



## Chinese Chicago: Transnational Migration and Businesses, 1870s–1930s

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### Abstract

Employing the theoretical framework of transnationalism, this study closely examines how the transnational kinship networks played out in various aspects of the Chinese businesses in Chicago, through reconstructing the transnational Chinese businesses during the period from the 1870s to the 1930s. Utilizing primary sources in both English and Chinese, in particular the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) Chicago Chinese Case Files (CCCCF) and Chinese gazetteers, it also demonstrates how the Chinese community in Chicago served as a vital link of the transnational migration and business networks and a center of commerce and trade in the American Midwest during this period.

### Keywords

Transnational migration, Chinese ethnic business, Chinese immigration, Chicago

And each time I roam, Chicago is  
Calling me home, Chicago is  
One town that won't let you down  
It's my kind of town

— Frank Sinatra/Sammy Cahn/Jimmy van Heusen

### Introduction

Chicago is a city with promise. Situated in the heart of America and privileged with land, water, rail, and air transportation advantages and a vibrant multi-ethnic and multicultural population, the city has attracted thousands of immigrants from around the world since the mid-19th century. Canadians, Germans, British, Irish, Swedish, Norwegians, Scottish, Poles and Italians have poured into the city over time, making it a truly multiethnic community.

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For the Chinese who first arrived on the West Coast, Chicago offered a growing and attractive economic opportunity in the 1870s. Here, the Chinese established a small but vibrant community in the downtown Loop (the downtown business district coinciding with the old cable car service area). Chinese grocery stores, laundries, restaurants, and community associations sustained the residents of the early Chinatown. The anti-Chinese sentiments prevalent in the country, exemplified by the Chinese exclusion acts of the 1880s, affected the relations between the Chinese and the larger society. In the 1910s, downtown property owners raised rents making it difficult for Chinese businesses to survive, forcing the vast majority of the Chinese to move to the South Side of the city where properties were cheaper. On the South Side, the Chinese soon established a new Chinatown known as the South Chinatown today, which remains a major tourist attraction of the city. Since the 1970s, the influx of the ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia has revitalized the Argyle Street area on the North Side, which emerged as the North Chinatown. Meanwhile, the suburban Chinese communities have also been growing rapidly.

The existing scholarly works on Chinese in Chicago have offered meaningful interpretations on Chinese businesses, while the topic warrants further investigation. Tin-Chin Fan's thesis, "Chinese Residents in Chicago," though empirical in conducting surveys among several community organizations, provided limited narrative and little interpretation on Chinese business (Fan 1926). Paul C.P. Siu's dissertation, "The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Isolation," on the other hand, offers a heavy-weight theoretical framework of the Chinese laundryman as a "sojourner." His observation of Chinese laundrymen's "in-group tendency" is also one of the earlier studies on the Chinese ethnic kinship networks (Siu 1987: 296-97). Equally bold, Historian Adam McKeown's book, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change, Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900-1936* (2001), based on his dissertation and a comparative study of Chinese migration in three locales, also focuses on the kinship connections and migrant networks in Chicago's Chinatown (McKeown 2001: 1-6).<sup>2</sup> While Siu and McKeown contributed a theoretical framework in analyzing the Chinese in Chicago, neither zoomed in on the business operations using data from the INS records and the important sources from Chinese gazetteers, genealogies, local magazines, and government statistics.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In addition, Henry Yu's *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America*, and Mae M. Ngai's "Transnationalism and the Transformation of the 'Other,'" also offer valuable insights into Chinese in Chicago.

<sup>3</sup> Siu's work primarily utilized his field work among the city's Chinese laundries, while McKeown employed the INS records mainly in depicting the conflict between the major clans.

Building on the existing works, this study employs the theoretical framework of transnationalism, and closely examines how the transnational kinship networks played out in various aspects of the Chinese businesses in Chicago, through reconstructing the transnational Chinese businesses during the period of the 1870s and 1930s. Although “transnationalism” as a theoretical interpretation was conceived in the early 1990s, when a group of anthropologists coined the term to describe the cross-geographical, cross-national, and cross-cultural activities practiced by many immigrants,<sup>4</sup> evidence garnered in this research indicates that transnational migration is a much earlier phenomenon that has existed in Chinese businesses in Chicago since the 1870s, when transnational migration became a dominant factor within the Chinese businesses in the city. This study also demonstrates that the Chinese community in Chicago served as a vital link of the transnational migration, business networks and a center of commerce and trade in the Midwest during the period of 1870s and 1930s, when the ethnic Chinese economy in Chicago, like that in the country at large, experienced steady growth before it was hit by the Great Depression.

Using primary sources in both English and Chinese, in particular the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) Chicago Chinese Case Files (CCCCF), the Ernest Watson Burgess Papers (E.W.B. Papers), local newspapers, sources from the Chinese American Museum of Chicago, and Chinese gazetteers, genealogies, overseas Chinese magazines, and government statistics, this study provides new insights on the various aspects of the ethnic Chinese business operations in Chicago.

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<sup>4</sup> Noting that immigrants have lived lives across geographical borders and maintained close ties to home, some anthropologists employed the term “transnationalism” to describe such cross-national, cross-cultural phenomenon in the early 1990s, and a number of historians have endorsed the idea in their monographs. For work on transnationalism, see Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton, eds., *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered*, ix. For historical works with transnationalism approach, see, for example, Renqiu Yu, “Chinese American Contributions to the Educational Development of Toisan 1910-1940” in *Amerasia*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1983): 47-72, and *To Save China, to Save Ourselves*; Madeline Y. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882-1943*; Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco 1850-1943: A Trans-Pacific Community*; McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change, Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900-1936*; and Haiming Liu, *Transnational History of a Chinese Family: Immigrant Letters, Family Business, and Reverse Migration*.

### **Historicizing Chicago Chinatown: Moy Brothers and the Early Community**

The anti-Chinese movement, compounded by the economic depression on the West Coast in the last decades of the 19th century, contributed to the redistribution of the Chinese immigrant population in the United States. Centrally located and as a center of land, water, rail — and later air — transportations, Chicago had served as a hub for Chinese immigrants in North America.

