commitment to establishing himself as a citizen of the city. It was a conversation that could be expected coming from a businessman attempting to promote and maintaining his sway over a limited and specialized niche. Of course,

Moy's comfortable role as a spokesman and his vision of the role of the Chinese in Chicago cannot be taken for granted. It emerged from an energetic power struggle in the decade before 1912, during which the vocabulary used by Chinese to depict unity and difference was much more varied and unstable.

Both numerically and socially, men of the Moy surname have dominated the Chicago migrant community since their arrival. Moy Dong Chew arrived in Chicago in the mid-1870s, followed shortly afterwards by his brothers Moy Dong Hoy (Sam Moy) and Moy Dong Yee. They bought a shop in the Loop from a man known as Opium Dong, which they called the Hip Lung Ying Kee Company. They moved the store to a small concentration of laundries on South Clark Street in 1884, and it became the nucleus of the first Chinatown in Chicago. For years, this shop was a focal point of Moy power and identity, referred to in Chicago newspapers as "the center of Chinese society." Reporters routinely visited it in search of Moy Dong Chew—who had taken on the identity of the company and was often known as Hip Lung—if they wanted a "representative" opinion from the Chinese community or a colorful description of New Year's festivities. By 1928, about eight hundred Moys lived in the city, making up a quarter of the Chinese population.³⁹ Numerical superiority and their early presence were important factors behind their power, but such advantages could be maintained only through constant attention to alliances and access to outside resources.

A conflict in 1893 highlights some of the social resources the Moys could draw on in Chicago. That year, Wong Aloy (who in 1904 would become interpreter for the Bureau of Immigration) had allegedly been beaten by some Moys as part of a feud between the Wong and Moy families. Wong Chin Foo, who had studied American law and spoke "choice" English, came from New York to pursue Wong Aloy's case in court. His learning was sorely tested against the extensive Moy connections in the city. Shortly after his arrival, Wong told reporters that he had just visited State's Attorney Kern, and had come to the conclusion that "it is impossible for any Chinaman in the City of Chicago who is not friendly to the Moy family to obtain justice through [State's Attorney Kern]." He reported having told Kern that he did not believe the rumors to the effect that "whatever Sam Moy or Hip Lung did they were all right with the state's attorney," and that Kern had replied, "You may believe them. It is true. . . . I have my information from Sam Moy, who is a resident of Chicago, and I prefer his testimony to yours. Moreover, I want you to understand that if you prosecute Sam Moy or Hip Lung, you prosecute me. Those men are my friends and in no case will I prosecute them." Kern

later justified his attitude to a reporter by making a frequently formulated distinction between respectable Chicago residents and troublemaking outsiders:

In my opinion Wong Chin Foo is an adventurer. He came to Chicago at this time, I think, for the purpose of stirring up a quarrel among the Chinamen that he might reap benefit from it. As I understand from Hip Lung, whom I have known for a number of years as a prosperous merchant and peaceful man, he is considered a professional mischief-maker, who travels about among his people in an ostensibly self-sacrificing manner for his personal profit. I think I understand Chinamen thoroughly, and believing that Wong Chin Foo had come here to create trouble in Chinatown, I thought the surest way of averting it would be to read the riot act to him. I told Wong Chin Foo that if it had been a white man in the case he would have been fined \$25 and the case disposed of long ago. They are making a trivial matter the excuse for a bitter factional fight.⁴⁰

Wong was not immediately discouraged. He saw a ray of hope in his perception that the "financial power of [the Hip Lung Company] is the secret of its influence over civil courts" and that Moy Dong Chew was at the moment financially crippled after sending eight thousand dollars to aid his connections in Canada who had gotten into trouble smuggling Chinese into the United States. On his part, Moy Dong Chew accused the Wongs of raising six hundred dollars for his assassination and of offering to withdraw prosecution on payment of five hundred from the Moys. I do not know the results of this particular tussle, but Kern would continue to be a friend of the Moys for decades. In 1912 he was owner of a new, three-story building occupied by the Hip Lung Company.⁴¹ When the Moys gave him the confidence to present himself as a man who "understands Chinamen," they acquired not only a legal and financial patron but a public promoter of their trustworthiness and prosperity as members of the Chicago commercial community.

Two Types of Integration

Wong Chin Foo had long been an advocate of assimilation into American society and cultivated the same kind of cosmopolitan demeanor as the Chinese elite of Peru in the 1920s.⁴² His activities provide a point of contrast from which to better understand the kinds of personal relationships and ethnic boundaries cultivated by the Moys. Wong was a tireless promoter of assimilation and Westernization when talking to Chinese, and

of Chinese culture when talking to non-Chinese, occasionally presenting himself as a "Buddhist missionary" who criticized the hypocrisies and religious intolerance of Christians. He traveled widely about the country giving speeches, publishing articles in English, asserting the value of Chinese as quality immigrants and potential American citizens, and engaging in debates in which he defended the value of Chinese culture against a host of criticisms large and small—including the accusation that bothered Moy Dong Chew of being snake and rat eaters. In 1892 he had formed the Chinese Equal Rights League of America to fight against exclusion, and to demand "an equal franchise for the Americanized Chinese of the United States."⁴³ Although Wong was an unusual character among the migrants, he was not a complete outsider in Chicago, despite the claims of State's Attorney Kern. In 1881, he had even helped the Moys persuade the mayor to use his influence to stop the prosecution of minor gambling and opium use at the Hip Lung Company. He had also led three Moys, one adult and two children, to the criminal court for naturalization as American citizens, which proved to be impossible in view of recent precedents in New York and California against citizenship for Chinese.⁴⁴

In 1893, shortly after his legal conflict with the Moys had brought him back to Chicago, Wong began producing a handwritten bimonthly newspaper called the *Chinese American*, which was a revival of a paper of the same name he had published in New York a decade earlier. The opening issue proclaimed in English, "[This paper] especially will appeal to the members of the Americanized Chinese of this country who understand the English Language and love the institutions and civilization of America, and are willing to cast their life lots with us here instead of with the people of China." It then criticized migrants who did not invest more money in their businesses in America, continued to wear Chinese clothes, and engaged in traditional practices, saying their behavior was "not a proper way for followers of confusion [*sic*] to do."⁴⁵ The English section also printed one of Wong's speeches against the exclusion laws and praised a group of Chinese merchants who had put up ninety thousand dollars to establish a booth at the World's Colombian Exposition when the Chinese government failed to do so. The booth included a "Chinese temple and joss house" and a panorama of "Chinese Heaven and Hell," so that visitors could "see all and save a trip to China." The investors had also learned an "expensive lesson" about what was lacking in the display and were "going to place some pretty Chinese ladies within their various departments shortly." The Chinese section included international news, with a special emphasis on conflict between Japan and China; national news, with criticisms of the Geary Act and the Six Companies for fail-

ing to successfully oppose it; local Chicago news; exhortations to study and learn; pieces of gossip from China; stories of miraculous events, like women who gave birth to pigs and rocks, and the doctors who cured them; warnings about counterfeiters and fraudulent business schemes; and explanations of American culture.

