

Huping Ling

The Transnational World of Chinese Entrepreneurs in Chicago, 1870s to 1940s: New Sources and Perspectives on Southern Chinese Emigration

树挪死，人挪活

A tree would likely die when transplanted; a man will survive and thrive when migrated.

—Chinese proverb (author's translation)

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Abstract This article contributes to an ongoing dialogue on the causes of migration and emigration and the relationship between migrants/emigrants and their homelands by investigating historical materials dealing with the Chinese in Chicago from 1870s to 1940s. It shows that patterns of Chinese migration/emigration overseas have endured for a long period, from pre-Qing times to today's global capitalist expansionism. The key argument is that from the very beginning of these patterns, it has been trans-local and transnational connections that have acted as primary vehicles facilitating survival in the new land. While adjusting their lives in new environments, migrants and emigrants have made conscious efforts to maintain and renew socioeconomic and emotional ties with their homelands, thus creating transnational ethnic experiences.

Keywords Chinese migration and emigration, overseas Chinese, Chinese in Chicago, Chinese ethnic businesses

Introduction

Just as all early civilizations used migration as an important survival strategy, so too Chinese migrated in great numbers. For example, beginning even as early as

Huping Ling (✉)

Department of History, Truman State University, Kirksville, MO 63501, USA

E-mail: hling@truman.edu

the first through fourth centuries large outflows of Chinese moved from central north China, one of several Chinese cultural origin zones, to locales south of the Yangtze; and then by the time of the Tang-Song transition (roughly the ninth-tenth centuries) Chinese were establishing themselves in more or less non-Chinese areas around the coast and across the South China Sea. This international aspect would grow tremendously by the 15th century.

Scholars outside of China have developed a notion of “push and pull” to characterize the forces behind such migrations.¹ As a theory, it borrowed a binary concept from physics: repulsive causes affected migrant/emigrant outward (the push), and attractive factors pulled migrants/emigrants in. This has been deployed in many studies of migrants/emigrants; but there still seems to be a lack of an overarching framework that describes the causes of migration/emigration especially concerning China. Once having migrated, how did migrants adjust to their new lives in adopted places or nations; and what was the relationship between the migrants and their homelands; did the homeland continue to kindle intellectual and economic activity?

This article will contribute answers to an academic dialogue on Chinese overseas migrations by carefully noticing connections between migrants and their homelands; it will do so through a historical investigation of the Chinese in Chicago from the 1870s to 1940s. The author has gleaned evidence from genealogies, gazetteers, local and regional overseas Chinese magazines, and manuscripts in English from the National Archive Records Administration, Great Lake Region (Chicago), the University of Chicago Library, the Chinese-American Museum of Chicago, the Chicago Chinese American Historical Society, the Chicago History Museum, and the Chicago Public Library’s Chinatown Branch.

The argument is framed around the long history of emigration overseas that began well before the Qing and boomed in the context of global capitalist activities occurring in recent centuries. First is a brief discussion of the macroscopic domestic and international forces behind Chinese emigration to the United States, these being China’s own socioeconomic conditions as well as

¹ For works by scholars in China on migration and emigration, see for example, Gao Weinong, et al., *Yueji huaqiao huaren yu yuedi duiwai guanxishi* [A history of the relationship between the overseas Chinese from Guangdong and foreign countries] (Beijing: Zhongguo huaqiao chubanshe, 2005); Zhuang Guotu, *Zhongguo fengjian zhengfu de huaqiao zhengce* [The Chinese feudal governments’ policies on overseas Chinese] (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 1989). For works by scholars outside China, see for example, Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991); Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States Since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1988); Wang Gungwu, *China and the Chinese Overseas* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1992).

invasions and encroachments into China by the industrialized west. Next, the discussions move in for a microscopic study of the Moy clan, one of the most populous clans among the early Chinese immigrants in Chicago. The clan's roots in Taishan county (台山, Toishan in Cantonese dialect), Guangdong, are traced; and connections to their homeland are brought out by using various Chinese and English sources, as just mentioned.

The chief argument is that from the very beginning of migration/emigration, trans-local and transnational connections have acted as powerful vehicles to facilitate survival and success in new places. While adapting to new environments, migrants and emigrants consciously made efforts to sustain socioeconomic and emotional ties with their homelands; they had not simply translated their nationalities, but had become transnationals.

This study examines the way transnational kinship networks helped sustain Chinese businesses in Chicago from the 1870s to 1940s. By employing relatively untapped local sources, it shows that the business founders and their partners possessed vision, practicality, and long-term goals. The larger and more complex businesses were well planned out and sophisticated in their use of transnational connections. They utilized long-distance kinship networks that were focused on certain locales in the Guangdong region. The networks involved banking, lending, and employment; and they helped the Chicago businessmen raise capital, procure merchandise, recruit employees, and manage operations. Ultimately, their enterprises served Chinese communities on both ends of a long-lasting process of transnational migration.

Forces of Migration/Emigration

Guangdong as a Hub of Overseas Emigration

A large two-story building standing prominently on Wentworth Avenue in the heart of Chicago's Chinatown reminds many of the local Chinese residents of the *yanglou* 洋楼 (Western buildings) or *diaolou* 碉楼 (fortresses, or watchtowers) of their homeland in Taishan. This building was built in 1928 as a headquarters for the On Leong Merchants and Laborers Association. Its striking grandeur and staunchly Chinese characteristics also provided a curiosity for visitors to the neighborhood: what were the possible connections between the Chinese living in Chicago and the culture and feel of life back in their homeland?

The similarity of building styles was hardly coincidental, and the connections a natural outcome of emigration. Taishan and the adjacent three counties of Kaiping (开平, or Hoiping in Cantonese), Enping (恩平, Yanping), and Xinhui (新会, Sunwei) are collectively called Siyi (四邑, *szeyap*), that is, the "four settlements" along with Canton and its three adjacent counties (Sanyi 三邑, or



On Leong Heahquarters 2008

samyap) of Nanhai (南海, Namhoi), Panyu (番禺, Panyi), and Shunde (顺德, Shuntak), they are the internationally recognized hub of overseas Chinese emigration to North America, Australia, and western Europe. In contrast, the neighboring province of Fujian has been an origin point for Chinese emigrants to Southeast Asian countries. The Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the Nationalist Government published statistics in 1945 indicating that among the then 8,546,374 overseas Chinese worldwide, 5,992,066, or 70 percent, were from Guangdong, mainly the large urban area of Canton (Guangzhou), as well as the Sanyi and Siyi districts.²

Chinese scholars have generally classified the people of Guangdong into three groups, according to their dialects: Cantonese, Chaozhou, and *Hakka*. Cantonese is spoken by people from Canton, Sanyi, and Siyi; Chaozhou by those from Chaozhou and the Shantou plain; and *Hakka* by people in the northeast region of Guangdong. The three areas inhabited by these dialect speakers developed into the three primary regions in that part of China for producing overseas Chinese.³

Guangdong Chinese have a long tradition of migration, both in and out. Perhaps the earliest immigrants were the more than 100,000 northerners dispatched by the authoritarian government of the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE) to expand what we nowadays term “Han” culture and to develop the economy of the region.⁴ These Han Chinese were a temperate climate people forced into a debilitatingly hot, humid sub-tropics and tropics typified by a monsoon climate.

² *Guangdong qiaohui*, 1945. Cited in Guangdongsheng dang’anguan ed., *Huaqiao yu qiaowu shiliao* (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1991), 211.

³ Gao et al., 2005, 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

Of course, gradually they adapted to the habitats of South and Southeast Asia. Because of its coastal position, Guangdong provided easy access outward, and thus Chinese merchants opened up commercial routes to Southeast and South Asian peoples by the 1st century. As early as the 3rd century, Canton had positioned itself as an excellent port that later on, by the 8th century, could attract Arab traders from west and South Asia, propelling itself into a great hub for international trade and overseas emigration. Such commercial contacts created the earliest Chinese emigrants, thus, by the end of the Tang dynasty (618–906), to escape the frequent social upheavals and civil wars, many Chinese emigrated from Guangdong to Southeast Asian countries.⁵

During the Song dynasty (960–1279), Chinese maritime commerce rapidly developed. Residents from Fujian and Guangdong frequently travelled between their respective provinces and the trading ports of Southeast Asia. Merchants stranded by typhoons, illness, or debt became accidental settlers in foreign lands. They were later joined by political refugees who were escaping persecution from Chinese authorities and others who were seeking better fortunes overseas. By the 13th and 14th centuries, Chinese emigration to Southeast Asia reached its zenith as a result of the Mongol military expeditions and the Ming government's maritime expeditions, which left behind many Chinese soldiers and civilians in the far-flung localities that they contacted.

In 1760, the Qing court chose Canton as the only “open port,” even though Quanzhou 泉州 and Zhangzhou 漳州, both located in Fujian province, were well-developed international trading ports. The Qing government (1644–1911) was at that time trying to abate piracy in the coastal provinces of Fujian and Guangdong and had closed many coastal areas and forcibly relocated inhabitants inland. Out of a concern to keep the Chinese populace at a distance from the foreign “devils” doing business, and for other, local and internal, reasons, all aspects of international trade in Canton were delegated to merchant organizations, called *gonghang* 公行, which had had long experience in dealing with foreign traders.⁶ Specific conditions for dealing with foreign enterprise notwithstanding, Western influence penetrated Canton and surrounding regions quite deeply, thus creating a certain type of foreign-oriented labor market.

Guangdong as a Link in Global Capitalistic Expansion

Although emigration overseas, especially to Southeast Asia, went on for

⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁶ See, for example, John King Fairbank, *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973); Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

centuries, emigration to the Americas did not occur in significant numbers until the end of the Opium Wars (1839–1842), when China was defeated by British cannons and gunboats and forced to sign the so-called Unequal Treaties with a number of Western powers, namely, Britain, France, and the US, which were allowed unrestrained trade in several port cities, including Canton. That the treaty nations' having left the opium trade in place affected Guangdong migration patterns, at least indirectly. Opium continued to be sold in larger and larger quantities, exacerbating an already grave economic situation and a weak copper-silver exchange rate. The disruptive economic consequence of opium importation was compounded by the general influx of foreign goods in the newly opened ports. Canton was particularly hard hit, because it had the longest history of foreign trade and the most foreign contacts, and it now lost this advantage to other open ports. Local household industries were swept away, and the self-sufficient agrarian economy collapsed.