Among the dispersed Chinese laborers, a man named Moy Dong Chow 梅宗周 (Mei Zongzhou) a.k.a. Hip Lung, was particularly interested in the Windy City, Chicago. As one who hailed from the Moy clan in Taishan County in the coastal province of Guangdong in China where most of the early Chinese immigrants in the Americas came from, Moy Dong Chow was known among his fellow countrymen for his stubbornness, resourcefulness, and shrewdness. The rare photos of Moy show him as a man with a prominent presence, and a stern face revealing determination (CAMOC). In the mid-1870s, Moy Dong Chow arrived in Chicago, and his two younger brothers, Moy Dong Hoy 梅宗凯 (Mei Zongkai) a.k.a. Sam Moy, and Moy Dong Yee 梅宗瑀 (Mei Zongyu) followed soon after.

Encouraged by the relatively more accommodating reception in Chicago, Moy Dong Chow wrote to his compatriots in San Francisco in 1880 asking them to join him (Fan 1926:14). As a result, there were a hundred Chinese in the city by 1880. Moy Dong Chow also continuously sent for his family members from the homeland. By 1885, 40 members of the extended Moy family from his native village had been living in Chicago. By the end of 1890, there were more than 500 Chinese living on South Clark Street, the first Chinatown in Chicago (Fan 1926:14). Laundries, grocery stores, and restaurants made up the early Chinatown. Two Chinese laundries in 1870 in the Loop, a few businesses and a Chinese church in the mid-1870s provided the early structure of the Chinatown in Chicago.

Among the Chinese businesses, operating a laundry was the easiest as it required limited skills and very little capital. All a laundryman needed was a tub, a scrub board, soap, an iron, and an ironing board. Chinese laundrymen could canvas a neighborhood, seek out a low-rent location and open a business. As a result, Chinese hand laundry developed rapidly. In 1874, 18 Chinese laundries were in operation, of which 15 were in the Loop, the area of Madison and Roosevelt roads, two on the Near West Side, and one on Near South Side. Less than a decade later in 1883, Chinese laundries grew more than tenfold to 198. While more than half of the laundries — 107 in

number — were still concentrated in the Loop, the rest was scattered across the city. In 1893, the Chinese laundries slightly decreased to 190, but were more widely spread around the city than a decade ago (Siu 1987: 28-30). The geographical dispersion of the Chinese laundries in Chicago followed a similar pattern in other major American cities (Ling 2004: 36-37; Yu 1992).

Parallel to the development of the Chinese laundry business, the Chinese population in Chicago grew rapidly. Within two decades, it had increased to nearly 600 according to the U.S. census, but 2,000 by the local press estimate (*The Graphic* 1894: 131) (see Table 1). On the weekends, the Chinese would congregate in the South Clark Street area to meet kinsmen, eat an authentic Chinese meal and relax playing *fán-tan* (a popular Chinese gambling game of the time) or smoke a cigar or opium. The Chinese New Year celebrations were the most memorable and joyous events for the Chinese. On New Year's Day, which often falls in early February of the solar calendar, Chinese men donned their quilted silk robes, put on their immaculate white stockings and thick-soled shoes, uncoiled their long queue, and made for the South Clark Street district.

Table 1: Chinese Population in Chicago

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*	82,922	60,627

\* The figure does not include Taiwanese.

Source: U.S. Censuses, compiled by author.

The growing presence of the Chinese in Chicago had caused discomfort and suspicions among the white residents who were most uncomfortable in particular with the interactions between Chinese males and white females taking place at the Chinese missions where the Chinese male laborers, mostly laundrymen, were taught English by white female teachers. Unlike the violent anti-Chinese outbreaks which occurred in New York, Boston, or Milwaukee at the turn of the century, opposition to the Chinese in Chicago took the form of economic sanctions (Lui 2005; Wong 1996; Jew 1999). In 1905, there was a movement to boycott American goods in China protesting the ill-treatment of Chinese immigrants in California. In response, property owners in the Loop drastically raised rents to drive out the Chinese businesses and tenants. In the early 1910s, the rent for a medium-sized Chinese grocery store in the South Clark Street area, such as Quong Yuan Chong Kee and Company, was as much as \$225 a month, while for a similar store on West 22nd Street on the South side, the rent ranged from \$125 to \$190 a month (CCCF files 2005/183, 2005/1608). Thus, by 1910, about half of the Chinese population was forced to move out of Clark Street into the area immediately south of the Loop area (Fan 1926:15). 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 been the chief force driving out the Chinese, there has also been the speculation of other causes such as internal rivalry between On Leong Tong and Hip Sing Tong, and the construction of a new federal building in the South Clark area (Moy 1978: 43; McKeown 2001: 212).

The new Chinatown on 22nd Street from Clark Street to Princeton Avenue was probably one of the city's most neglected areas in 1912. It was here that the Chinese built a commercial and residential community sheltering at least one third of the over 2,000 Chinese in the city during the first decades of the 20th century. Following two decades of growth and expansion, which brought about the general prosperity of the 1920s, Chicago Chinatown by the 1930s was well established as a distinctive sizable Chinese American urban community. The development of Chinatown was consistent with the city's growth, as Chicago had come to be known as America's "second city" after New York since 1890 and the largest city in the developing West (Joiner 2007: 21).

### **Theorizing Chicago Chinatown: A Vital Link of Transnational Migration and Regional Development**

The racialization of the larger labor market seems to have played a part in the ethnic business orientation of the Chinese in Chicago. In the "second city," stockyards and factories absorbed the bulk of the city's work force. In 1919, more than 70 percent of the 400,000 wage earners working in Chicago's manufacturing industry were employed in companies with at least 100 employees each, and nearly a third of them worked in factories employing over 1,000 workers each. A typical worker in Chicago in the 1920s was an industrial worker employed by one of the big employers such as Armour and Swift in the stockyards; Inland, Youngstown, Republic, Wisconsin, and U.S. Steel; the Pullman Company Works; International Harvester plants; Western Electric's Hawthorne Works; and Hart, Schaffner and Marx, makers of men's clothing. Succession of ethnic groups took similar patterns among the meatpackers and steelworkers. The earliest workers in the meatpacking factories and steel plants came from Ireland, Germany, and a little later, Bohemia. As skilled jobs declined and the sources of immigrant workers changed, Poles, Lithuanians and Slovaks, along with blacks, filled the ranks of a work force that had become overwhelmingly unskilled and semiskilled (Cohen 1990: 13, 28). However, one ethnic group from Asia, the Filipino, joined the labor force in the post office and Pullman by the mid-1920s (Posadas 1990).