Despite his enthusiasm and eclecticism, Wong was unable to develop the influence among other migrants or the practical mutual understanding with non-Chinese that the Moys had. Wong's calls for Americans to respect Chinese culture, and for Chinese to assimilate into American life while maintaining selected aspects of Chinese culture were idealistic and in the spirit of American liberalism, but they served the practical needs of only a handful of his contemporaries. Newspapers published in English and the encouragement of large investments in the United States are only two of the most obvious examples of how Wong's agenda was irrelevant to most migrants. The average migrant, linked to a family in China and embedded in migrant networks was likely to find Americanization risky, if not impossible or undesirable. The practical alliances in the service of day-to-day interests offered by the Moys were much more responsive to the immediate interests of the migrants, although this responsiveness was ultimately self-seeking and limited migrant horizons.

Between them, the three Moy brothers divided the labor necessary to establish themselves at the center of the social and economic networks which ran through the migrant community in Chicago. As an officer for several important migrant organizations and the head of an important import and export company, Moy Dong Chew was a key figure in Chicago migrant politics. He was often sought to act as a guarantor or to safeguard the money and valuables of kinsmen. He also maintained extensive connections throughout the United States which facilitated his many immigrant smuggling projects. Moy Dong Hoy was most active in establishing practical relations with the non-Chinese world. He could frequently be found at the Bureau of Immigration testifying as to the respectability of one person, the kinship of another, the financial status of somebody else, which business transactions he had witnessed, and whose money he was holding in safekeeping. The agents were pleased by his ability to produce information and documentation that easily conformed to bureaucratic requirements. They added weight to his statements by describing him to the Washington office as a well-known and "respectable local merchant." Moy could even get immigration officials to send telegrams to the border requesting that they expedite the entry of his friends.⁴⁶ The third brother, Moy Dong Yee, spent much of his time in Hong Kong, China, and the Hip Lung branch in San Francisco, where he established

and confirmed business connections, made sure that money invested in village affairs was suitably deployed, and looked out for family business interests. He was not always successful in imposing the will of the Moy brothers, as in 1905 when thirty thousand Hong Kong dollars sent to China for the establishment of a school had to be returned to the United States because nobody could agree on where to build the school.⁴⁷

Their cousin Moy Dong Mow, known as Charlie Kee, was also an important part of the Moy establishment. He had run a cigar store in Chicago since the 1880s but made his home at the Hip Lung Company along with the three brothers. He was also one of several Moys who were hired as interpreters for the Bureau of Immigration around the turn of the century. He accompanied special agent Greenhalgh on an undercover tour circuit of the United States from 1898 to 1899 to investigate Chinese immigration cities and ports throughout the country, carrying a letter of introduction from Moy Dong Chew. He was also an important middleman in the citizen discharge scam in upstate New York in 1903-4, working with white lawyers both to facilitate the connections between them and the Chinese and to shake down and threaten Chinese who were not willing to pay the fees. By 1907, he and Greenhalgh had quit the bureau and were suspected of traveling the country representing themselves as agents in order to extort money from other migrants.⁴⁸ As late as 1914, two years after Kee was murdered in Seattle, investigators on the Gulf Coast still despaired of establishing any kind of efficient border controls against Chinese smuggling, in large part because of the pernicious influence of the "Moy ring."⁴⁹ Smuggling not only produced profit but helped contribute to the numerical dominance of the Moys in Chicago, as well as link many migrants to the brothers through bonds of debt and obligation.

Moy versus Chin

By the turn of the century the Wongs had pretty much fallen out of the picture as pretenders to local power in Chicago, but the Chin family network was mounting an even larger challenge to Moy influence in Chicago and the Midwest. By the end of the nineteenth century at least five Chin merchants in Chicago were wealthy enough to establish households with concubines brought from China.⁵⁰ By 1907, Chin F. Foin was the most prominent Chinese restaurateur in Chicago and a pioneer in upscale Chinese dining (see fig. 14). He had arrived in the United States in 1892 at the age of fifteen and come to Chicago in 1895. By 1905, he was the owner of the King Yen Lo above Kenna's saloon, and by 1912 he and his four brothers owned five restaurants in Chicago. It was said that he spoke

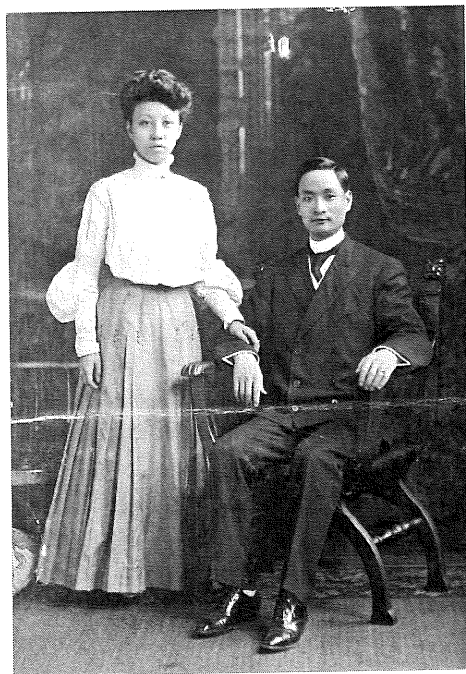


Figure 14 Chin F. Foin, with his wife, Yoklund Wong, 1903. (Source: Chinese Immigration Case Files, C-440. Chicago District Office, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85)

German fluently, belonged to an exclusive social club, rode horseback, was the first Chinese in Chicago to own an automobile, and "was a good all-around American."⁵¹ He counted Chinese ministers, prominent Chicago socialites, and Kang Youwei among his acquaintances and friends.