In addition to the incursions of foreigners and the Opium Wars, the 1840s and 1850s also saw large natural catastrophes in China. The major ones were the severe drought in Henan in 1847, the flooding of the Yangtze River in the four provinces of Hubei, Anhui, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang, and the famine in Guangxi in 1849. Flood and famine in Guangdong soon were compounded by the disastrous Taiping Revolution (1850–64), which ruined lands, people, and livelihoods.

The above might be seen as the “push” factor. But there was also a pull. In the second half of the 19th century, the lure of American gold took hold, after the discovery of a rich deposit in California and other regions attracted Chinese emigrants to Gam San 金山, or Gold Mountain, the nickname given the United States of America by the Chinese. In 1849, news of the discovery spread like wild fire to every corner of the world, and soon attracted thousands of gold seekers to California. Among them, 325 were from Tangshan 唐山, a sobriquet for China proper used by overseas Chinese.⁷ In the early 1850s, the number of Chinese increased dramatically—2,716 in 1851 and 20,026 in 1852.⁸ By 1882 when the passage of Chinese Exclusion Act ended large-scale Chinese immigration, there were about 300,000 Chinese in the continental United States.⁹

The early immigrant Chinese placed much of their aspirations in the gold fields, thus the majority of *gam san haak* 金山客, that is, “Gold Mountain guests,” worked directly in the mining areas of California. The census statistics indicate that almost 100 percent of Chinese in the continental United States lived

⁷ Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989), 79.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Elmer C. Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 16.

in California in 1860. Most Chinese miners worked placer claims, the most labor intensive and the least remunerative of all mining methods; they washed gold-bearing sand in pans or rockers, letting the heavier particles settle at the bottom.

As Chinese miners became ubiquitous in the California hills, white miners felt threatened and demanded the California legislature eliminate the foreign competition. Therefore, in May of 1852 the legislature passed the foreign miners' license tax, which required every foreign miner who was ineligible for citizenship to pay a monthly fee of three dollars. Since a 1790 federal law reserved naturalized citizenship only to "white" persons, Chinese were considered ineligible for citizenship and therefore were clearly the law's primary target.

In addition to mining, the construction of the transcontinental railroad absorbed a large number of Chinese laborers, many of whom were former gold miners. After the end of the Civil War, the US government could once again devote its attention to the construction of the transcontinental railroad. The eastern part of the railroad was contracted to the Union Pacific Railroad Company to build westward from the Missouri River, and the western part of the railroad to the Central Pacific Railroad Company. In February 1865, fifty Chinese workers were hired by the Central Pacific Railroad Company as an experiment. The workers did well at hard and laborious tasks, and so the company increased their hiring. During the peak of construction, 12,000 Chinese, nearly 90 percent of the entire work force,¹⁰ worked for the Central Pacific. After the railroad was built, many Chinese laborers became farm laborers in California, and others migrated south and east, working in southern plantations or in industrially active cities on the East Coast and in the Midwest. Chicago was the major Midwest destination. There, members of the Moy clan from Taishan county comprised the majority of early Chinese immigrants.

The Moys, the Taishanese, and Transnational Ties

The Moys

A distinctive feature of the Chicago Chinese was the dominance of the surname Moy 梅, which outnumbered other surnames, especially among the earlier immigrants, who were mostly from Guangdong. The Moy Family Association was the largest among family associations in Chicago since the late 19th century. Of the over 6,000 files on immigrants living in Chicago between 1898 and 1940,

¹⁰ Takaki, 85.

there are at least 1,000 that deal with people with the surname Moy.¹¹ Although the Chin and Wong were also populous surnames in the early history of the Chinese in Chicago, in order to keep the article focused, we take the Moy clan as an example in order to demonstrate transnational kinship connections.

According to a Moy family genealogical myth, their progenitor originated in the royal family of the Shang dynasty (1766–1122 BCE). He had been granted a principality in present-day Bo county, Anhui, named Mei (Moy in Cantonese), and therefore was known as Count Moy, whose offspring adopted the principality name as a surname. During the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), Bo county administratively belonged to Runan prefecture 汝南郡, and the Moys thus also became known as *Runan jun* people.¹²

Though originated from northern China, the Moys migrated to the South later in history. In the 2nd century, the Han dynasty court was weakened by both internal and external disturbances—political rivalries among the powerful aristocratic families and pressures from the nomadic “barbarians” from the north and northwest frontiers. With the fall of the Jin-dynasty capital of Luoyang in 307, hundreds of thousands followed the court south of the Yangtze River, an area perceived by many northerners as uncivilized. Soon, for first time, the population in South China exceeded that in the North: thus, while during Han times the ratio of population North versus South was 10 to 1, by the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), more than half of the Chinese population resided in the South.

The Moys were among those waves of migrants from the North after the fall of Luoyang. Interestingly, the Chinese court in its southern exile established a *qiaojun* 侨郡 (migrant prefecture) system among the newcomers, even naming the new southern prefectures for migrants according to the names that existed previously in the North. Therefore, Runan prefecture (presently in Henan province) was established for the Moys, who, as mentioned, had hailed from Bo county. The *qiaojun* system helped maintain a certain social order among the migrants, who cooperated with the government in this practice. However, only the prominent aristocratic families migrated in an organized fashion and sustained their patriarchal structures, whereas commoners migrated sporadically and randomly. Thus, any association with a northern prefectural name indicates an emigrant family’s prestige. For about 1,600 years, Moys spread widely across China, encompassing all provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions. The most concentrated areas of Moys include Anhui, Hubei, Henan, Hunan, Sichuan, Jiangxi, Zhejiang, Guangdong, and Jiangsu provinces, with an estimated total

¹¹ Author’s tally from the list of cases. National Archive Records Administration, Great Lake Region (Chicago); Chicago Chinese Case Files, 1898–1940, RG85.

¹² Shijie Meishi zongqin zonghui [The world Moy family association], *Meishi zongqin zupu* [The Moy family genealogy] (1991), 8–11.

population of five million.¹³

One specific branch of the Moys settled in the town of Duanfen 端芬, Taishan county, Guangdong. Over time, Duanfen Moys prospered greatly and formed the largest branch in China.¹⁴ Consequently, Moy became Duanfen's principal surname even to today, comprising 20 percent of the total population from the 1970s to the 2000s.¹⁵ A survey conducted in 1996 counted 14,500 Moys or 26 percent of the total population of 55,290 in Duanfen.¹⁶

What makes the Duanfen Moys so unusual among Moys in general is their written record, which provides a full family genealogy, or *zupu* 族谱. In 1673, the eleventh generation of the Duanfen Moys, Moy Mingxie, a metropolitan scholar during the Qing Emperor Kangxi's reign (1662–1722), completed his nine years' work on this *zupu*. In 1706, a twelfth generation Moy named Moy Xisi updated it.¹⁷ It has supplied many of the observations on the Moy family that follow.

The causes of overseas migration from Duanfen in modern times mirror those of Chinese emigration generally since the mid-19th century. At the end of the Qing dynasty, economic conditions in rural Taishan rapidly deteriorated and were compounded by the always disastrous effect of natural calamities. Between 1851 and 1908, there were reportedly fourteen floods, seven typhoons, five famines, four droughts, four plagues, and four earthquakes. Situated in a lowland, Duanfen was especially hard hit and bore the brunt of various of these disasters. Bad times would exacerbate the feuds that existed historically between Guangdong natives and migrants, or *hakka* (客家 “guest people,” a term that referred to migrants from North China). Between 1856 and 1867, violent conflicts affected Duanfen, resulting in countless deaths. Going overseas began to emerge as a viable alternative. In 1866, the Commander-in-General in Guangdong deployed 10,000 troops to suppress riots. Moy Qizhao, a Duanfen notable, joined the troops in charge of grain procurement. Witnessing the devastations, he wrote a poem to persuade the locals to go overseas for a better life: “There are opportunities everywhere/Chinese went overseas for a long while/Several hundred thousand in Gold Mountain (San Francisco)/Several hundred thousand in India.”¹⁸ The numbers he quoted may have been exaggerations, but they indicate that overseas emigration was becoming a preferred choice for Duanfenese. The brokers of the Chinese coolie trade, many

¹³ Ibid., 48.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ *Duanfen zhenzhi* [Gazetteer of Duanfen], 37–38.

¹⁶ *Meishi zongqin zupu*, 90.

¹⁷ Ibid., 81. I had been aware of the Moy *zupu*, but did not gain access to it until the summer of 2007, when I did my field research in Taishan.

¹⁸ Author's translation. *Meishi zongqin zupu*, 90–91.

of whom were locals, readily took an advantageous position. A Duanfense named Moy Yaoguan served as one of the *zhuzai tou* 猪仔头, or “head of the piglets,” in the coolie trade.¹⁹

According to a 1998 survey on the distribution of overseas Chinese originating from Taishan, conducted by the Taishan City Federation of Overseas Chinese, among the total of 93,285 individuals surveyed in Duanfen town, historically the most preferred destinations for Duanfense have been the US, Hong Kong, Macao, and Canada: 60,594 (65 percent) went to America, 15,555 (17 percent) to Hong Kong, 3,492 (4 percent) to Macao, and 3,016 (3 percent) to Canada. The statistics for other towns in Taishan city indicate a similar pattern.²⁰

There is no record that indicates that the Moy brothers in Chicago originated in Duanfen. However, it is certain in oral interviews and immigration records that the three Chicago Moy brothers were born in Taishan (the surrounding county).²¹ The likelihood of a Duanfen origin is therefore high. The predominance of the surname Moy among the Chicago Chinese indicates a number of important issues. First, the clustering of a certain surname or a few surnames is a manifestation of chain immigration. The patrilineal and patrilocal nature of the traditional Chinese villages resulted in the dominance of a few clans in any given village. The common surnames among immigrants reflect the chain immigration from certain villages and areas of the homeland, as the pioneer immigrants often sent for their family members and relatives to join them. Second, the clustering of surnames indicates continuous transnational ties, emotional as well as economic, between immigrants and those who remained in the homeland. Such ties enabled the latter more easily to join the emigrants later on.

The Taishanese

Taishan is located in the southwest part of the Pearl River delta. It belonged to Xinhui county before the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), and was incorporated into a separate county in 1499 named Xinning. In 1914 it was renamed Taishan by the

¹⁹ *Meishi zongqin zupu*, 90. The Chinese coolies were called *zhuzai* or piglets as they were stuffed in crowded lower compartments of the boats like livestock, during their strenuous oversea passage from Hong Kong to the Americas. The traffic bringing cheap labor from coastal China to the Americas has been called the “pig trade” accordingly.