Unlike the immigrant workers in other ethnic groups, the Chinese in Chicago did not join the work force run by corporate employers, largely due to their lack of English speaking ability and discrimination by society at large; rather they focused on the economic niches of grocery, restaurant and laundry, ethnic enterprises that had prevailed in other parts of the country with concentrations of Chinese immigrants.

A close examination of the Chinese businesses in Chicago reveals a number of distinctive features. First, the grocery businesses in Chicago were well connected with the transnational ethnic networks in all aspects of running a business, and supplied not only the Chinese laundries and chop suey houses in the city, but also those in nearby areas and neighboring states, making the Chicago Chinatown a supplier of wholesale grocery and other merchandise in the Midwest region. In addition, the city as a hub of transportation had allowed many Chinese to move between Chicago and other cities of the country, making Chicago a center for the Chinese transnational migration and regional socioeconomic development. Second, the city's metropolitan atmosphere inculcated ambition, a sense of modernity, and a taste for extravagance among the Chinese restaurateurs, who therefore helped create the trend of

Chinese fine dining in the country at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Third, Chinese hand laundries in Chicago not only provided a livelihood for thousands of Chinese immigrants, but also served as a vast and rich field of enquiry for Paul C. P. Siu's work on the Chinese laundryman. Chinese laundries in Chicago (as well as those in San Francisco and New York) became prototype for those in other Midwest cities and towns. Fourth, the Chinese businessmen in Chicago, from the Moy brothers to Chin F. Foin and Hong Sling, were transnational in their business outlook and operation, serving as examples of the early Chinese transnational migrants. The following sections further elaborate on these points.

### *Wholesale Centers and Traveling Stores*

Wentworth Avenue and West 22nd Street, the main thoroughfares of Chinatown, hosted most of the businesses and community organizations: 65 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 (SMMP 1933). The majority of the businesses in Chinatown was wholesale and retail grocery stores, selling imported goods from China. The advertisement of Chinese Trading Co., for example, listed in its inventories of goods imported from China, sesame oil, soy sauce, bamboo shoots, candies, dry foods and cooking ingredients. Sam Lung Co., an old established business in operation before 1900 and located in the old Chinatown area of South Clark Street, sold Chinese groceries, herbs, silk and other fabrics (SMMP 1933).

The larger and more prominent grocery stores (in chronological order of each store's operational time period) 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, Chinese Trading Company at 2214, Archer Avenue, and Sam Lung and Company at 431, South Clark Street owned by Hong Sling. A close examination of some of the older and more established firms in Chicago reveals a good description of the Chinese transnational grocery business in the areas of capital investment, partnership, organizational structure, dividends and salaries, daily operations, and business volume.

Transnational ethnic networking dominated various aspects of the Chinese grocery business in Chicago. Ethnic networks were essential for the large Chinese firms in raising capital to start a business, in procurements of merchandise, in recruiting employees and in both wholesale and retail trade. Almost without exception, the Chinese business owners garnered funds from kinsmen

and friends through business partnerships, rather than obtaining loans from American banks, which was the conventional and standard practice in American and European societies for acquiring capital to start a business. Numerous immigrant testimonies have demonstrated this method of venture capital accumulation. Typically, large Chinese grocery stores and restaurants would have ten to thirty partners, each investing about \$1,000 in the firm. The largest shareholder and organizer of a firm would normally serve as manager of the business (CCCF files 2205/182-E, 463).

Members of the three big clans of Moy, Chin, and Lim had greatly benefited from kinship networks, as exhibited 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 detailed in this section. Hip Lung Yee Kee, or Hip Lung for short, the oldest Chinese company in Chicago, was initially started in the 1870s by a Chinese immigrant, whose name remains 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 strategically divided the work among themselves in operating the transnational family business. Moy Dong Chow, 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 operations of Hip Lung by serving as its manager from 1885. As the 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, Hip Lung had 35 partners, among whom nine actively participated in the store business, all without exception were Moy clan members. Of the total capital of \$41,000, over \$10,000 was in stock. The store’s worth was \$30,000 in goods, apart from bills due to it and goods on the way. Moy Dong Chow and Moy Dong Hoy served as managers, while Moy Dong Yee was 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 an acting treasurer (CCCF file 463). The above information reveals some important points. First, the kinship business partnership was essential for the establishment and growth of business in securing venture capital and capital for further expansion. Second, 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 operations.

The Chinese sources further reveal that the Moys enjoyed the most extensive transnational migration networks among the major Chinese clans in Chicago. The Chicago Moy Shi Kung Sow (Moy's Family Association), founded in 1898 as the second Moys branch association in North America (the first was founded in 1894 in New York), had arguably the largest membership among all the Chinese family associations in Chicago. A global organization, Moy Shi Kung Sow embodied a transnational network with connections and influences throughout North America and the world. The Chicago Moys had emerged as the leaders of the Moys Family Association in America since as early as the 1920s. It hosted the first national Moys Convention in 1927 and several successive national conventions that were held every three years (Meishi Zongqin Zupu 1991: 111-13). The broad national and international connections no doubt helped the Chicago Moys build their early businesses and reinforced their economic power over time.

In the recruitment of employees, transnational ethnic networks were also essential. The Chinese business owners in Chicago would send for their family members, kinsmen, or fellow villagers to work as paid or unpaid helpers in stores after arriving in the city. The major Chinese grocery stores in Chicago normally hired kinsmen as employees. While the Moy brothers and members of the Moy clan operated Hip Lung Yee Kee, the Chin clan established a rival firm, Wing Chong Hai Company in the 1890s at 381, South Clark Street to compete with the former. Chin F. Foin, a wealthy and flamboyant Chinese merchant in town, served as its assistant manager from 1895 to 1900 and became manager in 1900. He hired 20 employees to run the store. In 1908, 12 partners, all Chin kinsmen, jointly owned the firm and worked as its employees as well. The store normally had \$25,000 worth of goods at any time and sold \$50,000 to \$60,000 worth of goods annually in the 1900s. Chin F. Foin earned a monthly salary of \$120 in addition to dividends in 1908, while Chin Wing Yuen, a member of the firm since 1893 with a share of \$1,000 who worked in the herb section of the store preparing and packing medicine, was paid \$60 a month plus dividends (CCCCF files 616, 660). Clearly, as in the case of Hip Lung Yee Kee, Wing Chong Hai Company also largely depended on kinship network for financing and operating the business. The sales figures of the two firms are 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. The salesmen of the store were paid \$35 a month. The store hired experienced