Tongs and Chinese political parties both emerged as areas of conflict between the Chins and Moys. The Chicago branch of the Hip Sing Tong was established by 1905, and the On Leong by 1907.⁵² One story about the establishment of the On Leong tells of the arrival of a Hip Sing representative from San Francisco to establish a new chapter in Chicago. On his way to the proposed meeting hall he got lost and stopped in a store owned by some Moys to ask directions:

Innocently, he explained his mission. The store keeper called in several other of his Moy kinsmen, who listened to the man's story of how he had brought the flag, seal, and book of oaths from San Francisco for the purpose of forming a tong there, and they became incensed. They jumped to the conclusion that they were being harmed, that a new tong was being formed to combat them. Therefore, the new tong had a bitter enemy even before it was founded in Chicago.⁵³

Apocryphal as this story may be, it nonetheless captures well how new tong chapters were quickly embedded in local disputes. In fact, the identification of Moys with the On Leong already had a long history. The Portland, Oregon, Hip Sing had put a price on the head of Charlie Kee in 1899, and New York On Leong founder Moy Dong Yue was most likely a cousin of the three brothers. By 1907, the conflict between Moys and Chins centered on the control of gambling, and what better way to obtain resources for such a battle than to join a tong of national scope with long experience in such battles?

The Moys and Chins were also attracted to the local Emperor Protection Association as a platform from which to build and extend their prestige. An Emperor Protection Association branch was established in Chicago in June of 1903, a month before Liang Qichao (who devoted more space in his memoirs to the sights and modernity of Chicago than to local Chinese) passed through the city. Moy Dong Chew was the first president of the local branch, but the Chins would play a more important role in association activities and attract more recognition from the prominent reform leaders.⁵⁴ Kang Youwei passed through Chicago on 23 May 1905, attracting a crowd of four hundred Chinese to his speech criticizing the exclusion laws.⁵⁵ Later that year, Kang and his associate Tom Leung began to solicit capital from investors across America and China to establish a new restaurant as part of the Commercial Corporation. The original plan was to find a location near Leung's residence in Los Angeles, but Chin F. Foin recommended a site he had located in the Chicago Loop. Kang and Leung took Chin's advice and made him manager. He supervised all aspects of design and decoration, including the importation of expensive fittings from China, and the new King Joy Lo promised to be even more splendid than the old King Yen Lo above Kenna's Saloon, which had established Chin's reputation as a restaurateur.

Kang Youwei himself took an interest in the naming and decor of the restaurant, and was there for the opening in May 1907. During that visit he distributed many articles of imperial clothing in return for donations, and many local migrants had their pictures taken in them.⁵⁶ Chin F. Foin continued to enjoy a heady stream of social successes in the months right after the opening, not only among other migrants but also among Qing officials sympathetic to the reformers and among local Chicagoans sympathetic to a luxurious dining experience. He achieved a major social coup in November, when the acting Chinese minister and many prominent Chicagoans attended the naming ceremony of his one-month-old baby at the King Joy Lo. The baby was named Theodore Chungow Chin,

Chungow being the name suggested by the previous minister, and Theodore the name suggested by the acting one in honor of President Roosevelt's willingness to mitigate the rigors of exclusion enforcement.⁵⁷

The King Joy Lo was plagued with scandal nearly from the start. That same November investors were already wondering when they would see some return on their investments. Tom Leung, the manager-in-absentia in Los Angeles, was accused of inefficient management and of using \$160,000 he had borrowed from the Commercial Corporation for his own purposes. The delay of profits from the King Joy Lo also led to delays in the establishment of other Commercial Corporation enterprises and to the general aura of corruption and disenchantment gradually adhering to the Emperor Protection Association. Kang Youwei interpreted Leung's behavior as a betrayal of his trust and claimed to have fallen sick for months due to heartbreak.⁵⁸ The scandal was concurrent with aggressive attacks on Chin interests in Chicago as their relations with the Moys broke down to a state of naked, unmasked hostility. Local papers noted that Moy Dong Chew played a prominent role in the Chinese reception committees for Minister Wu Tingfang's visit to Chicago in May and June of 1908, as Chin F. Foin and the King Joy Lo receded from the limelight. Wu turned his attention to matters of state and sent his secretary to help straighten out problems that had arisen in the Emperor Protection Association.⁵⁹ The secretary quickly found himself immersed in a conflict that ranged far beyond the concerns of Chinese reform politics. In response to accusations surrounding the King Joy Lo scandal, the Chins were accusing Moy Dong Chew of not having used his moral influence as president of the Emperor Protection Association to forestall the establishment of the On Leong Tong the previous year, and both sides repeated the accusations that were part of a widely publicized trial that month, in which the Chins accused Moy Dong Chew and his brother of the murder of a fellow clansman.

Murder

The event that most clearly marked the degeneration of local struggles into irreconcilable hostility was the murder of Chin Wai in October 1907, just months after the establishment of the King Joy Lo and the On Leong Tong. Fortified by Hip Sing power and Reform Association prestige, the Chins had challenged the Moy dominance of local gambling in the summer of 1907. The Chin lawyers later claimed that "Hip Lung . . . attempted to form a Chinese gambling trust with himself at the head, and when he met opposition, instead of resorting to underselling, secret agreements,

and rebating, he simply decided to kill off a few of the independents as an object lesson."⁶⁰ The Chins had accompanied their opposition with a propaganda campaign, circulating proclamations calling upon all the Chinese of Chicago to resist the tyranny and extortion of Moy Dong Chew and establish an "open" Chinatown. Moy Dong Chew justified his dominance to white reporters by claiming that he had been responsible for keeping highbinders and hatchetmen out of Chicago for twenty years.

Moy Dong Chew and his son Frank were victims of assaults and threats in August and October. The atmosphere on Clark Street grew so tense that many merchants were afraid to venture from their stores, and even the Chicago press noted the tension.⁶¹ Early in the evening of 16 October, Chin Wai was shot and mortally wounded near the corner of Clark and Van Buren (right next to the Kenna Saloon). Police who had heard the gunshots chased and captured Harry Lee, a Christian laundry man from Forty-third Street, as he attempted to hide on the Hip Lung Company premises.⁶²

Chinese willing to share their opinions with the press in the days before and after the murder echoed Moy Dong Chew in blaming the murder on a society of highbinders which had descended upon Chicago. They drew these images from newspaper articles at the turn of the century that frequently offered a vague and seamy vision of "highbinders," which wavered between describing them as united in a single predatory nationwide network and as uncontrolled, unorganized delinquents. Chinese in Chicago did little to either refute or clarify these images because, either way, they worked to conveniently dissociate their own respectable commercial image from hints of illegal activity. They emphasized that the violent offenders all came from outside of Chicago, particularly from Boston, where tong violence had resulted in an enormous police raid in 1903 which had made that city notorious throughout the nation.⁶³