²⁰ Author’s tally and computation from Taishan shi qiaolian [Taishan city federation of overseas Chinese], *Taishan shi qiaolian pucha: huaqiao huaren fenbu shijie gedi qingkuang tongbiao* [Taishan City Federation of Overseas Chinese survey: table of the distribution of overseas Chinese] (1998).

²¹ Interview of Lorraine Moy Tun, by Ruth Kung, Sep. 1, 2007. Lorraine Moy Tun is the daughter of the second Moy brother, Moy Dong (Tong) Yee; Testimony of Moy Tong Yee, Mar. 30, 1906, CCCF Case 463.

Nationalist Government, to avoid confusion with Xinning counties elsewhere. With its long and intensive association with Chinese emigration, Taishan has been dubbed “the leading county of overseas Chinese.” In the 1990s, there were over a million overseas Chinese from Taishan, more than the local county’s population. More than 75 percent of the local population had relatives overseas during the same time period. According to local records, Taishanese had emigrated to Southeast Asia since as early as 1774. In the past two centuries, Taishanese have migrated all over the world (over eighty-two nations), but with the majority going to North America.²²

Throughout the over two-century history of emigration, there appeared four major waves of the Taishan exodus: (1) the 1848 discovery of gold in California; (2) in 1865 the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad; (3) the 1943 repeal of the Chinese exclusion acts; and (4) after 1979, when the Sino-US relationship was renormalized and the Chinese government loosened its policies regarding emigration.²³

The majority of the Chinese in Chicago, especially the earlier immigrants, were from Taishan, for example, such prominent merchants as Moy Dong Chow, Chin F. Foin, and Hong Sling. To better understand the transnational connections between Chinese Chicago and the Chinese homeland, it is necessary to investigate local gazetteers. The present study has utilized abundant information found in *Taishan xian huaqiao zhi* (Taishan county gazetteer on overseas Chinese) compiled in 1992, and other gazetteers of the region.

Transnational Ties

While living far away, overseas Chinese generally maintain strong ties with their homeland by sending remittances, visiting home, and investing in homeland enterprises. The Taishanese demonstrate a very strong trend of such activities. According to Wuyi University scholar Zhang Guoxiong’s study, among the over two million overseas Chinese from the five counties of Xinhui, Taishan, Enping, Kaiping, and Heshan, there are 1.55 million in the Americas, among whom 1.32 million are in the US and Canada. Most Chinese in North America are medium- or small-scale entrepreneurs. However, their remittances well surpass those from Southeast Asian overseas Chinese. In the 1930s, remittances from North America consisted of one-half or one-third of the total of overseas Chinese remittances. In 1930 alone, remittances from overseas Taishanese were \$30 million, about

²² *Taishan xian huaqiao zhi* [Taishan county gazetteer on overseas Chinese from Taishan] (1992), 5–6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 6.

one-third of the total of \$95 million.²⁴

Huang Jing, a researcher at the Chinese Institute for Overseas Chinese History Studies, concludes that there have been three periods of overseas Chinese remittances since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. In the first period, 1950–60, remittances averaged about \$100,000,000 annually. They made a rapid rise in the second period, 1970–80, with an annual increase of 16 percent reaching an all time high of \$696,000,000 in 1979. However, in the third period, from 1980 onward, there had been an annual decrease. For instance, there was only \$179,890,000 in 1985, a 74 percent decrease from 1979, and a 43 percent decrease from the previous year of 1984. The reasons for the decline are multifaceted. As the standard of living in the home villages of overseas Chinese rose, there had been less dependence on remittances from overseas. Since the 1980s, more overseas Chinese were visiting home villages in person, and in their return trips they brought cash and gifts in place of the usual remittances. Meanwhile, the overseas Chinese began directly investing in enterprises in their home villages.²⁵

According to data on overseas Chinese-owned enterprises, by 2007 there have been about 140,000 enterprises in China owned by overseas Chinese, consisting of 50 percent of the total 280,000 businesses in China. Qinghua University scholar Long Denggao's study estimates that 60 to 80 percent of private enterprises owned by overseas Chinese were concentrated in Guangdong province before 1991.²⁶

Consistent with the above evidence, Jinan University historians Wang Yuanlin and Deng Minrui, in their study of the influence of overseas Chinese on the homeland, observe that a great change of life-styles and customs occurred in Guangdong *qiaoxiang* (or, the ancestral villages of overseas Chinese) in three aspects: a westernization of attitudes toward what is considered a necessity, a new trend in emigrating abroad, and the notion of “civilized behavior” (that is,

²⁴ Zhang Guoxiong, “Cong YueMin qiaoxiang kaocha erzhanqian haiwai huaqiao huaren de qunti tezheng—yi Wuyi qiaoxiang wei li” [A study of the collective character of overseas Chinese in Guangdong-Fujian qiaoxiang before World War II—with special reference to wuyi qiaoxiang], *Huaqiao huaren lishi yanjiu* [Overseas Chinese history studies], (2003): 26–34.

²⁵ Huang Jing, “Chaoshan yu Zhongguo chuantong qiaoxiang: yige guanyu yimin jingyan de leixingxue fenxi” [Chaoshan region and other traditional qiaoxiang in China: a typology analysis of the migration experience], *Huaqiao huaren lishi yanjiu* [Overseas Chinese history studies] no.1 (2003): 24–36.

²⁶ Long Denggao, Zhao Liang, and Ding Jian, “Haiwai huashang touzi Zhongguo dalu—jieduanxing tezheng yu fazhang qushi” [Investment of overseas Chinese in the mainland of China: features and trends], *Huaqiao huaren lishi yanjiu* [Overseas Chinese history studies] no. 2 (2008): 10–17.

Westernized habits) as fashionable.²⁷

While the overseas Chinese remittances have afforded relatives in the homeland a better life and a more Westernized outlook, it also encouraged dependence on this cash and thus eroded traditional values among villagers at home. This phenomenon had already appeared in the last decades of the 19th century. Madeline Hsu's book *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of China* comments on the disturbing imbalance between the ability of Taishan residents to spend and their willingness to work.²⁸

Anthropologist Andrea Louie's study also found a similar pattern. In the summer of 1992, Louie participated in a program called "In Search of Roots," during which young Chinese-American participants visited their ancestral villages in Guangdong. Louie visited her maternal grandmother's ancestral village in Duanfen, Taishan, and her paternal ancestral village in Heshan county, one of those Five Counties (*wuyi*), where many Chinese emigrants came from. She observed the impact of Chinese emigration in her subsequent book, *Chineseness across Borders: Renegotiating Identities in China and the United States*: "[In Taishan] many with relatives abroad (usually in the United States) place their hopes on eventually going abroad themselves, or on marrying a potential emigrant or US citizen."²⁹

Historizing Chicago Chinatown: Moy Brothers and the Early Community

The anti-Chinese movement, driven by the economic depression on the US West Coast in the last decades of the 19th century, contributed to the redistribution of Chinese immigrants in the United States. Chicago, being centrally located and a center of land, water, rail (and later air) transport, became a hub for Chinese immigrants.

Among the Chinese laborers moving out of the West Coast was a man named Moy Dong Chow 梅宗周 (a.k.a. Hip Lung). He was particularly interested in the Windy City. A member of the Moy extended family of Taishan county, Moy

²⁷ Wang Yuanlin and Deng Minrui, "Jindai Guangdong qiaoxiang shenghuo fangshi yu shehui fengsu de bianhua: yi Chaoshan he Wuyi weili" [The change of lifestyle and customs in qiaoxiang in modern times: with special reference to Chaoshan and Wuyi], *Huaqiao huaren lishi yanjiu* [Overseas Chinese history studies] no. 4 (2005): 56–62.

²⁸ Madeline Y. Hue, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882–1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 41.

²⁹ Andrea Louie, *Chineseness across Borders: Renegotiating Identities in China and the United States* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004), 158.

Dong Chow was known among his countrymen for stubbornness, resourcefulness, and shrewdness. The rare photos of him show a man with great presence, with a stern face revealing determination.³⁰ In the mid-1870s, Moy Dong Chow arrived in Chicago, and his two younger brothers, Moy Dong Hoy 梅宗凱 (a.k.a. Sam Moy) and Moy Dong Yee 梅宗瑀 followed soon afterwards.

Encouraged by the accommodating reception in Chicago, in 1878 Moy Dong Chow wrote to his countrymen in San Francisco to come.³¹ As a result, by 1880 there were a hundred Chinese in the city. Moy Dong Chow also continuously sent for his family members from the homeland. By 1885, forty members of the extended Moy family from his native village were living in Chicago. By the end of 1890, there were more than 500 on South Clark Street, the first Chinatown in Chicago.³² Laundries, grocery stores, and restaurants constituted the business core. Two Chinese laundries in 1870 in the Loop (Chicago's major downtown business district coinciding with the old cable car service), plus a few businesses and a Chinese church in the mid-1870s provided the early structure of Chinatown in Chicago.



Moy Dong Chow

Among Chinese businesses, the laundry seemed easiest to operate, as it required limited skill and very little capital—basically a tub, scrub board, soap, iron, and an

³⁰ Chinese American Museum of Chicago.

³¹ Tin-Chin Fan, "Chinese Residents in Chicago" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1926), 14.

³² Ibid.

ironing board. Chinese laundrymen could canvas a neighborhood for a low-rent location, and open his business. As a result, Chinese hand laundries developed rapidly. In 1874, eighteen were in operation, of which fifteen were in the Loop (around Madison and Roosevelt), two on the Near West Side, and one on Near South Side. Less than a decade later, in 1883, Chinese laundries grew tenfold to 198. While more than half, 107, were still concentrated in the Loop, others were scattered across the city. In 1893, the number of Chinese laundries slightly decreased to 190, but were even more widely spread around than in the prior decade.³³ This geographical dispersion of Chinese laundries in Chicago resembled the pattern of other American major cities.³⁴

Related to the development of the Chinese laundry, the Chinese population in Chicago grew rapidly. Within two decades, it had increased to nearly 600 according to the US Census, but by the local media's estimate it was 2,000 (see Table 1).³⁵ On weekends, the Chinese would congregate in the South Clark

Table 1 Chinese Population in Chicago, 1870–2010

Year	Number	Increase
1870	1	0
1880	172	171
1890	584	412
1900	1,179	595
1910	1,778	599
1920	2,353	575
1930	2,757	404
1940	2,018	-739
1950	3,334	1,316
1960	5,082	1,748
1970	9,357	4,275
1980	13,638	4,281
1990	22,295	8,657
2000*	34,370	2,075
2009*	43,227	8,857

Note: *The figure does not include Taiwanese.