employees such as Moy Dung, who had worked in a Chinese grocery store, Quong Yuen Sing, in New York prior to his employment at Tai Wah. Clearly, the Chinese business benefited from the transnational ethnic network, from which it could recruit better employees. Meanwhile, the network also provided Chinese immigrants with job mobility. As a large and reputable firm, Tai Wah served as a virtual bank as well. It witnessed numerous lending transactions and managed savings for many Chinese laborers (CCCF file 596). The dual functions of the large Chinese businesses as both merchandise firms and banks grew out of the practice of money lending between Chinese kinsmen and friends which occurred in the grocery stores. Money lending within a kinship network was highly personal and informal. The Chinese immigrants generally regarded loaning savings to kinsmen as either a familial obligation or a form of investment, in neither case was the lending documented formally and properly; it was rather an informal and individual undertaking by a lender based solely on his trust in the borrower. Inter-personal money lending often took place in the Chinese grocery stores, where close kinsmen or distant "cousins" loaned money to each other while purchasing goods or socializing (CCCF files 616, 617). In such transactions, as "a Chinese custom," no receipts or any other lending documents were necessary, and the mere trust in the "cousins" was a sufficient guarantee for a lender.<sup>5</sup> For instance, Chinese laundryman Lum Joy loaned his cousin, Lem Quai, \$600 in 1903 and another cousin, Lem Dock, \$600 in 1904. Lem Quai had paid back \$115 and Lem Dock \$45 by the time Lum Joy was planning to go to China for a visit. Both loan transactions took place at the Chinese store, Quang Yuen Co., and were recorded only in the store's books, while the lender Lum Joy did not have any documentation himself as proof of the transactions (CCCF, file 360).

As the practice of informal money lending took place in grocery stores more and more frequently, reputable Chinese stores operated by prominent merchants began serving as banks or investment brokers for clan members and customers. Numerous monetary transactions occurred and were considered as part of the store's operations. Many Chinese laborers deposited their savings in the large firms that would use those funds in their business operations, and would pay the depositors a percentage of the business profit as the return. Moy Kee Doy's case provides a good example. Moy Kee Doy was born in China in 1871 and came to the United States in 1881. In 1902 he moved to Chicago

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<sup>5</sup> Numerous case files indicate that the personal loans to kinsmen or friends had no written records, because the lenders "trusted him" as a kinsman or as a good friend. See, for example, testimony of Lum Joy, September 7, 1904, CCCF, file 360; testimony of Moy Kee Doy, July 17, 1905, CCCF, file 365; and testimony of Chan Wing, August 23, 1905, CCCF, file 369.

and worked as a cook for the officers at Fort Sheridan for two years. From doing that job he saved \$500 which he handed over to Moy Lung You, the bookkeeper of Tai Wah, the grocery store discussed earlier. He later asked Moy Lung You to invest his \$500 in the Wee Ying Lo restaurant when it opened in 1903. For this investment he received \$7 for each \$100 as dividends (CCCF file 365). The seven percent return, although moderate, was considered lucrative enough to attract investors among kinsmen and friends. In addition to money management for clan members and customers, some stores also handled the sending of remittances to families and relatives in China on behalf of the Chinese immigrants.

Transnational ethnic networking was indispensable in the purchase of 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 on Chinese transnationalism and migration notes that the need for Chinese groceries overseas generated the businesses called *jinshanzhuang* 金山庄, or Gold Mountain firms, in Hong Kong to meet 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. Managers of *jinshanzhuang* took orders for Chinese goods and arranged for their shipment on behalf of the Chinese merchandise firms overseas. By 1922, there were 116 *jinshanzhuang* located in Hong Kong doing business with Chinese firms in North America. Owing to the increasing demand, the number of *jinshanzhuang* more than doubled to 290 by 1930 (Hsu 2000: 41). Merchandise such as tea, dry foods, cooking ingredients, herbs, fabrics, and porcelains were imported from Hong Kong by sea to San Francisco, and then sent by train to Chicago.

The Chinese grocery stores would also dispatch representatives to China to purchase goods in person. Au Tat was one of such businessmen. Born in Ng Woo village, Kaiping District, Guangdong Province, China in 1884, Au Tat came to the United States in 1911, first landing in San Francisco and then taking the 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 a \$1,000 interest in the store, Au Tat served as bookkeeper of the store while also being in charge of purchases in Hong Kong from time to time. In 1919, for instance, he went to Hong Kong on a business trip and returned the following year. While in Hong Kong, he did business with Quong Loon Chung store at No.1, Bonham Strand where he placed orders for his company in Chicago (CCCF file 2005/1608).

Reflecting the city's unique economic position as a wholesale and retail giant, the Chinese grocery businesses in Chicago served as central suppliers distributing goods to all the hinterland's cities and towns. Apart from the above large firms which all handled wholesale and retail business, Quang Yuan Chong Kee and Company was a good example as a supplier of goods to stores in the 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 in the South Clark Street, it moved to the South Side at 241, West 22nd Street paying a monthly rent of \$190. By 1913 it had 25 partners mostly from the Lim clan with a total capitalization of \$30,000. Eight of the partners were working in the store. Lim Shear Lett, who had the largest share of the firm, served as the manager from the time the store opened, and Toy Hung Chuck was the bookkeeper. Lim Yee served as a sales clerk with a monthly salary of \$35, selling goods in the store or traveling in the neighboring states of Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, and smaller towns in Illinois for the firm. The cities he often traveled to included Battle Creek and Lansing in Michigan, Indianapolis, Kekomo, Fort Wayne, and Peru in Indiana, where he took orders for goods and collected debts from the local grocers. Being an image conscious man, Lim Yee purchased his suit and hat in Peru, Indiana, when he saw them in a store during one of his business trips (CCCC file 2005/183).