Because the Boston violence was also part of the Hip Sing-On Leong rivalry, some Chinese accused the Hip Sing Tong and others the On Leong as being the real source of the highbinders. Members of each tong also insisted that theirs was a "respectable merchant organization" made up of locals who had a strong interest in peace and stability in Chicago.⁶⁴ While posting bail for Harry Lee, Frank Moy commented on what a "hard-working man" Lee was, and on Chin Wai's unsavory reputation as "a known highbinder [who] belonged to the Boston branch of the society."⁶⁵ Despite many other such attempts to displace scrutiny, the indictment against Harry Lee was changed in January to charge Frank's father and uncle, Moy Dong Chew and Moy Dong Hoy, with having personally shot Chin Wai.⁶⁶

The Trial

The Moys and Chins drew from different social resources in organizing forces for their upcoming court battle. The Moys made use of the networks and alliances most associated with South Clark Street, hiring Robert E. Cantwell, one of the lawyers held on retainer by the Coughlin-Kenna fund, to lead their defense team. He had a reputation for successfully defending the seemingly hopeless cases of many well-known criminals. He was also known for a melodramatic and quarrelsome flair, for being a "friend of people higher up," and for having been convicted of contempt of court and assault, including one on an assistant state's attorney.⁶⁷

The Chins also worked through First Ward connections, but followed them further afield in their search for legal talent. The most famous member of the Chin prosecution was ex-mayor and future governor of Illinois, Edward F. Dunne. Dunne had a progressive reputation—earned in his campaigns as county judge against corporate bribery and tax evasion—as "a living symbol of justice and humanity," a "defender of the underdog," and as one who loaded his administration with "long-haired friends and short-haired women."⁶⁸ Although an enemy of corruption, Dunne was not strongly associated with the moralistic brand of upper middle class reform that had been the bane of the Levee for so many years, but with a more widely based brand of populism which appealed to working-class voters. His successful 1905 bid for the mayorship had been greatly assisted by the support of Kenna and Coughlin (and the green-linked broadside). It was an unlikely alliance which had broken down quickly when Dunne pushed for the enforcement of saloon closure on Sundays and authorized a few raids on gambling establishments. The loss of First Ward support was crucial in his failure to gain reelection in 1907, but only months after the election he was once again involved in the affairs of South Clark Street as he accompanied two Chinese on a high-profile visit to the death bed of Chin Wai. On the way to the hospital, they made sure that reporters noticed their stop at the Harrison Street police station to request two detectives to escort them as protection against bad elements who might not want them to hear what Chin had to say.⁶⁹

Despite their choice of lawyers, the Moys did not lack connections with men of moral stature equal to Dunne's. Their supply of well-known gentlemen to act as character witnesses included Dunne, as well as Chicago banker, upper-class reformer, and ex-Secretary of the Treasury Lyman Gage, who had held office in 1898 when the Treasury Department was aggressively prosecuting a smuggling ring linked to the Hip Lung Company.⁷⁰ Despite the presence of such respectability, the trial was

plagued with scandal before it even started. It took an unusually long time to select a jury, and accusations never stopped circulating as to the integrity of the jurors, many of whom were "men of wealth and high business rating" in Chicago. One juror was claimed to have been seduced by a pretty woman from New York into trading his vote for a kiss.⁷¹ After the trial Cantwell and his key witnesses, John Moseland and politician H. H. Stridiron, who claimed to have seen the murder and that the murderer was not any of the accused, were themselves accused and convicted of perjury. Stridiron left the country in July in an attempt to flee justice, but later turned himself in.⁷²

The perjury evidence came too late to influence the verdict. The Moy brothers and Harry Lee were acquitted on 17 June 1908. Shortly after the verdict they gave a great banquet in honor of all who had assisted them, at which a Chinese orchestra played the "Star Spangled Banner" along with various Chinese tunes.⁷³ The Chins were distressed. They had put their necks on the line by asking for the death penalty, although they had backed down from this demand as the trial began to turn against them. Many Chins closed their businesses and left the city in fear of Moy reprisals.⁷⁴ Other Chins did not give up, and weeks after the verdict Dunne was once again in their service accusing the police of conspiring with the Moys to harass Chins with vagrancy arrests on Clark Street.⁷⁵ Later, in 1909, the Chins took advantage of a growing sentiment in the municipal government to push vice underground and again cooperated with Dunne and the police in raiding Clark Street gambling houses.⁷⁶ Violence burst out again in 1911, shortly after the festive opening ceremonies of a new Hip Sing headquarters at 358 South Clark Street. By the end of the year, two On Leong members had been shot in Chicago—one was killed and the other hospitalized.⁷⁷ Charlie Kee was shot in the back in Seattle in March of 1912, in what was reputedly a dispute over opium smuggling. By this time, however, the Moys had already begun preparations for their trump card: the relocation of Chinatown.

The Move

In February of 1912 it was announced that Chinatown would move two miles south of the Clark Street location to the intersection of Twenty-second and Archer. Many of the Clark Street leases were due to expire in the next three months, and forty ten-year building leases on Twenty-second Street had been arranged at a cost of over fifty thousand dollars. Plans were also made for the erection of new buildings, the addition of ornate balconies and facades to the old ones, and the construction of a

temple for what was to be "the most complete Chinatown in America."⁷⁸ Not all the Chinese businesses and associations took part in the move. The Hip Sing Tong and a few shops allied around it remained on Clark Street. Nonetheless, by the first of May, the majority of the Chinese had followed the Moys to the new location, leaving behind only a few posters hung on the walls denouncing the Hip Sing as a den of hatchet men "that have come out into the open for the first time."⁷⁹

The move had been encouraged by the expansion of the central business district and the rising rents and threats of demolition that accompanied it. Other bachelor-oriented establishments on Clark Street also gave way to the erection of skyscrapers. Even Hinky Dink Kenna was forced out in 1911 when the building that housed the Kenna Saloon and the King Yen Lo was purchased and slated for demolition. A newspaper article entitled, "Progress Menaces Dink's Throne Seat, Death Knell for Chinatown," reported that upon hearing the news, "The little boss was too overcome for a moment to speak. . . . 'I guess de first ward's goin' south. . . . First it was Custom House place. Now dey want Chink town.'"⁸⁰ As far as the Chinese were concerned, the move was not a flight but a carefully planned and executed relocation. Even arranging the leases at Twenty-second and Archer was accomplished with a remarkable amount of crafty planning, aimed both at befuddling hostile property owners and forestalling Hip Sing interference. Public announcements originally stated that Chinatown would be relocating at Wabash and Twenty-second, resulting in protests by local residents. It was an elaborate ruse, because Wabash and Twenty-second was where the brothels and gamblers who had been neighbors of the Chinese on Clark Street had reestablished themselves after being chased south by raids a few years earlier. They were probably the last group of property owners in Chicago who would spontaneously organize to object to a Chinese presence. While attention was diverted to that area, leases were quietly signed with building owners in a residential area a few blocks west at Archer.⁸¹