Source: 1870–2000 figures are from US Censuses. 2009 figure is from US Census Bureau, 2009 American Community Survey.

³³ Paul C. P. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation* ed. John Kuo Wei Tchen (New York: New York University Press, 1987), 28–30.

³⁴ See for example, Huping Ling, *Chinese St. Louis: From Enclave to Cultural Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 36–37; Renqiu Yu, *To Save China, To Save Ourselves: The Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance of New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

³⁵ “Where Orient and Occident Meet,” *The Graphic*, Feb. 17, 1894, 131.

Street area to meet kinsmen, eat authentic Chinese meals, play fan-tan (a Chinese gambling game), or smoke cigars or opium.

The growing presence of Chinese in Chicago caused discomfort and suspicion among white residents, who in particular were uncomfortable with interactions between Chinese males and white females that occurred at the missions where Chinese male laborers, mostly laundrymen, were taught English by white female teachers. Unlike the violent anti-Chinese outbreaks that occurred in New York, Boston, and Milwaukee at the turn of the century, suspicions toward the Chinese in Chicago took a different form—economic sanction.³⁶ In 1905, a movement to boycott American goods occurred in China to protest the ill-treatment of Chinese immigrants in California. Agitated by this boycott, white property owners in the Loop raised rents drastically to drive out the Chinese. In the early 1910s, the rent for medium-sized Chinese grocery stores in the South Clark Street area, such as Quong Yuan Chong Kee and Company, was \$225 a month, while for the same space on West 22nd Street on the South side, rent ranged from \$125 to \$190 a month.³⁷ Thus, by 1910, about half of the Chinese population was forced to move from Clark Street into the area immediately south of the Loop.³⁸ In February 1912, On Leong, the dominant community organization consisting of Chinese merchants and laborers, and the businesses associated with On Leong moved from Clark Street to 22nd Street and Wentworth and Cermak, and the area was immediately proclaimed as the “New Chinatown.” While economic pressure seems to have served as the chief force driving the Chinese out, writers have also speculated about other things, such as internal rivalry between the On Leong Tong and Hip Sing Tong, and the construction of a new federal building in the South Clark area.³⁹

³⁶ For anti-Chinese violence in New York, Boston, and Milwaukee, see respectively Mary Ting Yi Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); K. Scott Wong, “The Eagle Seeks a Helpless Quarry”: Chinatown, the Police, and the Press, The 1903 Boston Chinatown Raid Revisited,” *Amerasia Journal*, 22, no. 3 (1996): 81–103; Victor Jew, “Broken Windows: Anti-Chinese Violence and Interracial Sexuality in 19th Century Milwaukee,” in *Asian Pacific American Genders and Sexualities* ed. Thomas K. Nakayama, (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona State University, 1999), 29–51.

³⁷ Testimony of Lim Yee, Dec. 5, 1913, CCCF, file 2005/183, Chinese Exclusion Case Files (or Chicago Chinese Case Files) for District No. 9, Chicago, 1898–1940; Chicago District Office, “Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service,” RG 85, National Archives, Great Lakes Region, Chicago, Illinois; testimony of Au Tat, Jun. 5, 1924, CCCF, file 2005/1608.

³⁸ Fan, 15.

³⁹ Susan Lee Moy, “The Chinese in Chicago: The First One Hundred Years, 1870–1970” (Master’s thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1978), 43; Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change, Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900–1936* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 212.

The new Chinatown on 22nd Street, from Clark to Princeton Avenue, was probably one of the city's dirtiest spots in 1912. But the Chinese built their commercial and residential community there, sheltering a third or more of the over 2,000 Chinese in the city during the first decades of the 20th century. Following two decades of growth, by the 1930s, Chicago Chinatown was established as a distinctive and sizeable Chinese American urban community. Its development was consistent with the city's overall growth, as Chicago became America's "second city" after New York, and the largest city in the developing West.⁴⁰

Theorizing Chicago Chinatown: A Vital Link in Transnational Migration and Regional Development

In the "second city," stockyards and factories absorbed the bulk of the working force. In 1919, more than 70 percent of the 400,000 wage earners in Chicago manufactures were employed in companies with at least 100 employees, and nearly a third of them labored in factories employing over 1,000. A typical worker in Chicago in the 1920s was an industrial worker at one of the giant employers, such as Armour and Swift in the stockyards, Inland, Youngstown, Republic, Wisconsin, and US Steel; also there was the Pullman Company, International Harvester, Western Electric's Hawthorne Works, and Hart, Schaffner and Marx, maker of men's clothing. Ethnic succession followed similar patterns in meatpacking and steel. The earliest workers came from Ireland, Germany, and a little later from Bohemia. As skilled work declined and sources of immigrant workers altered, Poles, Lithuanians, and Slovaks, along with blacks, filled the ranks of the by then overwhelmingly unskilled and semiskilled.⁴¹ However, by the mid-1920s only one ethnic group from Asia, namely Filipinos, constituted a large number in the United States Post Service and in Pullman.⁴²

Unlike such immigrant workers as mentioned, the Chinese in Chicago did not join large work forces run by corporate employers, but rather focused on the small-business ethnic niches, namely the groceries, restaurants, and laundries that had prevailed in other parts of the country with Chinese population concentrations.

⁴⁰ Thekla Ellen Joiner, *Sin in the City: Chicago and Revivalism, 1880–1920* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 21.

⁴¹ Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 13, 28.

⁴² Barbara M. Posadas, "Ethnic Life and Labor in Chicago's Pre-World-War-II Filipino Community," in *Labor Divided: Race and Ethnicity in United States Labor Struggles, 1835–1960* eds., Robert Asher and Charles Stephenson (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), 63–80.

Several characteristics of Chinese businesses in Chicago deserve attention. First, the grocery businesses in Chicago were well connected with transnational ethnic networks that supplied not only the Chinese laundries and chop suey houses in the city, but also those in the nearby areas and neighboring states, consequently making the Chicago Chinatown a supplier of wholesale grocery and other merchandise in the greater Midwest region. In addition, the city's transportation hubs allowed Chinese to move between Chicago and other cities, making Chicago a center for the Chinese transnational migration and regional socioeconomic development. Second, the city's metropolitan atmosphere cultivated ambition, a sense of modernity, and a taste for extravagance among the Chinese restaurateurs, who therefore helped create a trend in Chinese fine dining that emerged in the US at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Third, Chinese hand laundries in Chicago not only provided livelihoods for thousands of Chinese immigrants, but also served as a vast field of research for Paul C. P. Siu's work on the Chinese laundryman, which is discussed below. Chinese laundries in Chicago and other large cities became prototypes for those in smaller cities and towns. Fourth, the Chinese businessmen in Chicago, from the Moy brothers to Chin F. Foin, were transnational in their business orientation and operation: they can be seen as models of early Chinese transnational migrants.

Wholesale Centers and Traveling Stores

Wentworth Avenue and West 22nd Street hosted most of the businesses and community organizations: 65 were on Wentworth Avenue, and 60 on West 22nd Street, out of a total of 156 Chinese establishments listed in the local Chinese directories in the 1930s.⁴³ The majority of these were grocery stores, retailers, and wholesalers of imported goods from China. The advertisement of the Chinese Trading Co., for example, announced such products as sesame oil, soy sauce, bamboo shoots, candies, dry foods, and cooking ingredients. Sam Lung Co., an old establishment in operation before 1900 in the old Chinatown area of South Clark Street, sold Chinese groceries, herbs, silk and other fabrics.⁴⁴

The larger and more prominent grocery stores (in general chronological order) included:

Hip Lung Yee Kee owned by the three Moy brothers at 2243 Wentworth Avenue;

Wing Chong Hai Company at 281 South Clark Street owned by Chin F. Foin;

Tai Wah and Company at 303 South Clark Street;

Quang Yuan Chong Kee and Company at 509 South Clark Street;

⁴³ *San Min Morning Paper*, 1933.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Chinese Trading Company at 2214 Archer Avenue; and Sam Lung and Company at 431 South Clark Street.

A close examination of some of the older and established firms in Chicago helps us understand the Chinese transnational grocery business in the various aspects of capital investment, partnership, organizational structure, dividends and salaries, daily operation, and business volume.

Transnational ethnic networks dominated much of the Chinese grocery businesses in Chicago. They were essential in raising capital for startup, for procuring merchandise, in the recruitment of employees, and in both wholesale and retail activities. From numerous immigrant testimonies, it is apparent that almost all Chinese business owners garnered funds via partnerships with kinsmen and friends, rather than obtaining loans from US banks, as the settled American society was used to doing. Typically, the large Chinese grocery stores and restaurants would have ten to thirty partners, each investing about \$1,000. The largest share-holder and organizer of the firm would normally serve as business manager.⁴⁵

Members of the major descent groups of Moys, Chins, and Lims benefited from kinship networking, as seen in the cases of Hip Lung Yee Kee and Company, Wing Chong Hai Company, Tai Wah and Company, and Quang Yuan Chong Kee and Company. The first mentioned, Hip Lung Yee Kee, or Hip Lung for short, was the oldest Chinese company in Chicago. It was started perhaps sometime before the 1870s by a Chinese immigrant whose name is now unknown. Moy Dong Chow bought it in the late 1870s and named it Hip Lung Yee Kee and Company. The store was moved to 323 South Clark Street in 1880 and again to 2243 Wentworth Avenue in 1912, when Chinatown was relocated to the South Side. It was known as Hip Lung Yee Kee in the 1930s. The three Moy brothers cleverly and strategically divided tasks among themselves. Moy Dong Chew, the most charismatic of the brothers and “the oldest Chinese in town,” handled the public relations, negotiating with the mainstream media and the Chinese community on behalf the Moys. Moy Dong Hoy, steady and calm, oversaw the operation of Hip Lung by serving as its manager since 1885. As a manager and one who could speak English fluently, Moy Dong Hoy often appeared at the Office of Immigration Inspector to testify for fellow partners of the company. Moy Dong Yee, handsome and shrewd, managed the transnational family business on the other side of the Pacific, traveling between Chicago, San Francisco, and Hong Kong.