While the case of Quang Yuan Chong Kee and Company illustrates how the larger companies served as wholesale centers to Chinese grocers in other cities in the Midwestern region, Annie Leong's family history is an example of how smaller grocers in the Midwestern cities benefited from their business connections with Chicago. Annie Leong's father came to St. Louis in 1920 and set up a successful Chinese restaurant business. Four years later, he brought his bride to St. Louis from his hometown, Xinhui, Guangdong, in China. Leong and her two elder brothers were all born and grew up in Hop Alley, Chinatown in St. Louis. During the 1920s and 1930s, the Leong family owned a Chinese restaurant 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. All the children spent their time after school working in the grocery store. Annie Leong recalled her childhood experiences in retailing: "we got them on credit and we have thirty days to pay. If you don't have a good credit, you have to pay right away. They gave us wholesale price, and we retail them. The whole family helps to do the business. After the operation whatever is left is our profit" (Leong 1998).

While the large grocery stores in the heart of Chinatown enjoyed having steady patrons, many Chinese grocery stores located on the periphery or

outside Chinatown depended more on wholesale to Chinese chop suey shops and laundries. Mr. Fung was a farmer in China who came to America in the 1890s. Since his grocery store in Chicago was not located at the center of Chinatown, his business depended mainly on wholesale, selling primarily chop suey ingredients of meats and vegetables delivered daily in his car to chop suey houses and laundries run by his cousins (Siu 1930s-B).

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 in Chinese laundries and chop suey houses in the city and throughout the country. Paul C. P. Siu counted 25 trucks running daily in the 1930s, making deliveries to Chinese laundries and chop suey houses throughout the city. They carried laundry supplies, meats, vegetables, cooking ingredients, imported and locally-produced food, and a miscellany of household goods. Some of the traveling stores sold primarily fresh meat, poultry, vegetables, and Chinese delicatessen foods. Other supplies that were dispatched by the larger stores in Chinatown would carry a more complete inventory, including not only foods but also laundry supplies. The laundryman usually did his food shopping on Sundays, his only day off. He would buy some dry foods, and even fresh foods that would last a few days. By the middle of the week, he was out of fresh foods and he would have to buy them from the traveling stores. Such demand soon gave rise to a growing business of traveling stores.

A similar situation arose in the Chinese chop suey houses. The chop suey house could buy dry ingredients from the Chinese wholesale stores. But perishable foods would have to be purchased daily. Since the chop suey houses used considerable quantities of meat, poultry, fish, and vegetables, the daily supplies of fresh foods were essential to the business. As the largest Chinese urban center in the Midwest, Chicago witnessed a growing number of Chinese chop suey houses in the 1910s — the majority of the 250 Chinese restaurants were chop suey houses — spreading across the city. One smart man would first foresee the demand and start the business. When he became successful, many soon followed. In this way, traveling grocery stores and delivery businesses grew into a significant sector of the grocery business.

The traveling store was used as a model in other Midwestern cities, such as St. Louis. Oriental Tea was such a store in the 1920s. Unlike most grocery stores with single ownership, Oriental Tea had several partners to finance and operate the store, and sold its supplies to Chinese laundries and restaurants. Richard Ho's father was a partner of the store who brought the then ten-year-old Richard from Canton, China to St. Louis in 1928. Richard Ho later worked in the store as a driver of a small panel truck delivering goods to

Chinese laundries and restaurants, and taking new orders from them for the following round (Ho 2002).

The above cases indicate that in the sale of merchandise Chinese businesses had to rely on transnational ethnic networks to a greater or lesser extent depending on the type and size of a given business. While the larger Chinese mercantile companies traded as wholesalers to the Chinese businesses in other cities in the Midwestern region, and as retailers to the local residents, the petty grocers or traveling stores had to rely heavily on retail sales to kinsmen and friends who felt obligated to patronize such businesses. In either case, the transnational migration networks were indispensable.

Apart from their regular lines of business, Chinese grocery stores and other food businesses also provided temporary or long-term lodging for Chinese laborers, thus serving as boarding houses or hotels. For instance, Louie Yap, a hired laundryman, lived in the store of Sam Lung Company at 299, South Clark Street in 1906 (CCCF file 375). Gong Dock Death, a restaurant worker, lived in Hong Kong Noodle Factory at West 152, 22nd Street in the 1910s and 1920s (CCCF file 2005/1603). Hip Lung run by the Moy brothers also served as a hotel (*Chicago Tribune* 1892).

The Chinese grocery stores made up a significant part of the Chinatown businesses and provided 600, or a quarter of the Chinese population in Chicago in the 1920s, a livelihood largely through kinship connections. The multiple functions of Chinese grocery stores as wholesalers and retailers, banks and hotels diversified their activities and increased their profit margins, while providing services needed within the transnational migrant networks. The economic significance of the grocery stores went far beyond Chinatown in Chicago since they also served as suppliers of merchandise to numerous smaller stores in cities and towns of the Midwest region. A local Chinese marveled at the sales volume of the Chinese grocery stores tightly packed on 22nd Street and South Clark Street in the 1920s, which might look small, "...this is 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" (Fan 1926: 39).

### *Pioneers of Chinese Fine Dining*

Chinese restaurants were the second most important business in Chinatown. In 1926, there were about 250 Chinese restaurants which could be found at almost "every convenient point along the principal thoroughfares" in Chicago (Fan 1926: 38). By 1930, there were at least 11 established Chinese restaurants located in South Chinatown (SMMP 1933).

Situated in a hub of land, water, and rail transportation, where foreign dignitaries, international celebrities and rich businessmen often made a visit or stopped over in transit, Chinese restaurants in Chicago may well have contributed to the rise of upscale Chinese fine dining. Chinese restaurateurs with a vision, a taste of elegance, and a sense of modernity had emerged in Chicago Chinatown. Chin F. Foin is arguably the first and exemplary modernized Chinese restaurateur in Chicago. Born in Sin-ning (Xinning, renamed Taishan in 1914) County, Guangdong Province in China in 1877, Chin F. Foin came to America in 1892 as a fifteen-year-old teenager and arrived in Chicago in 1895. Young and adaptable, he picked up the English language and American way of life. It was believed that he could speak German fluently, and lived a life rivaling that of wealthy and trendy American businessmen. He rode horses, owned an automobile when it was first commercially available to buyers, joined an exclusive social club, and had connections with both Chinese ministers and influential Chicagoans. When Kang Youwei, an eminent Chinese reformer and royalist, visited Chicago, Foin was there to escort Kang (CCCF file 440; Siu 1930s-A). By 1905, in addition to owning the grocery store, Wing Chong Hai Company, he had become 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 on the corner of Clark and Van Buren Streets, the restaurant had Chinese-made furniture such as marble-topped tables with inlaid mother-of-pearl decorations, a popular style of the time. The restaurant was patronized by visiting Chinese officials and other prominent Chinese, as well as the upper-class Chicago socialites (CCCF file 374; Ho and Moy 2005:43). Just as in his Chinese grocery business, Wing Chong Hai Company, Chin F. Foin also had a number of partners who invested in the restaurant, among whom kinsmen Ham Sam had invested \$1,300 and Hum Sing, \$1,200 (CCCF file 374).