The move provided the opportunity for a new start away from the unsatisfactory Clark Street gambling situation, which had been subject to Hip Sing interference and increased city-sponsored raids aimed at eradicating vice. During the move, some low-ranking On Leong members had acted on their own initiative to establish a clear-cut monopoly on Twenty-second Street. With the assistance of attorney Charles Hille, who had earlier worked with Dunne in the 1909 Clark Street raids against the On Leong, they struck a deal with Mayor Harrison to allow limited gambling within the new Chinatown, provided that absolutely no police payoffs took place. When they presented this plan to the rest of the tong, Frank

Moy and the other officers were infuriated, responding to the unauthorized negotiators with physical violence. The officers suspected that by arranging this deal, which undermined their established informal arrangements for protection, these men were expecting some kind of special payoff or, even worse, were attempting to usurp tong leadership. Licking their wounds, the renegades presented their plan at the national On Leong conference that year, but the tong backed the Frank Moy faction. Gambling flourished in the new Chinatown via payoffs channeled through the usual Moy connections.⁸²

In the years to come, the new Chinatown and the On Leong would flourish, dominating the site in a way never achieved on Clark Street. The new Chinatown was in a much more isolated location than Clark Street, with railroad lines and vacant lots demarcating clear boundaries on three sides. Most non-Chinese businesses moved out over the next twenty years, and the new Chinatown became completely dominated by Chinese businesses. It survived the widening of Twenty-second Street in 1922, erecting new buildings and slowly pressing south down Wentworth Street. Chinese families even began to move into the surrounding residential neighborhood. In contrast, the Hip Sing territory on Clark Street appeared more and more abandoned. Some sources even claimed that the On Leong continued to rent Clark Street buildings and leave them empty to contribute to the appearance of desolation.⁸³ The Hip Sing attempted to rejuvenate its territory in the late 1920s by sponsoring a new Chinatown at Twenty-third and State Streets, about a half mile east of the On Leong Chinatown, but was not successful. By 1931, the Chicago Hip Sing President, Li Weiyang, was requesting the national Hip Sing congress to find a means of putting pressure on local businesses that refused to repay the loans he had given out for start-up capital. By the early 1940s, the Hip Sing and a few businesses associated with it had retreated back to South Clark Street.⁸⁴

The move became a fertile source for interpretations of the history of Chinese in Chicago. A Chinese student at the University of Chicago in the 1920s suggested that the move occurred in 1912 because that was the year of the Chinese revolution and the "progressive" Chinese felt they had to move away from the more conservative reformers.⁸⁵ Ting-chiu Fan, who got much of his information from Moy Dong Chew, took a different nationalist slant that downplayed internal schism by pushing the move back to 1905. He argued that the anti-American boycott in China that year had engendered anti-Chinese feelings in Chicago, which had led to rent increases on Clark Street and the creation of tongs and other mutual aid societies for self-protection against whites.⁸⁶ An interpretation

offered decades later by an ex-Chicago resident in Communist China was even more explicit in blaming 1905 rent increases as a racist conspiracy by the white Chicago bourgeoisie.⁸⁷ An immigration inspector who had been posted in Chicago after the move localized the 1905 boycott as a Chicago protest against rising rents on Clark Street.⁸⁸ A young Moy studying at the University of Chicago in the 1920s was able to conflate ethnic politics, Chinese factionalism, and the enthusiasm of students for mass movements all into one explanation. He repeated the inspector's idea of a local boycott, but brought the date back up to 1912 and claimed it was led by the local CCBA over the objections and defiance of the renegade Hip Sing Tong.⁸⁹

Almost all of these explanations reflected the expanding consciousness of Chinese in Chicago by interpreting the move in terms of political events linked to a national or even global scale. I would argue, however, that the move was primarily a bid for local hegemony. Rent increases were a factor, but not a determining one—the Hip Sing and a few shops remained on Clark Street until the 1970s. More to the point was that a move away from the expanding business district and the Hip Sing offered a level of isolation and autonomy that fostered On Leong dominance. On Twenty-second Street, the Chinese had a corner of Chicago all to themselves.

THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE CHICAGO CHINESE

After 1912, Moy Dong Chew started delegating many of his responsibilities to Frank, who became the personification of On Leong dominance through the late 1930s. Frank (whose immigration records claim he was born in Portland, Oregon) had married a local, non-Chinese woman and had a home in Hyde Park near the University of Chicago. Local Chinese were impressed by his gold chains and tailored suits, and by how he was driven to the front door of the On Leong in his four-thousand dollar black Lincoln.⁹⁰ Non-Chinese knew him as the Mayor of Chinatown, and one reporter said he was "as hospitable as a Southern Colonel."⁹¹ His death in 1937 was reportedly due to "overexertion in patriotic activities," a reference to his involvement in anti-Japanese fund raising. The funeral boasted a procession of over three hundred autos.⁹² He lived a high-profile life with wide connections, yet even today old Chinese still speak of him with hesitancy and a touch of fear. The skills of men like Frank Moy in accumulating friendships and status symbols recognized by both Chinese and non-Chinese were an important part of the boundaries and protection being wrapped around local Chinese.

The growth of the new Chinatown was part of the increasing domination of the On Leong Tong. The success of both was manifested in 1927 with the erection of a massive tong headquarters near the corner of Twenty-second and Wentworth. It was soon known as the "Chinatown City Hall," a title usually reserved for local CCBA's. A 1931 article in the *Chicago Tribune* quoted a prominent migrant as saying the On Leong "pretty completely directs the economic, political, and social life of Chinatown."⁹³ This domination meant first of all that gambling operations and business territory were made more stable and secure from outside interference. It also marked a transformation in the activities and self-image of the tong. The collaboration between tongs and merchants in San Francisco that had arisen with the growth of tourism after 1906 was taken one step further in Chicago, where the main organ of merchant interests was the On Leong Tong itself. The On Leong went beyond merely asserting that it was an association of "respectable merchants," and tried to fill the role of charitable and representative Chinatown organization. In achieving this, the On Leong did more than just perform the usual mediating, benevolent, and legal functions of a CCBA. It also presented a public face to non-Chinese as a group of businessmen actively marketing their specialization in oriental delights.

Why a Tong?