In 1904, the Moys’ Hip Lung store had thirty-five partners, among whom, as might be expected, were nine Moys as active participants (Moy Dong Chow,

⁴⁵ See for example, testimony of Hong Siling, Dec. 2, 1913, CCCF, file 2005/182-E; testimony of Moy Dong Hoy, Apr. 11, 1906, CCCF, file 463.

Moy Dong Hoy, Moy Dong Yee, Moy Ben, Moy Lee, Moy Toy, Moy Quan, Moy Hen, and Moy Loy). Of the total of \$41,000 in capital, over \$10,000 was in stock. Moy Dong Chow and Moy Dong Hoy served as managers, while Moy Dong Yee served as assistant treasurer, earning \$40 a month besides his dividends. When Moy Dong Yee was in China, Moy Toon, a nephew of the Moy brothers, would serve as acting treasurer.⁴⁶ The above information provides important points. First, it confirms that the kinship business partnership was essential in the establishment and growth of business, in order to secure venture capital and capital for further development. Second, the capital investment and partnership fluctuated from time to time, but remained within the kinship network. Third, to be competitive, a large firm tended to be transnational in its business operation.

The Chinese sources further reveal that the Moys enjoyed the most extensive of transnational migration networks compared with other major Chinese clans in Chicago. The Chicago Moy Shi Kung Sow (梅氏公所 the Moy Family Association), founded in 1898 as the second Moy branch-association in North America (the first was founded in 1894 in New York), had the largest membership of all the family associations in Chicago. As a global organization, Moy Shi Kung Sow embodied a transnational network with connections and influences throughout North America and the world. The Chicago Moys emerged as the leaders of the Moy Family Association in America as early as the 1920s. The Association hosted the first national Moy Convention in 1927 and several successive national conventions that were held every three years.⁴⁷ The broad national and international connections no doubt helped the Chicago Moys build their early businesses and reinforced their economic power over time.

Transnational ethnic networking was also essential in the recruitment of employees. Chicago's Chinese business owners would send for family members, kinsmen, or fellow villagers, and the latter would work as paid or unpaid helpers in stores after arriving in the city. The major Chinese grocery stores in Chicago normally hired kinsmen. While the Moy brothers and members of the Moy group operated Hip Lung, the Chin descent-group established a rival firm, the Wing Chong Hai Company at 381 South Clark Street by the 1890s, which competed with the Hip Lung. Chin F. Foin, a wealthy and flamboyant Chinese merchant, served as assistant manager from 1895 to 1900 and became manager in 1900, overseeing twenty employees. In 1908 twelve Chin kinsmen partners (Chin F. Foin, Chin Yen Quai, Chin F. Toy, Chin See, Chin Hor, Chin Leng, Chin Wing Yuen, Chin Der, Chin Wing, Chin Fung, Chin Sun Cheong, and Chin Lee), jointly owned the firm and worked as employees as well. The store normally had

⁴⁶ Testimony of Moy Dong Hoy, Apr. 11, 1906, CCCF, file 463.

⁴⁷ *Meishi zongqin zupu* [The Moy family genealogy] (Taipei, 1991), 111–13.

\$25,000 worth of goods at any time and sold \$50,000 to \$60,000 worth of goods annually in the 1900s. In 1908 Chin F. Foin earned a monthly salary of \$120 in addition to dividends, while Chin Wing Yuen, a member of the firm since 1893 with a share of \$1,000, worked in the herb section preparing and packing medicine. He was paid \$60 a month and dividends.⁴⁸ Clearly, as in the case of the Moys' Hip Lung, Wing Chong Hai Company also largely depended on kinship network for financing and operating the business. The volume of sales of the two firms was comparable.

Tai Wah and Company was probably the third oldest Chinese grocery store in Chicago. Founded in 1896, it had about \$20,000 worth of goods in stock. Eleven partners, mostly Moy clan members, invested in the company, including Moy Sam (manager), Moy Lum You, Moy Mon, Lee Park, Moy Yee, Moy Hor, Moy Son, Moy Yoke, Moy Yee Wing, Moy Dung, and Moy Sue Hing. The salesmen were paid \$35 a month. The store hired experienced employees such as Moy Dung, who had worked in the New York grocery store Quong Yuen Sing prior to his employment at Tai Wah. Clearly, Tai Wah benefited from transnational ethnic networks, especially enabling it to recruit better employees. In addition, the network provided Chinese immigrants a certain job mobility. Finally, because it was large and reputable, Tai Wah also provided certain banking activities, such as loan transactions and managed savings for Chinese laborers.⁴⁹

The dual capital roles of large Chinese businesses, as merchandisers and banks, grew out of the practices of money-lending between Chinese kinsmen and friends, which was highly personal and informal. Chinese immigrants generally regarded making loans to kinsmen as a familial obligation and as a form of investment; in neither case was the loan properly documented, but was an informal and individual action taken by a lender solely based on the personal trustworthiness of the borrower. Inter-personal money lending often took place in Chinese grocery stores, where close kinsmen or distant "cousins" loaned money to each other when meeting at shopping, or otherwise socializing.⁵⁰ As "a Chinese custom," no receipt or other loan documentation was necessary for these kinsmen, and the trust in "cousins" was enough of a guarantee for the lender.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Testimony of Chin Wing, Oct. 25, 1907, CCCF, file 616; testimony of Chin F. Foin, Jan. 16, 1906, CCCF, file 440; testimony of Chin F. Foin, Jun. 25, 1908, CCCF, file 660.

⁴⁹ Testimonies of Moy Dung and Moy Sam, Sep. 18, 1907, CCCF, file 596.

⁵⁰ Numerous case files indicate personal loans to kinsmen or friends took place in major grocery stores in Chicago such as Wing Chong Hai at 281 South Clark Street, Sing Lung at 309 South Clark Street. See, for example, testimony of Chin Wing, Oct. 25, 1907, CCCF, file 616; testimony of Moy Gee Nie, Nov. 4, 1907, CCCF, file 617.

⁵¹ Numerous case files indicate that the personal loans to kinsmen or friends had no type of written record, because the lenders "trusted him" as a kinsman or as a good friend. See, for example, testimony of Lum Joy, Sep. 7, 1904, CCCF, file 360; testimony of Moy Kee Doy, Jul. 17, 1905, CCCF, file 365; and testimony of Chan Wing, Aug. 23, 1905, CCCF, file 369.

For instance, Chinese laundryman Lum Joy loaned his cousin Lem Quai \$600 in 1903 and another cousin Lem Dock \$600 in 1904. Lem Quai paid back \$115 and Lem Dock \$45 by the time Lum Joy was planning to go to China for a visit. Both loans took place at Quang Yuen Chong Kee, and the transactions were recorded only in the store's book, while the lender Lum Joy did not possess any documentation himself.⁵²

As such money lending occurred in stores more and more frequently, the more reputable stores began serving as banks or investment brokerages for clan members and customers, making the practice part of their overall operations. Many Chinese laborers deposited savings in the large firms, which would employ the money in their business operations, and therefore paid a percentage of their business profit as a return.

Moy Kee Doy is a case in point. Moy Kee Doy was born in China in 1871 and came to the United States in 1881. He moved to Chicago in 1902 and worked as a cook for officers at Ford Sheridan for two years. From that job he saved \$500, which he put into the hands of Moy Lung You, the bookkeeper of Tai Wah. Later he asked Moy Lung You to invest his \$500 savings in Wee Ying Lo restaurant when it opened in 1903. For this he received 7 percent dividends,⁵³ which, although moderate, was lucrative enough to attract investors among kinsmen and friends. In addition to money management for clan members and customers, some stores also handled sending remittances back to China.

Transnational ethnic networks were indispensable in procuring merchandise. Chinese grocery stores largely depended on imports from China, as they carried mostly dry goods, cooking ingredients, herbs, teas, and fabrics produced in China. Madeline Y. Hsu's study of Chinese transnationalism and migration notes that the need for Chinese groceries overseas generated the businesses called *jinshanzhuang*, or Gold Mountain firms, in Hong Kong to handle the demand for Chinese merchandise from overseas Chinese. *Jinshanzhuang* started as early as the 1850s with close links to Chinese businesses overseas that were mostly run by kinsmen or fellow villagers. On behalf of the overseas Chinese firms, *jinshanzhuang* managers took orders for goods and arranged shipment. By 1922, there were 116 *jinshanzhuang* in Hong Kong doing business with Chinese firms in North America. Due to the increasing demand, by 1930 the number of *jinshanzhuang* had more than doubled, to 290.⁵⁴ Merchandise such as tea, dry foods, cooking ingredients, herbs, fabrics, and porcelains were imported from Hong Kong by sea to San Francisco, and then by train to Chicago.

Chinese grocery stores in the US would also dispatch representatives to China

⁵² Testimony of Lum Toy, Sep. 7, 1904, CCCF, file 360.

⁵³ Testimony of Moy Kee Doy, Jul. 17, 1905, CCCF, file 365.

⁵⁴ Hsu, 41.

to purchase goods directly. Au Tat was one such businessman. Born in Ng Woo village, Kaiping district, Guangdong, in 1884, Au Tat came to the United States in 1911, first landing in San Francisco and then going by train to Chicago. In 1917, he joined Quong Hong Chong and Company at 219 West 22nd Street when it was established. With a total capital of \$12,000 and annual sales of \$80,000, the store sold Chinese groceries and Chinese medicine. Having \$1,000 interest, Au Tat served as the bookkeeper of the store, as well as purchaser in Hong Kong from time to time. In 1919, for instance, he went to Hong Kong on business and returned the following year. While in Hong Kong, he did business with Quong Loon Chung store at No. 1 Bonham Strand, from which he made orders for his company in Chicago.⁵⁵

Reflecting Chicago's unique economic position as a retail-wholesale center, Chinese grocery businesses there served as distributors of goods to other cities and small towns. All the above-mentioned large firms handled wholesale, but we might focus on Quang Yuan Chong Kee and Company as an example of wholesaler to small towns of the region. Opened in 1906, it was initially located in the old Chinatown at 509 South Clark Street, where the store paid \$225 a month for rent. In 1913, along with many other Chinese businesses there, it moved to the South Side and set up at 241 West 22nd Street with a monthly rent of \$190. By 1913, it had twenty-five partners mostly from the Lim clan with a total capitalization of \$30,000. Eight of the partners were working in the store (Lim Bon with \$2,500 interest, Lim Chong \$2,500, Lim Foo and Lim Shear Lett \$2,700, Lim Guy \$1,000, Lim Ying \$1,000, Toy Hung Chuck \$1,000 and Lim Yee \$700). Lim Shear Lett, who had the largest share, served as manager since opening, and Toy Hung Chuck as bookkeeper. Lim Yee was a sales clerk with a monthly salary of \$35, selling goods in the store but also traveling into the neighboring states of Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, and the smaller towns of Illinois. The cities he often visited were Battle Creek and Lansing in Michigan, as well as Indianapolis, Kokomo, Fort Wayne, and Peru in Indiana, where he took orders and collected debts from local grocers.⁵⁶

While the case of Quang Yuan Chong Kee and Company illustrates how the larger merchandisers served as wholesale centers to Chinese grocers in other cities in the US Midwest, Annie Leong's family history offers an example of how the smaller Midwestern grocers benefitted from their business connections with Chicago. Annie Leong's father came to St. Louis in 1920 and set up an eventually successful Chinese restaurant. Four years later, he brought his bride to St. Louis from his Chinese hometown of Xinhui, Guangdong. Annie Leong and her two older brothers were all born and raised in Hop Alley, the Chinatown of St. Louis.