Chin F. Foin also went on to invest in King Joy Lo Mandarin Restaurant, probably the most luxurious Chinese American restaurant in Chicago established at the turn of the century. Also located in the Loop area at 277-279, South Clark Street and the corner of Van Buren Street, it boasted of all the amenities fashionable in the fine-dining Western restaurants of the time (CCCF file 374). It featured a live orchestra and a dance floor and had Western-style silverware for its American customers. Its menu guaranteed satisfaction for the diners and paid extra attention to customers unfamiliar with Chinese cuisine: "If you experience difficulty in making selection, the floor walker will cheerfully aid you" (Ho and Moy 2005: 42). A 1930s photograph shows the restaurant with lavish decorations of elegant Chinese artwork. The



Chin F. Foin and Wife, 1906. Foin was arguably the first and exemplary modernized Chinese restaurateur in Chicago.

downstairs dining room was spacious and up to date with a pleasant ambience. The wide staircase was lined with big and sumptuously decorated columns. Carved banisters displayed Chinese workmanship, and the walls and ceiling were adorned with carvings and paintings in Chinese themes. The lavish and splendid design was unmatched even by those seen in present-day Chinese restaurants (Ho and Moy 2005:43). Such painstaking efforts reveal Chin F. Foin as an ambitious and visionary businessman dedicated to creating the best dining experience for his customers.

Another upscale restaurant, Guey Sam Restaurant, had been in operation since 1901. It was first located in the South Clark Street area, and later moved to the South Chinatown along with most of the Chinese businesses. In the 1930s it was located at 2205, Wentworth Avenue, on the second floor at the corner of Wentworth Avenue and Cermak Road (SMMP 1933). A postcard of the restaurant in the 1920s shows its interior with modernized décor and Western-style round tables covered with starched tablecloth and napkins. The spacious restaurant was air conditioned and could accommodate more than a hundred guests. In 1950 the restaurant changed hands but kept its name. Its chinaware was custom-made with the restaurant logo designed by Shenan Company in New Castle, Pennsylvania, showing its established name (Ho and Moy 2005: 46). Similarly, Hoe Sai Gai Restaurant at 85, West Randolph Street in the Loop was decorated in the fashionable Art Deco style of the 1930s that distinguished it from other Chinese restaurants (Ho and Moy 2005: 44).

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 (CCCF file 405). Having reaped success with Wee Ying Lo, Moy Dong Hoy and his partners opened a branch restaurant, Song Ying Lo, in the same year with \$40,000 capital. The two restaurants jointly had 25 partners with a total investment of \$70,000. The cooks were paid \$55 to \$60 a month (CCCF file 405). The capital investment easily suggested the décor and furnishings of the two restaurants were comparable to their rivals such as King Yen Lo and King Joy Lo run by Chin F. Foin.

Tom Lok was another visionary Chinese restaurateur. Born in Canton, China, in 1868, Tom Lok came to the United States in 1881, landing in San Francisco as a thirteen-year-old, possibly as 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 located. Right after Tom Cincho's death in 1916, Tom Lok bought the business from Cincho's wife 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 got their capital from kinsmen and fellow villagers, Tom Lok was the sole proprietor of the restaurant. In 1923, the turnover of the business was \$100,000, of which Tom Lok's net profit was \$3,000. He employed 15 people: seven cooks in the kitchen, and six waiters in the dining room. In addition, two white men were closely involved with the restaurant. Charles F. Hille, an attorney at 109, North Dearborn Street, came to the restaurant once a month. H. L. Henson, a salesman of wholesale groceries and rice at 251, East Grant Avenue, visited the restaurant once a week to take orders and collect debts. In 1924, eight years after he bought the business, Tom Lok estimated the worth of the business had more than doubled, to \$40,000 (CCCF 2005/1614).

The large Chinese restaurants in Chicago at the turn of the century were not only extravagant in appearance, but also sizable in seating capacity, indicating a growing demand for Chinese food in the city. Golden Pheasant Inn at 72, West Madison Street which opened in 1916, was reportedly the largest Chinese restaurant in Chicago in the 1920s. It had a capital of \$75,000 from 30 shareholders, each receiving a ten-percent dividend, twice as much as the dividend paid by smaller Chinese restaurants. With 175 tables and 75 employees, it could have been one of the largest restaurants even at the present time. The large number of diners and of employees made it imperative that the restaurant had effective management and well-defined employee responsibilities. Eng Gow, president of the company and general manager, oversaw the operations and dealt with the procurement of supplies from H. L. Henson, a wholesale grocery owner. Ng Gar Chung, one of shareholders with an investment of \$1,250, was first hired in 1917 as a checker, virtually a kitchen manager, whose primary responsibility was to make sure the items on the order match the food on the trays before they were carried by waiters to the table. A year and half later, Ng Gar Chung was promoted to "dining room manager," with a monthly salary of \$75 (CCCF file 2005/763). Ng Gar Chung's promotion might suggest the importance of management in the restaurant's operation and success.

While the Chinese restaurants in Chinatown offered more authentic Chinese food and catered largely to Chinese clientele, those outside Chinatown seemed to serve more non-Chinese diners with a mixed menu of Western dishes such 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 dated around the 1930s lists restaurants of the town in alphabetic order, providing a good idea of the cultural mix

of the cosmopolitan city at the time: Bamboo Inn at 11, North Clark Street with a specialty in Cantonese food, for instance, "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 listed Egg Rolls (\$0.85), Boiled Fillet Mignon (\$2.85), Hon Su Gai (Chicken Fritters and Chinese Vegetables) (\$1.85), and Fried Half Chicken, Club Style (\$1.45); Nankin Restaurant at 230, North Dearborn Street serving Cantonese foods had Beef Rice (\$1.35), Chicken Subgum Chow Mein (Nankin Special) (\$1.65) and Fried Tender Half Chicken, disjointed (\$1.65) (CAMOC).