The limitations of the Chinese economic role in the United States meant that individual Chinese, unlike those in Peru, were rarely able to claim recognition based on their positions as successful, independent businessmen. Whatever prestige individual Chinese in the United States could attain among non-Chinese was strongly based on a reputation as a representative of the Chinese community. Migrant associations played a key role in defining that Chinese community and legitimizing individual claims to represent it. As a manager of the Hip Lung Company, Moy Dong Chew had earned some public recognition. Backed by the On Leong, Frank Moy became the Mayor of Chinatown. Idealistic but poorly connected men like Wong Chin Foo could gain publicity, but were much less successful in exercising influence. The legitimizing power of these associations had roots in their importance in organizing the earliest flows of migration (whereas migration to Peru was organized by white planters) and was maintained through the success of the Six Companies and other CCBA's in placing themselves at the nexus of complex associational networks and portraying their interests as identical to those of the local Chinese community. As the Chinese moved east, the political significance of

migrant associations was maintained, but tongs replaced CCBA as the dominant institutions. The Chicago On Leong was a model example of this transformation, so successful that by the 1920s it was an anchor point in the national On Leong system. Why did the tong prevail over *huiguan*, family, business, political parties, and occupational guilds as a vehicle for the consolidation of Moy power in Chicago?

In brief, tongs offered more flexible alliances, superior resources, and an organizational structure easily put in the service of the economic interests of its leaders. The *huiguan* of the 1850s had offered similar benefits, but by the twentieth century they had become somewhat ossified in their actions and structure. Surname and native place organizations were limited in their range of membership and consequently in their ability to centralize power and represent the migrant community as a whole. Large-scale labor mobilization was no longer a primary source of wealth, although great profits still came from smuggling and the sale of papers. Consequently, strong connections in China were no longer as critical as connections with officials and underground networks. Moreover, after the upheavals of the late nineteenth century, the *huiguan* had surrendered much of their direct involvement in economic affairs and developed pretenses toward broad representation. In Chicago, almost all the migrants came from Taishan county, and all could make some claim to representation in the local Ningyang Huiguan. Rotating officerships and little selectivity regarding membership made such a *huiguan* difficult to mobilize as an effective organizational tool under the dominance of a single clique. A brief burst of *huiguan* creation took place in Chicago in 1911 "to fight against Moys," but none of them lasted very long.⁹⁴ By the early twentieth century, surname and native place associations had become much more relevant as institutions for the maintenance of small-scale mutual aid and links to villages in China.

A CCBA had been established in Chicago in 1904 but was merely a figurehead institution through most of its history. It had little influence over the conflicts before 1912, and after the move to Twenty-second Street the On Leong began to perform the community-wide mediation and regulation that usually belonged to the CCBA. In the 1920s, most migrants would only accept CCBA mediation if Moy Dong Chew and Toy Fong (a wealthy merchant who had only resided in Chicago sporadically before the late teens) were present, suggesting how power was vested in the CCBA only at the pleasure of powerful men.⁹⁵

Chinese political parties after the turn of the century also offered avenues of prestige that reached out beyond the local migrant communities and village-based migrant networks. These organizations, however,

lacked a stable financial basis other than the solicitation of funds from migrants. They tended to demand too many contributions without providing enough in return, and attempts like the King Joy Lo to develop a stable source of income could prove fruitless under the stresses of individual and local interests. As the Emperor Protection Association crumbled under the weight of scandal, Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary movement finally gained momentum as he passed through Chicago at the end of 1909, early 1910, and again at the beginning of 1911. The second Tongmenghui in the United States was established during his 1910 visit, with most of the dozen or so original members—more than half of whom were Moys—being Christians. His visit in April 1911 was a much more significant event, coming on the heels of an unprecedented show of support in New York, which had resulted in the public humiliation of the New York CCBA president. He was met at the train station by leaders of the Hip Sing, the On Leong, and the Zhigongtang.⁹⁶ By the following February, however, the Chicago Chinese were already using the Chinese New Year's celebration to celebrate the ascension of Sun's rival Yuan Shikai to the presidency (including homage to George Washington for good measure). The Chicago Moys and the Hip Sing both remained supporters of the Constitutional Party into the 1920s, but interest in political organizations as a source of status was largely deflated by the failure of the 1912 republic.⁹⁷

Tongs, on the other hand, were open to people of any surname, from any native place, and even of any race, while at the same time being selective about who would be initiated. Thus, tongs were ideal vehicles through which a group like the Moys could institutionalize alliances with other families and individuals while retaining control of the institutional structure of officers, elders, and common members. Tong affiliations also offered access to resources outside of Chicago, especially after they were formally confederated into a nationwide organization, while still respecting the autonomous control of local branches over nearly all local business activities. These resources included ready access to armed men and a commitment of nationwide resources to the regulation and exploitation of economic activities. Migrant elites could focus tong resources to their benefit in local situations, or use the tong as a forum to pursue their ambitions beyond the limits of the local migrant community.

Benevolent Tongs

On Leong and Hip Sing members continued to murder each other in Chicago after 1912, more as an aspect of nationwide conflict among the tongs than as a consequence of local struggles. Even the nationwide war of

1924, which originated in factionalism in the Chicago On Leong branch, is best understood on a national scale. Chin Jack Lem had been one of the renegades who tried to establish a new gambling arrangement with the mayor in 1912. Despite that failure, he rose quickly within the Chicago branch, building a career out of his reputation for ruthless violence. At the 1924 national On Leong meeting in Pittsburgh, Chin was expelled along with New York founder Moy Dong Yue and other members who supported the Constitutional Party and were known as the "conservative" faction. Leaders of the "progressive" faction that had taken over included Lee Toy of Chicago, who was elected national president and national interpreter for the tong that year. They had reportedly won the 1924 election through "American" vote-canvassing tactics, which meant handing out flyers at the door and attempting to bypass the usual practice of a previously orchestrated consensus. When Chin Jack Lem and some of his followers joined the Hip Sing in New York, violence erupted throughout the United States.⁹⁸

The extension of rivalries based in the Chicago On Leong to a national scale reflected not only the increasingly tight relationship between the branches, but also the extent to which local challenges had been subdued in Chicago. As local power was consolidated, the On Leong became the main stage for power struggles, and individual ambitions could be directed outward toward national influence. The On Leong freely sent inspectors to Clark Street to make sure that no On Leong members were gambling there, but Hip Sing members were afraid to go without armed escorts to Twenty-second Street to take part in CCBA meetings.⁹⁹ The Chins had forsaken the Hip Sing as well. By the 1920s, most of the prominent Chins who had not left Chicago had drifted over to the new Chinatown and became involved in the On Leong.¹⁰⁰ That the Chicago Hip Sing retained any autonomy at all was more a result of the nationwide balance of power than any local tolerance on the part of the On Leong.