⁵⁵ Testimony of Au Tat, Jun. 5, 1924, CCCF file 2005/1608.

⁵⁶ Testimonies of Lim Yee and Lim Shear Lett, Dec. 5, 1913, CCCF, file 2005/183.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Leong family owned a Chinese restaurant in downtown and a grocery store in Hop Alley. The Leongs ordered merchandise for their grocery store from wholesalers in Chicago, San Francisco, and New York. The children worked in the family grocery store after school.⁵⁷

The major Chinese grocery stores in Chicago generally had tight operational structures with clear job descriptions for each employee. Quong Hong Cheng and Company at 219 West 22nd Street, a medium-sized store selling Chinese groceries and drugs, had twelve business partners, each owning a share of \$1,000. The six active member-workers had the following work division: Jack Sam Tsai as manager, Au Tat bookkeeper, Dea Hawk Woon treasurer, Dea Mer Quong salesman, Yee Woi Wah Chinese druggist, and Dea Sung English correspondent and interpreter.⁵⁸

In addition to the regular grocery stores, there were also traveling grocery stores. The traveling stores emerged at the end of World War I, but developed rapidly in the 1920s and 1930s due to the increase of Chinese laundries and chop suey houses in the city and throughout the country. Paul C. P. Siu counted twenty-five trucks running daily in the 1930s, making delivery to Chinese laundries and chop suey houses throughout the town. They carried laundry supplies, meats, vegetables, cooking ingredients, imported and locally-produced food supplies, and household miscellanies. Some of the traveling stores sold primarily fresh meats, poultry, vegetables, and Chinese delicatessen foods. Others that were dispatched by the larger stores in Chinatown would carry a wider inventory including both food and laundry supplies. The laundryman usually did his food shopping on Sundays, the only day he took off from his business. He could carry back some dry foods, and even fresh foods, which may have lasted a few days. By the middle of the week, he was out of fresh food and would need to buy from the traveling stores. Steady demand generated a growing business of traveling stores.

A similar situation occurred in the Chinese chop suey houses. The chop suey house could buy dry ingredients from the Chinese wholesalers. But perishable foods would have to be purchased daily. Since the chop suey houses used considerable quantities of meats, poultry, fish, and vegetables, daily supplies were essential. As the largest Chinese urban center in the Midwest, Chicago witnessed a swelling number of Chinese chop suey houses in the 1910s (the majority of the 250 Chinese restaurants were chop suey houses). The trend spread across the country, usually via a first entrepreneur in a town who was then followed by others. We should note that a key to the success of traveling stores was kinship networks. If a traveling store keeper had a large circle of "cousins," either by lineage or by the geographical region of his ancestral village, he could make a decent living.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Annie Leong, interview by the author, Dec. 17, 1998.

⁵⁸ Testimony of Jack Sam Tsai, Jun. 5, 1924, CCCF, file 2005/1608.

⁵⁹ Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman*, 103–4.

Apart from their normal operations, Chinese grocery stores and other food service businesses also provided temporary or long-term lodging for Chinese laborers. For instance, Louie Yap, a hired laundryman, lived in the store of Sam Lung Company at 299 South Clark Street in 1906.⁶⁰ Gong Dock Death, a restaurant worker, lived in the Hong Kong Noodle Factory at 152 West 22nd Street in the 1910s and 1920s.⁶¹ Hip Lung, run by the Moy brothers, also served as a hotel.⁶²

The groceries constituted a significant part of Chinatown's businesses and the company members constituted 600, or one seventh, of the Chinese population in the 1920s. The multiple functions of Chinese grocery stores as wholesalers and retailers, banks, and hotels diversified and increased profit margins, and provided services within the transnational migrant networks. The stores' economic significance went far beyond Chinatown in Chicago, supplying merchandise to numerous smaller stores in cities and towns in the Midwest. A local Chinese marveling at the sales volume of the Chinese grocery stores tightly lining 22nd and South Clark Streets in the 1920s, said that their small appearance was "not a basis to estimate the volume of their business. Indeed they do much more business in these stores than can be estimated by an outsider."⁶³

Pioneers of Chinese Fine Dining

Chinese restaurants were the next most important facet of businesses in Chinatown. In 1926, there were about 250 Chinese restaurants located at "every convenient point along the principal thoroughfares."⁶⁴ By 1930, there were at least eleven established Chinese restaurants located in South Chinatown.⁶⁵

Situated directly in Chicago's transit hub, where foreign dignitaries, international celebrities, and rich businessmen often visited or stopped, Chinese restaurants in Chicago may have contributed to the very notion of upscale Chinese dining. Chinese restaurateurs with vision, a taste of elegance, and a sense of modernity had emerged in Chicago Chinatown.

Chin F. Foin was arguably the first modernizing Chinese restaurateur in Chicago. Born in Xinning county (changed to Taishan in 1914), Guangdong, in 1877, he came to the US in 1892 as a fifteen-year-old teenager, arriving in

⁶⁰ Testimony of Louie Yap, Jun. 26, 1906, CCCF, file 375.

⁶¹ Testimony of Gong Dock Death, Nov. 2, 1926, CCCF, file 2005/1613.

⁶² "Celebration of Chinese New Year's," *Chicago Tribune*, Jan. 30, 1892, 7:4.

⁶³ Fan, 39.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶⁵ *San Min Morning Paper*, 1933.

Chicago in 1895. Young and adaptable, he picked up English and American ways of life quickly. It was believed that he could speak German fluently, and lived a life rivaling that of wealthy and trendy American businessmen. He rode horseback, owned an automobile when they were first available for consumers, joined an exclusive social club, and had connections with both Chinese ministers and influential Chicagoans. When Kang Youwei, the eminent royalist court reformer, visited Chicago, Chin was Kang's escort.⁶⁶ By 1905, in addition to owning the grocery store Wing Chong Hai Company, he was the owner of King Yen Lo Restaurant at 277–279 South Clark Street, one of the finest Chinese-American restaurants in Chicago at the turn of the century. Located in the original old Chinatown at the corner of Clark and Van Buren Streets, the restaurant was furnished with sumptuous furniture made in China. The wooden tables had mother-of-pearl decorations topped with marble, a popular style of the time. It was patronized by visiting Chinese officials and other prominent Chinese, as well as the upper-class Chicago socialites.⁶⁷ As in his Chinese grocery business Wing Chong Hai Company, Chin F. Foin also had partners who invested in the restaurant, among whom kinsmen Ham Sam had invested \$1,300 and Hum Sing \$1,200.⁶⁸



Chin F. Foin and wife

⁶⁶ Testimony of Chin F. Foin, Jan. 16, 1906, CCCF, file 440; Paul Siu, "A Case of Assimilation," E.W.B. Papers, Box 136, Folder 7.

⁶⁷ Testimony of Ham Sam, Sep. 18, 1905, CCCF, file 374; Chuimei Ho and Son Lon Moy, *Chinese in Chicago, 1870–1945* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), 43.

⁶⁸ Testimony of Ham Sam, Sep. 18, 1905, CCCF, file 374.

Chin F. Foin later also invested in King Joy Lo Mandarin Restaurant, probably the most extravagant Chinese-American restaurant in Chicago established at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Also located in the Loop area at 277–279 South Clark Street and the corner of Van Buren Street, it adopted all the amenities that were in fashion in Western restaurants of the time.⁶⁹ It featured a live orchestra and a dance floor. It provided American customers with Western-style silverware, and the menu guaranteed diners their satisfaction, providing assistance to those unfamiliar with Chinese cuisine: “If you experience difficulty in making selection, the floor walker will cheerfully aid you.”⁷⁰ A 1930s photograph shows the restaurant decorated with elegant and lavish Chinese artwork. The spacious downstairs room was up to date, and was a pleasant and clean place. The wide staircase featured sumptuous columns. Carved banisters show Chinese workmanship, and the walls and ceiling were donned with carving and paintings of Chinese themes. The lavish design was unmatched by even present-day Chinese restaurants in the US.⁷¹ These efforts reveal Chin F. Foin as an ambitious and visionary businessman who aspired to create a unique experience for his customers.

Another upscale venue, Guey Sam Restaurant, began operation in 1901. It was first located in the South Clark Street area, and in the 1930s, as others had, it moved into South Chinatown, located at 2205 Wentworth Avenue, on the second floor, at the corner of Cermak Road.⁷² A postcard photo of the 1920s shows an interior with modernized décor and Western style round tables covered with starched table cloths and napkins. The spacious restaurant was air-conditioned and could hold more than a hundred guests. The restaurant changed hands in 1950 while keeping the same name. Its Chinaware was custom-made with the restaurant logo by Shenan Company in New Castle, Pennsylvania.⁷³ Similarly, Hoe Sai Gai Restaurant at 85 West Randolph Street in the Loop was also decorated in fashionable Art Deco style of the 1930s that distinguished it from other Chinese restaurants.⁷⁴

Like Chin F. Foin, the Moy brothers also invested in and operated Chinese restaurants. Moy Dong Hoy was the primary shareholder and manager of Wee Ying Lo and Song Ying Lo restaurants. Opened in 1903 and located at 174 South Clark Street, Wee Ying Lo had \$30,000 in capital investment.⁷⁵ With a success in Wee Ying Lo, Moy Dong Hoy and his partners opened a branch restaurant,

⁶⁹ Testimonies of Hum Sing and Hum Sam, Sep. 16, 1905, CCCF, file 374.