The above cases well illustrate the fast growth and economic significance of Chinese restaurants in Chicago during the last decades of the 19th and first decades of the 20th centuries. The annual turnover of \$30,000 for small restaurants and \$100,000 or more for large restaurants would amount to about \$1.6 million (or approximately \$310 million in the early 21st century) as the total annual gross earnings for all the 250 Chinese restaurants in town. With such a financial capacity, it is no wonder that the prominent restaurateurs in Chicago could make their establishments the finest and most luxurious of the time.

The Chinese entrepreneurs in Chicago were deft and savvy in promoting their enterprises through lavish investment. The most illustrative examples are the Chinese participation in the two world fairs held in Chicago in 1893 and 1933/34. The 1893 World's Columbia Exposition was one of Americans' early exposures to Chinese and Chinese-Americans were presented in a positive light. As the Qing government boycotted the Fair in protest of the Chinese Exclusion Law, the Chinese participation in the Fair was sponsored by Wah Mee Corporation, a private company formed solely for the purpose of the Fair. The three managers and main investors of the company were all prominent Chinese businessmen in America. Its president, Dr. Gee Woo Chan, was originally a Chinese government official who arrived in 1884 to observe the New Orleans Exposition. He overstayed his visa after his official commission expired and remained in the United States. He first practiced Chinese herbal medicine in San Francisco, then invested his money in real estate and "higher standard of business enterprises." The second investor, Hong Sling, was a young but wealthy newcomer to the city. He lived in Omaha, Nebraska and invested heavily in real estate, particularly in railroad as a contractor on the West Coast. He moved to Chicago before the 1893 Fair, anticipating it to be a good business opportunity. As a wealthy owner of the Sam Lung Company, he was believed to have played a major role in the Chicago Chinese community up to the 1930s. Although he was not as proficient in English as

Dr. Chan, he was well-connected and had close associations with several American civic leaders in Chicago. An experienced restaurateur, he was also reportedly the person who introduced chop suey to the Midwest. The third investor and treasurer of the company was Wong Kee, owner of a grocery store on South Clark Street. Although believed to be the richest Chinese in Chicago, Wong Kee was low-key about his fortune (Christoff 2001; CAMOC). The Wah Mee Corporation created a Chinese Village consisting of a Chinese theater, a joss house, a tea house, and a shopping bazaar.

The participation of Chinese businessmen in 1893 was motivated partially by Chinese nationalistic pride and partially by practical business instinct. The Fair proved to be an effective venue to arouse Americans' curiosity, to educate the American public about Chinese architecture, culinary culture, customs, philosophy, religion, theatrical art, and to promote Chinese restaurant businesses throughout the country particularly in the Midwest. Mae M. Ngai, a historian at Columbia University at present and the University of Chicago previously, has made a similar assessment on the commercial effort of the Chinese entrepreneurs in the Fair, "the Chinese village was an early prototype for Chinese American efforts to develop urban Chinatowns as tourist destinations, a trend that began in San Francisco in the 1910s" (Ngai 2005).

The Chinese Café in the Chinese Village was believed to be one of the first Chinese restaurants in the Midwest to cater to the non-Chinese diners. The owners imported 2,000 pairs of the ivory chopsticks from China, but also thoughtfully provided knives and forks (*Chicago Daily Tribune* 1893-A, 1893-B; CAMOC 1893). The menu seems to be a well-thought-out combination of Chinese food and Western soups and steaks, revealing the conscious efforts of the Chicago Chinese businessmen in introducing Chinese cuisine to non-Chinese diners at one of the largest venues in the city.

Compared to the 1893 Columbian Exposition, the Chinese participation in the 1933/34 Century of Progress was a concerted effort by the Chinese government, private Chinese and Chinese American merchants, a Swedish Explorer, Dr. Sven Hedin, who financed a replica of Golden Lama Temple of Jehol (Rehe), and the Japanese government promoting its newly acquired Manzhouguo in Manchuria, China (which was frowned upon by the Chinese in Chicago). It featured a jade pavilion, Foochow lacquer ware, and the "Street of Shanghai in 1934."

Although the display was not as extravagant as those in 1893, it was a "show off" for the local Chinese business community. Since the site of the Fair was located about a mile from Chinatown, many local merchants financed the concessions there, and many Chinatown residents worked at the Fair. The "Street of Shanghai in 1934" was completely paid for by the Chinese merchants

in Chicago. The highlight of the Chinese participation was a parade held on October 1, 1933. Organized by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), commonly known as Zhonghua Huiguan; the entire Chinatown participated in the event. The parade consisted of floats, bands, boy scouts, and beautiful girls in Chinese costumes. It started from Michigan Avenue and passed through the Fair along the Avenue of the Flags, the Golden Lama Temple and the Chinese Village (CAMOC 1933). The Chinese participation in the 1933/34 Fair was the most effective promotional effort by the Chicago Chinese merchants.

The promotion of Chinese businesses through cultural exoticism may have reinforced the American public's stereotypical notions of Chinese and Chinese culture. Nevertheless, its effectiveness in attracting non-Chinese patrons is undeniable. The Chinese participation in the two World's Fairs demonstrates the business vision and strategies of the Chinese business community in Chicago. Its success was made possible through the Chinese business community in Chicago effectively harnessing its transnational human and financial resources.

### *Paul Siu's Laundryman and Beyond*

Like the grocery and restaurant businesses, laundry was one of the niche occupations for Chinese in Chicago and 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. It was finally published in 1987, a year after the author's death. This empirical study provides invaluable and the most detailed sources, and exhaustively investigates all the possible aspects concerning a Chinese laundryman, so that after its publication, it would seem that there is nothing more to be done on the topic. My research on the INS immigration records, the E. W. B. Papers containing some of Siu's essays, interview notes, and other primary sources, however, indicate otherwise.