Control of gambling always remained the primary basis of On Leong power, both financially and socially. The creation a secure space for gambling activities was a crucial aspect of the undisputed territorial monopoly of the On Leong. During the four years from 1905 to 1908, 2,239 Chinese were arrested in Chicago (a number amounting to well over half of the entire Chinese population), 64 percent for gaming violations.¹⁰¹ In the eleven years from 1914 to 1925 (excluding 1919, for which I have no data), only 1,913 Chinese were arrested, a decline in the yearly average of nearly 70 percent. Of 484 convictions, only 11 percent were for gaming, and those were said to have been gamblers in small, independent houses that did not pay protection to the tongs. Of the other convictions, 24 per-

cent were for disorderly conduct, and 18 percent for prostitution, activities which usually took place outside of tong influence, although the 9 percent for concealed weapons may have had some connection with the tongs.¹⁰²

One migrant recalled, "When we talk about gambling, this is connected to the American police, because it was them who arrested gamblers, it was them who indulged and protected gambling, and it was also them who used gambling to stir up fights among the Chinese."¹⁰³ This observation was accurate in pointing out the significance of local police indulgence, but not in evaluating the results. When collaboration between municipal and tong officials over gambling went smoothly, as was the case in Chicago after 1912, the local Chinese community was not disrupted so much as enclosed within a barrier. The interests of non-Chinese in segregating the Chinese resonated with tong interests in dominating them. The less access that average Chinese had to outside opportunities, the more the tong elite could earn profit and prestige by interposing themselves between migrants and the non-Chinese world.

The rise of the On Leong also corresponded with a more general shift in the political relations of the city as a whole. When the Moys left Clark Street in 1912, the neighborhood was already disappearing, both physically and socially. As vice was pushed underground in the early twentieth century, its open protection by politicians like Coughlin and Kenna became a thing of the past. Independent crime syndicates grew in their place, reaching full flower during prohibition. This shift accompanied the rise of big business, not only as a source of profit and patronage for gangsters and politicians, but also as a model of organizational efficiency. The new criminal was an organization man, and profit was the measure of success.¹⁰⁴

Tongs were changing with the times. In abandoning Clark Street, the Moys disentangled themselves from neighborhood political relations and found an isolated location in which the tong could be the final authority, retaining its own legal staff and making its own deals with city officials. The tong itself had also attained a level of organizational strength and profit orientation unknown in the nineteenth century. Chinese merchants in the United States had always engaged in a range of activities that might be considered conspiratorial, illegal, or exploitative in certain situations. With the On Leong, however, the criminal tong and respectable Chinese merchant association became one and the same. At the turn of the century, Chinese merchants had interacted flexibly with local politicians and vice entrepreneurs. By the 1920s, they had developed a coherent institutional identity for themselves as local businessmen. Their

most high-profile interactions with non-Chinese no longer appeared as special friendships, but as open commercial and public relations encounters. At the same time, they never restrained the violence and flow of cash that continued to underwrite the less public side of Chicago business. The main thing that tongs lacked was respectability as legitimate organs of migrant representation, but the Chicago On Leong was a pioneer in developing that respectability.

Respectability and Exotica

Although the Chicago On Leong was closely linked to nationwide tong activities, locally it attempted to dissociate itself from tong activities and legitimize its domination as a representative and benevolent businessman's community center in the style of a CCBA. Moy Dong Chew told Ting-chiu Fan in 1925 that tongs were growing weaker in the United States and that none of the respected Chinese belonged to them. Fan's thesis did not even refer to the On Leong, but only to a "Chinese Association" that was "a branch of a national organization in North America" that provided social services, arbitrated disputes, certified documents, maintained order, and represented the Chinese.¹⁰⁵ A University of Chicago student from North China claimed the On Leong was primarily an arbitration agency.¹⁰⁶ The Moy sociology student who had credited the CCBA for moving Chinatown felt compelled to recognize the existence of unsavory activities among the Chinese in Chicago, but shifted the blame away from the On Leong by explaining how the legitimate leaders of the On Leong were occasionally "put to shame due to the malpractices of some of the black sheep of the colony who have learned the tricks of lower-class American politicians in the ward."¹⁰⁷ Susan Lee Moy's 1979 master's thesis continued this tradition of describing the Chicago On Leong as the sum of its charitable and commercial activities, but she was perhaps a bit less romantic when she suggested that it was also "the only organization with power and money enough to carry on large community projects."¹⁰⁸ The establishment of the On Leong as the local Chinese government even included attempts to rewrite history by appropriating some of the past glories of the Chins. Within a year after Chin F. Foin's death in 1924, Moy Dong Chew assumed credit for the King Joy Lo by pushing its establishment back to the 1890s as the first chop suey house in Chicago and implying that he and Minister Wu Tingfang had established it as a joint effort to improve the lot of local Chinese.¹⁰⁹

Journalists visiting the On Leong in the 1930s were impressed by the "intelligent, courteous, and educated business men," who received



Figure 15 Wentworth Street and On Leong Tong Building, 1952. (Source: Chicago Historical Society, ICHI-04881; photograph by J. Sherwin Murphy)

them.¹¹⁰ The most notable manifestation of the rise of a local Chinese business community was the increasing commodification of Chineseness in and of itself as a salable product. Sophisticated On Leong businessmen increasingly marketed a product of mild oriental exoticism. The On Leong building was probably the most visible example of this Chinese public identity (fig. 15). Its solid, heavy form and dominating presence evoked the power of the On Leong, while the jade-colored trimmings and pagoda-shaped turrets offered an exotically seductive lure which could be seen for blocks around.

Restaurants were at the core of this economy. Turn-of-the-century restaurateurs like Chin F. Foin had made much of their profit from American-style meals, but by the 1920s, they were tapping into a growing market of customers searching for something different yet unthreatening, like Chinese American chop suey and fortune cookies. The food was served in an atmosphere of vague oriental exotica embodied in names like Golden Pheasant Inn, Bamboo Inn, Peacock Inn, Canton Tea Garden, and Oriental Garden, and in a spectrum of decor that included gaudy red and gold interiors, pointed reed hats, and cuneiform typefaces meant to

appear as if written by a Chinese brush to bamboo and thatched grass lobbies serving "Polynesian cocktails." Some Chinese earned money giving tours of Chinatown to diners leaving the restaurants. By the late 1930s, these tours were even sponsored by the WPA, and a receptionist was kept in the lobby of On Leong Tong building to welcome visitors.¹¹¹