⁷⁰ Ho and Moy, 42.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷² *San Min Morning Paper*, 1933.

⁷³ Ho and Moy, 46.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁷⁵ Testimony of Ah Song, Aug. 16, 1906, CCCF, file 405.

Song Ying Lo, in the same year with \$40,000 capital. The two restaurants jointly had twenty-five partners with a total of \$70,000 invested. The cooks were paid \$55 to \$60 a month.⁷⁶ Although there is no evidence about the appearance of the restaurants, the capital investment suggests décor and furnishings comparable to those of their rivals.

Tom Lok was another visionary Chinese restaurateur. Born in Canton in 1868, Tom Lok came to the United States in 1881, landing in San Francisco as a thirteen-year-old, possibly a “son” of a Chinese merchant. Ten years later, he went to New York to learn the restaurant business and came to Chicago at the turn of the century. He had been interested in a property at 349 South Clark Street, where an Italian restaurant owned by Tom Cincho was in operation. With Tom Cincho’s death in 1916, Tom Lok bought the business from Cincho’s widow and heirs at \$15,000 and converted it into a large Chinese chop suey restaurant with a seating capacity of 200. Unlike other large Chinese restaurant owners who accumulated capital from kinsmen and landsmen, Tom Lok was the sole proprietor of the restaurant. In 1923, the volume of business was \$100,000, of which \$3,000 was Tom Lok’s net profit. He employed fifteen people: seven cooks and six waiters; but in addition two white men worked closely with the company. One was Charles F. Hille, an attorney at 109 North Dearborn Street, who came to the restaurant once a month, and the other was H. L. Henson, a salesman for a wholesale grocer and rice supplier at 251 East Grant Avenue, who visited once a week to take orders and collect debts. In 1924, eight years after he bought the business, Tom Lok estimated that the total worth had more than doubled, now at \$40,000.⁷⁷

Chicago’s large Chinese restaurants at the turn of the century were not only extravagant in appearance, but also had sizeable seating capacity, indicating the growing demand for Chinese food in the area. Golden Pheasant Inn restaurant at 72 West Madison Street, opened in 1916, was reportedly the largest Chinese restaurant in Chicago in the 1920s. It had a capitalization of \$75,000 from thirty shareholders, each receiving 10 percent dividends, twice as much as the dividends given by smaller Chinese restaurants. With 175 tables and 75 employees, even today it would have been one of the largest anywhere. The high volume of diners and large number of employees demanded effective management and well-defined responsibilities. Eng Gow, president of the company and general manager, oversaw the operation and dealt with procurement of supplies from H. L. Henson, mentioned above. Ng Gar Chung, a shareholder at the \$1,250 level, was first hired in 1917 as a checker, virtually a

⁷⁶ Testimony of Moy Sam, Aug. 16, 1906, CCCF, file 405.

⁷⁷ Testimonies of Tom Lok, Charles F. Hille, and H. L. Henson, Jul. 1, 1924, CCCF, file 2005/1614.

kitchen manager, whose primary responsibility was to make sure the items on the order matched the food put on the trays before being carried out by the waiters. A year and half later, Ng Gar Chung was promoted to the position of dining room manager, making a monthly salary of \$75.⁷⁸ Ng Gar Chung's promotion suggests the importance of management in the restaurant's operation.

While the Chinese restaurants in Chinatown offered relatively authentic Chinese food to largely a Chinese clientele, those outside Chinatown seemed to have served relatively more non-Chinese diners with mixed menus, including such dishes as sirloin steak and Americanized Chinese dishes such as chop suey (fried rice with meats and vegetables) and chow mein (fried noodle with meats and vegetables). A restaurant guide datable to around the 1930s lists restaurants in alphabetic order, providing a good idea of the cultural mix of this cosmopolitan city at the time, among which were:

Bamboo Inn at 11 North Clark Street with a specialty in Cantonese food, e.g., "AA" Club Sirloin Steak (\$3.00), Fried Chicken and Bacon (\$1.50), along with Beef Chop Suey or Chow Mein (\$1.60), and Chicken Chow Mein (\$2.00);

Hoe Sai Gai at 75-85 Randolph Street, with its Egg Rolls (\$0.85), Broiled Filet Mignon (\$2.85), Hon Su Gai (Chicken Fritters and Chinese Vegetables) (\$1.85), and Fried Half Chicken, Club Style (\$1.45); and

Nankin Restaurant at 230 North Dearborn Street, featuring Cantonese food: Beef Rice (\$1.35), Chicken Subgum Chow Mein (Nankin Special) (\$1.65) and Fried Tender Half Chicken, disjointed (\$1.65).⁷⁹

The above cases illustrate the fast growth and economic significance of Chinese restaurants in Chicago during the last decades of the 19th century and first decades of the 20th century. The annual business volume of \$30,000 for each small restaurant and \$100,000 or more for a large restaurant would have amounted to about \$1.6 million for the total annual business value of all 250 Chinese restaurants in town. (This would be about \$310 million in 2000s dollars.) With such financial capacity, it is no wonder that the prominent restaurateurs in Chicago could make their establishments fashionable and even extravagant.

Paul Siu's Laundryman and Beyond

Like grocery and restaurant businesses, laundering was a niche occupation for

⁷⁸ Testimony of Eng Gow, Oct. 8, 1920, CCCF, file 2005/763.

⁷⁹ Chinese American Museum of Chicago.

Chinese in Chicago, and the business has been meticulously documented in Paul C. P. Siu's study, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation*, a dissertation that took Siu 25 years to complete and finally published in 1987, a year after Siu's death. He investigated all the facets of the workings of a Chinese laundryman. This empirical study provides invaluable details and vivid sources on Chinese laundrymen. Upon its publication, it appeared that nothing more could be done on the topic, but my research on the INS immigration records and *Ernest Watson Burgess Papers* containing some of Siu's essays for classes and interview notes, and other primary sources, however, has indicated otherwise.

While Siu's study of Chinese laundrymen in Chicago has been recognized as significant, it did not utilize the abundant sources from the Immigration and Naturalization Service records. Those records concerning Chicago Chinese Case Files from 1898–1940 contain over 6,000 files. Early files often document alleged violations of Chinese exclusion laws. Later files, especially after 1920, refer mainly to applications for return certificates or for student status. These case files provide further information to supplement Siu's study, especially on capital investment, business volume, and wages and profits.

The following, culled from the INS records, provides a profile of a laundryman's life in Chicago at the turn of the century. Many laundrymen started businesses with loans from friends or kinsmen, or took over a laundry business from a friend or kinsman by owing the capital as repayable to the former owner. Generally, a one-man laundry was worth \$550 and could make \$200 monthly, and a two-man laundry would double the value of the laundry and its business. For instance, Moy Lun borrowed \$550 in 1907 from his cousin Moy Gee Nie to invest in a laundry on Cottage Grove Avenue.⁸⁰ Chin Wing and Chin Teng jointly owned a laundry at 3223 Cottage Grove Avenue in 1906. The laundry was worth \$1,100 and the weekly business was about \$110. They paid a monthly rent of \$32.50 for the laundry. In 1907, Chin Wing turned over his half, worth \$550, to his friend Chin Show, who subsequently considered it a \$550 loan.⁸¹

Mark Do Wea and Chan Wing provide good examples of laundry operations. Mark Do Wea was born in China in 1860 and was running a laundry at 5631 Wentworth Avenue in the 1900s. His laundry worth \$500 was equipped with tubs, irons, and a gas ironing machine for collars, cuffs, and shirts. The weekly volume averaged about \$50.⁸² Similarly, Chan Wing started his laundry on 63rd Street in 1900 with \$500 capital. Three years later Charlie Chin joined the laundry, in charge of bookkeeping. When the laundry closed at night, Charlie Chin accounted the day's money and reported same to Chan Wing on a weekly

⁸⁰ Testimony of Moy Gee Nie, Nov. 4, 1907, CCCF, file 617.

⁸¹ Testimonies of Chin Wing and Chin Show, Oct. 25, 1907, CCCF, file 616.

⁸² Testimony of Mark Do Wea, Aug. 9, 1905, CCCF, file 367.

or bi-weekly basis. In 1905 when Chan Wing was planning to visit China, he sold the business to Chin Leung Dum for \$1,380.⁸³

While the owners of one-man or two-man small laundries worked in their laundries as laborers, the larger laundry owners hired their workers. For instance, Goon Pon Sing bought a laundry at 105 Lake Street, Oak Park, a suburb of Chicago, from Moy Chong in 1904 at the price of \$1,400. Goon Pon Sing only came to the laundry every Saturday to pay wages to each of the four laundrymen working for him: Goon Toon \$17, Yik Loon \$13, Fook Seu \$14, and Goon Dai \$14. He also had a bookkeeper, Goon Toon Pak, to keep accounts and to pay all other expenses. He took about \$120 to \$140 worth of business each week, from which he drew \$30 profit. He also owned a horse-drawn wagon and paid \$3 to \$4 a week for stabling.⁸⁴

Laundry earnings were meager, about \$50 a month, or twenty percent of normal business volumes in the 1900s.⁸⁵ With a frugal life style, however, laundrymen could save about \$1,000 after five years of toil. For example, Louis Fook came to the United States in 1879. By 1906, he saved \$1,000 from his laundry at 299 South Clark Street, which he owned for five years.⁸⁶ Lum Joy was born in China in 1864 and came to the United States in 1881. In 1905 he was a laundryman in Chicago making \$55 a month on average. He was able to save up to more than \$1,000 and loaned his savings to two of his cousins.⁸⁷ Moy Len could also save \$1,000 from his laundry at 2036 West North Avenue and deposited it at the Great Lakes Trust Company, arguably the only mainstream Chicago bank that served Chinese immigrants at the time.⁸⁸ The more enterprising laundrymen would invest their savings in Chinese restaurants for profit. In 1903, for instance, Hum Sing, a laundryman, invested savings of \$1,200 in King Yen Lo Restaurant and received dividends.⁸⁹

Not all laundrymen, however, could put away savings based on such meager earnings. Moy Dun owned half of the laundry at 307 East 43rd Street in 1907, but only earned enough to sustain himself. When his family in China was about to build a house and needed money, he had to borrow \$500 from a friend in order to remit construction funds to China.⁹⁰

Chinese laundry businesses were not only a significant means to sustain immigrant Chinese, but the ownership of a laundry also served as a base for

⁸³ Testimony of Chan Wing, Aug. 23, 1905, CCCF, file 369.

⁸⁴ Testimony of Goon Pon Sing, Oct. 17, 1907, CCCF, file 598.

⁸⁵ Testimony of Kong Choon, Nov. 7, 1913, CCCF, file 2005/171.

⁸⁶ Testimony of Louis Fook, Jun. 26, 1906, CCCF, file 375.

⁸⁷ Testimony of Lum Toy, Sep. 7, 1904, CCCF, file 360.

⁸⁸ Testimony of Moy Len, Jul. 16, 1920, CCCF, file 2005/719.

⁸⁹ Testimony of Hum Sing, Sep. 18, 1905, CCCF, file 374.

⁹⁰ Testimony of Moy Gee Nie, Nov. 4, 1907, CCCF, file 617.

Chinese laborers' requests for return certificates in order to depart for China, since immigration regulations required a minimum of \$1,000 of property or debt as a bond to ensure the laborer's right to return.⁹¹ Numerous cases from INS records also indicate that Chinese laundrymen often turned over their businesses to kinsmen or friends, which became this sort of collateral for a right-to-return certificate.⁹²

The Chinese hand laundry served as an indispensable vehicle enabling the Chinese to move around in search of economic opportunities. As a portable occupation, laundry was clearly important in the domestic migration between Chicago and other cities. St. Louis was the second largest city in the Midwest and thus a destination for remigration undertaken by many Chinese laundrymen in Chicago; the reverse also occasionally occurred, as illustrated in the following stories.

Sam Wah Laundry in St. Louis was almost a replica of the Chinese laundry in Chicago described by Paul C. P. Siu. Sam Wah opened his laundry in 1887 at 329 Market Street. In 1922, the aging Sam Wah brought his two nephews, Gee Kee One (also known as Gee Sam Wah) and Gee Hong, from Canton to join him. The nephews arrived in San Francisco, where they learned the laundry business. Then they went to Chicago to open a laundry. Unaccustomed to the cold weather in Chicago, they came to St. Louis to join their uncle.⁹³ They first worked for their uncle in the laundry at 4381 Laclede Avenue, and later inherited the laundry after Sam Wah passed away. The brothers had operated the laundry under the same name with more or less the same techniques until it finally closed in 1986, upon the deaths of both proprietors.⁹⁴

Lam Lap Goey had been a St. Louis laundryman for some years before moving in 1901 to Chicago to look for new business, where at first he worked in a laundry to support himself. To start his own enterprise, he borrowed \$650 from Lam Chee Dai, a laundryman who became his friend since coming to Chicago.⁹⁵

Earnings for Transnational Families

The above examination of Chinese businesses in Chicago largely based on INS records provides first-hand information on various aspects of business operations.

⁹¹ Although the 1888 Scott Act nullified 20,000 reentry certificates, the applications during the 1900s in the INS' CCCF were recorded as for laborer's return certificates.

⁹² Testimony of Goon Pon Sing, Oct. 17, 1907, CCCF, file 598; Testimonies of Chin Wing and Chin Show, Oct. 25, 1907, CCCF, file 616.

⁹³ Papers Relating to the Campaign to Save Sam Wah Laundry. Correspondence, 1978–1986, 9 Folders, Eliot F. Porter Jr. Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.

⁹⁴ *Gould's St. Louis Directory, 1872–1952; Polk's St. Louis City Directory, 1955–1980.*

⁹⁵ Testimony of Lam Lap Goey, Nov. 7, 1905, CCCF, file 383.

Tin-Chiu Fan's empirical investigation offers further data on trade distribution and earnings of Chinese laborers.

In 1926, Tin-Chiu Fan, a doctoral student at the University of Chicago, surveyed the following population sets: 161 Chinese male adult students from schools in the area, 245 Chinese YMCA members, 1,215 Mon Sang Association members, and 3,001 members of the Chinese Association. The survey of the 245 Chinese YMCA members shows, in relation to the other sets, a slightly smaller percentage (84 percent) of those engaged in trade (merchants, dealers, and store helpers) and service (laundrymen, restaurant keepers, cooks, and waiters). The other three populations indicate that more than 90 percent belonged to such categories.⁹⁶

According to Fan's study, in 1926 the wage distribution of Chinese laborers ranged from a monthly \$160 for cooks, \$117 for laundrymen, \$100 for waiters, down to \$50 for store helpers. This is more or less consistent with the data from INS records.⁹⁷

Chinese laborers were not only able to sustain themselves from these meager wages, but also kept part of the income as savings. In some cases savings were deposited in banks, or lent to kinsmen, or, in one case, hidden in a trunk at the residence, but a substantial portion of savings was sent home to China.⁹⁸ In their testimonies, numerous Chinese immigrants stated that they sent money to family in China. It is difficult to calculate the amount of these remittances since they were made in various forms, such as postal money orders, checks, and drafts. From 1903 to 1937, the estimated remittance from overseas Taishanese to China annually increased from 110 million to 517 million, in Chinese dollars.⁹⁹ In the 1920s and early 1930s, remittances from the United States to Taishan constituted one-tenth of all money sent to China from abroad.¹⁰⁰ The money remitted enabled families in China to purchase land, build houses, donate to charitable activities, and live slightly more westernized lifestyles.¹⁰¹

The construction of *diaolou*, or fortress buildings, and *yanglou*, or Western buildings, became common in villages of Taishan county in the 1920s and 1930s, when the region was plagued by social instability and turmoil caused by local bandits and natural disasters. The frequent bandit attacks coupled with summer floods in Taishan, made Chinese immigrants in the US concerned about the safety of their families. To ease their worries, the overseas Chinese transmitted money to construct these fortress-like buildings for sheer protection. Living

⁹⁶ Fan, 33–37.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 41.

⁹⁸ Testimony of Kong Choon, Nov. 7, 1913, CCCF, file 2005/171.

⁹⁹ Hsu, 41.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 40.

¹⁰¹ *Taishan xianzhi* [Taishan county gazetteer], 8, 6b, as cited in Hsu, 41.

abroad for an extensive period of time, the Chinese immigrants had been influenced by Western architecture to some extent, and they often designed the buildings themselves, combining Western architectural styles with Chinese practices; they would send blueprints home along with remittances.¹⁰²

The *Meijia dayuan*, or “Moy compound,” serves as a typical example of Western buildings in Tingjiang, Taishan county. The remittances from the Moys in Chicago and other places in the 1920s and 1930s were responsible for the construction of it, which was completed in 1932.¹⁰³ It had more than 100 Western style buildings erected over eighty *mu* (or fourteen acres) of land. The buildings were two or three stories of uniform height, neatly arranged and forming a huge rectangular courtyard that served as a local market.¹⁰⁴



Meijia dayuan (Moy compound)

Remittances from overseas Chinese were not only used for constructing fortress buildings in home villages, but were also allocated toward the numerous elementary and secondary schools for the general public in Taishan county since the beginning of the 20th century. By the end of Qing dynasty, Western influence had penetrated to most parts of China, and the cultural current in China was dominated by ideas and experiments that emphasized Western learning.

¹⁰² *Xinning Magazine*, no. 4 (2006): 14–15.

¹⁰³ Testimony of Moy Gee Nie, Nov. 4, 1907, CCCF, file 617.

¹⁰⁴ Author's field research, Jul. 10, 2007.

Consequently western schools were established throughout China. Taishan, as a premier center for overseas Chinese, witnessed a surge of new elementary and secondary schools funded by donations from Chinese emigrants. From 1907, when the first Western elementary school was founded, to 1919, eighteen local schools were established. The decade of the 1920s saw a rapid increase in new schools: forty-two were built, probably due to the economic prosperity in the United States and the abundant funds from overseas Chinese. Eighteen new schools were added during the 1930s and seventeen in the 1940s.¹⁰⁵

Remittances to China did not just benefit those who back home in China, but also provided psychological satisfaction for those abroad. Many large-sized and grandiose buildings were the equals of multimillion-dollar mansions of the present day. They overtly displayed the wealth a successful Chinese emigrant possessed. That Chinese emigrants were willing to invest substantial money in China's real estate suggests the importance of the homeland in their minds. To many, the ultimate goal and highest form of success was to return home rich, or to be recognized, honored, or envied by fellow villagers through their monetary power. Such mentality was instilled and deeply rooted in the minds of most Chinese emigrants. It has remained a strong motive for Chinese abroad, in maintaining continuous social, economic, and emotional ties with the homeland.

Conclusion

Most early Chinese immigrants in Chicago were Taishanese from China's Guangdong province, a people with a strong tradition of migration and emigration. The strong patrilineal tradition in South China dictated that the Taishanese immigrants in Chicago, and in other US places and around the world, were bound to their home villages through social, economic, and emotional ties. These transnational connections benefitted both ends of the migration: the immigrant community obtained continuing human resources and emotional support from their homeland; the native villages received continued remittances and investments from the overseas Chinese. The mutually beneficial nature of the connections would logically make transnationalism a viable and enduring feature of the Chinese community in Chicago, as well as in other Chinese communities in the US and around the world.

Chinese niche businesses were not merely menial and low-skill trades, as often imagined in conventional modern writings and other media; on the contrary, many of the ethnic Chinese businesses, especially the larger and more complex ones, were sophisticated transnational businesses created by men with vision,

¹⁰⁵ *Taishan xian huaqiao zhi* [The history of overseas Chinese from Taishan county], 120–27.

practicality, and long-term goals. These businesses had effectively utilized transnational business networks in raising capital to get started, in procurement of merchandise, recruitment of employees, and in business operations. The city's central location and its access to water, land, and rail transport enabled Chinese grocery businesses to become wholesalers to small grocers in the Midwest region. Its metropolitan atmosphere inspired experiments in Chinese fine dining. The Chinese laundries in Chicago also served as a prototype for those in other Midwestern cities and towns.

These unique features suggest that the ethnic Chinese community in Chicago, one that is still severely understudied to date, has been a vital link in the Chinese transnational migration network and a center of commerce and trade in the Midwest region of the US. The shrewd business sense, practicality, and ingenuity of Chinese entrepreneurs contributed not only to individual business successes, but also to the collective survival and sustenance of the Chinese communities in US cities as well as to their homeland cities and villages.

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