If Frank Moy was a symbol of rising On Leong dominance, Gerald Moye personified its mature public face as head of a benevolent local business organization selling the tastes and sights of the Orient. Moye, a long-time president of the Chicago On Leong after Frank's death, was a lawyer educated at the University of Illinois and a partner in the firm Moye, Gleason, and Dillon. He had also managed a small tourist attraction called the Ling Long Museum in the 1930s, which offered a panorama of the "Highlights of Chinese History and Chicago's Chinatown." The descriptive pamphlet for the museum began with a brief summary of Chinese history, in which the Chinese Republic received most of the attention, and then asserted that the Chinese in Chicago were the inheritors of this noble historical legacy. It quickly made a point of diffusing any suspicions that this legacy might be a threat to American sovereignty by stating that "there is really no political set-up in Chinatown. We do not have a 'mayor' or a 'city hall.'" It continued by explaining that "tongs are simply merchant associations, and are strictly of American origin . . . [consisting of] well-educated men . . . [making] efforts toward philanthropic goals rather than confined to rivalry." This image of civilized behavior stopped short of the aim of total assimilation into America with the assertion that Chinatown was still independent and "self-governed by Chinese without political alliances, through the cooperation of the different associations."¹¹² The pamphlet concluded with an invitation for outsiders to visit a tourist trail which included stops at the On Leong building, the Methodist Church, and the larger souvenir shops.

In many ways, Gerald Moye was finally putting into practice Wong Chin Foo's vision from over forty years before of the Chinese as a dedicated commercial community deploying selected aspects of Chineseness as a basis for integration into American society. By the 1920s, Chinese in both Chicago and Peru were actively promoting positive images of themselves as Chinese. In Peru, this Chineseness was expressed primarily as membership in the Chinese nation, based in part on claims of racial and cultural affinity, but also modeled after prestigious European colonies defined by their cosmopolitanism and modernity. The Chinese in Chicago, however, defined their qualities as a group not so much in terms of international standards as in terms of local material interests and institutions. These qualities included their ability to take care of themselves, get

along with their neighbors, and provide attractive products from far away to local consumers.

Tongs had few links to any particular locale in China and (except for the Zhigongtang, which tried to involve itself in national politics in China rather than local hometown issues) most of their goals and resources were focused on local interests outside of China. Their networking across North America was a form of collaboration designed to fortify the interests of local branches. Thus, local affairs and access to the non-Chinese world were easily dominated by tongs, which helped perpetuate the status quo of laundries, restaurants, and gambling. Direct links to China primarily involved profits from smuggling migrants (or, more likely, from the protection of smugglers). Once in the United States, however, these migrants were generally left to their own means. The tongs only "protected" local enterprises; they were not the nodes of business and credit networks, because such networks always reached ultimately beyond North America and beyond tong surveillance. This was unlike the elite businesses in Peru that could channel migrants all the way from Hong Kong and into their extensive local business networks. Migrant elites in Peru both profited from transnational networks and publicly drew upon them as a means to upward mobility. In Chicago, however, organizations and small businesses other than the tongs continued to make up the fabric of transnational networks, which remained strong along with the relatively high proportion of new migrants. Local power was left to the tongs, which had developed in conjunction with the racism and economic opportunities of North America. They could not, however, develop the connections necessary to dominate transnational networks. Rather, they cooperated with those networks to orient migrants in such a way as to perpetuate the local isolation upon which tong domination was built.

Continuing Patterns

The On Leong building still marks the entrance to the Twenty-second Street Chinatown. It was raided by federal agents in the late 1980s for gambling and closed for several years but has now been occupied and renovated by a Christian social service organization. A plaque installed in the doorway in 1993 to recognize the building as a historical monument praises the community-building aspects of the On Leong:

The business association that commissioned this building was instrumental in creating Chicago's Chinatown in 1912. The building housed various meeting halls, a school, a shrine, and the association's officers.

Its design was derived from the architecture of the Kwangtung region of China, the ancestral region of many of Chinatown's residents.

The conflicts of Chinatown history receive less public acknowledgment than the benevolent merchant facade, but they are still evident today. When the federal government bought out the Hip Sing property on Clark Street in 1974 to build a parking garage and prison, the Hip Sing moved eight miles north to Argyle Street. With funds donated by the Nationalist government in Taiwan, it purchased several buildings and made plans for a beautiful mall complete with fountains and pagodas.¹¹³ The plans for the Argyle Street Chinatown were as ambitious as those that accompanied the move to Twenty-second Street but were much less successful. The new Chinatown was saved from obscurity only by the waves of Southeast Asian migrants who came to Chicago in the 1980s. The Twenty-second Street Chinatown remains almost exclusively Chinese; many residents can trace their networks back to migrants who arrived much earlier in the century, while Argyle Street now boasts businesses with signs written in at least five languages.

Patterns of violence also persisted. Four years after the Argyle Street move, some old men gambling in the Hip Sing building were brutally attacked by a youth gang affiliated with the On Leong. Chinese statements to the media provided denials and assertions similar to those heard in 1907: that the perpetrators were outsiders from New York, that they victimized the Hip Sing because the Twenty-second Street Chinatown was too close-knit for freelance criminals to operate in, and that the tongs themselves were only involved in social and charitable activities.¹¹⁴ The less public side of this continued legacy of tong domination can be seen in observations made to a white reporter by a Chinese merchant in New York in the 1980s:

[Extortion] is the cost of doing business here. Maybe 1 percent of places getting extorted are unhappy. It's status quo. I'm upset now because we're in the first phase of disorganized crime. It's so serious it's terrifying. Those kids come in. We have no one to negotiate with. You can't b.s. your way out, or make a deal. This is new. In eighty years, this is new. We don't know who they are—it's not the same guys each time. We think it's free-lance kids. Vietnamese don't respect anybody. Things are changing. . . . I know the management of the tong that controls my street, its general, and its lieutenants. To save face, I'll complain to its second rung, not the top. The kid gets taken care of. . . . I'm for tranquillity. I'm not looking for reform. I'm typical, I think. Chinese are the richest people on earth, you know. All these guys out

there are getting rich. They don't view themselves as enslaved by gangs and associations. The IRS enslaves me, not the gangs.¹¹⁵

For this merchant, the tongs were more legitimate than the United States government in their claim to govern and extract tribute. He expressed a belief that Chinese success depended to some extent on security from outside interference. This was not necessarily an accurate assessment of his best interests. Different assessments of the best interests of Chinese communities are evident in the resistance of the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance against the New York CCBA in the 1930s, in the demands for rights of citizenship by Chinese American Citizens Alliances, and in the activities of social service organizations that have emerged since the 1960s. Nonetheless, the continued relevance of this merchant's assessment is based on the success of tongs and other migrant associations in monopolizing contacts with non-Chinese and directing the Chinese toward networks that link them more strongly with China and other Chinese.