The most significant contribution of Siu's dissertation is the notion of "the sojourner," a term that came from a fellow student, Clarence Glick, who used it in his dissertation, "The Chinese Migrant in Hawaii" (Glick 1938). Siu, however, gave the term a sociological tweak and weight, which helped popularize the sojourner theory. He summarized the three characteristics of the sojourner. First, the sojourner held "the temporal disposition of the job." Siu stated, "the Chinese laundryman does not organize himself to select the laundry work as his life-long career, and his sojourn in America is for one single purpose — to make a fortune or to make enough money to improve his economic well-being at home." Second, the sojourner had "ethnocentrism and

the in-group tendency.” Siu asserted that “the sojourner clings to the cultural heritage of his own ethnic group; he is proud of it and thinks of it as the best, and therefore he tries to maintain it by all sorts of means.” Third, the sojourner made “the trip and movement back and forth.” Siu observed that the sojourner had the “desire to go home, but when he gets home he finds it hard to stay and wants to go abroad again. This back and forth movement means that the man has gotten into an anomalous position between his homeland and the country of his sojourn” (Siu 1987: 296-97).

Siu’s conclusions still remain valid today, but can be further understood in the context of transnational migration. Laundry as a “temporal disposition of job” ensured the Chinese immigrants’ sustenance and survival in a foreign land, and supported the family members in the homeland. The remittances to China constituted an integral part of the transnational economy. The “in-group tendency” helped form local links to the transnational social network. The “back and forth movement” was the very nature of transnational activities, as has been defined by authors on transnationalism since the 1990s.

While Siu’s study on the Chinese laundrymen in Chicago has been recognized as a significant work, it did not utilize the abundant sources from the Immigration and Naturalization Service records. The INS records on Chicago Chinese Case Files (CCCF) in 1898-1940 consist of over 6,000 files. The early files often document alleged violations of laws denying admission to Chinese laborers. The later files, especially after 1920, refer mainly to applications for return certificates or for student status. These case files provide further information supplementing Siu’s study, especially on capital investment, business volume, wages and profits. As government records of affidavits, entry and departure documents such as ship tickets, birth certificates and resident certificates, and testimonies of cross interrogations of Chinese immigrants or residents and their witnesses, the CCCF manuscripts may have been regarded by historians and other scholars as primary sources that tend to be more objective with higher credibility and accountability, than the participant-observations and personal interviews, methodologies and sources employed primarily in Siu’s study of Chinese laundrymen in Chicago.

The following cases from the INS records provide 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 a kinsman by owing the debt to the former. Generally, a one-man laundry was worth \$550 and could make a monthly turnover of \$200, and a two-men laundry would double the value of the laundry and its turnover. For instance, Moy Lun borrowed \$550 in 1907 from his cousin Moy Gee Nie to invest in a laundry on Cottage Grove Avenue (CCCF file 617).

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 revenue was about \$110. They paid a monthly rent of \$32.50 for the laundry. In 1907, Chin Wing turned his half of the laundry, worth of \$550, over to his friend Chin Show without getting a payment, instead, Chin Show owed the \$550 to Chin Wing (CCCF file 616).

Mark Do Wea and Chan Wing's cases provide good examples of the operation of Chinese laundries. 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 ironing collars, cuffs, and shirts. The weekly revenue was about \$50 on average (CCCF file 367). Similarly, Chan Wing started his laundry on 63rd Street in 1900 with \$500 capital. Three years later Charlie Chin joined the laundry, taking charge of bookkeeping for the business. When the laundry was closed at night, Charlie Chin took and looked after the money made during the day. He reported the account to Chan Wing on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. In 1905 when Chan Wing was planning to visit China, he sold the business to Chin Leung Dum and got \$1,380 from it (CCCF file 369).

While the owners of one-man or two-men small laundries worked in their laundries as laborers, the larger laundry owners did not work in the laundry but instead hired workers to do the actual laundering. 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 book keeper, Goon Toon Pak, to keep accounts and to pay all other expenses. He took in about \$120 to \$140 worth of gross income each week, from which he drew \$30 as profit. He also owned a horse-drawn wagon and paid \$3 to \$4 a week for the stable where the horse was kept (CCCF file 598).

Interracial coexistence was also evident in the operation of Chinese laundries. Some Chinese laundry operators hired non-Chinese employees as illustrated in David Lee's father's laundry. David Lee's father came to San Francisco in 1918, and then went to Chicago in 1924, where he operated a Chinese hand laundry to support his large family. In his laundry, he hired a black woman, a white woman, and a Mexican woman to help him with the washing and ironing (Lee 2008).

The net earnings from a laundry were meager, about \$50 a month, or 20 percent of the gross earnings in the 1900s. For instance, Kong Choon owned half a laundry at 4626, Cottage Grove Avenue in the 1900s. His share

was \$620 and he could make \$50 to \$80 a month (CCCF file 2005/171). With a frugal life style, however, many laundrymen could save about \$1,000 after five years of toiling in the business. For example, Louis Fook came to the United States in 1879. By 1906 he had saved \$1,000 from his laundry at 299, South Clark Street, which he had owned for five years (CCCF file 375). Lum Joy was born in China in 1864 and came to the United States in 1881. In 1904 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 (CCCF file 360). Moy Len also saved \$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 (CCCF file 2005/719). The more enterprising laundrymen would invest their savings in Chinese restaurants for profit. In 1903, for instance, Hum Sing, a laundryman, invested his saving of \$1,200 in King Yen Lo Restaurant and received dividends (CCCF file 374).

Chinese laundry business was not only a significant means to sustain the Chinese, but the ownership of a laundry also served as a basis for a Chinese laborer's request for a return certificate before departing for China, as the immigration regulations required possession of a minimal \$1,000 worth of property or debts receivable as a basis for a Chinese laborer's right for a return certificate.<sup>6</sup> For instance, Goon Pon Sing claimed the ownership of his laundry worth \$1,400 at 105, Lake Street, Oak Park, as his right to be given a laborer's return certificate, when he was planning a visit to China in 1907 (CCCF file 598). Numerous cases from the INS records also indicate that Chinese laundrymen turned over their businesses to kinsmen or friends, which became credits for them to claim their right for a return certificate. For instance, Chin Wing was applying for a laborer's return certificate in 1907, based on the claim that he had more than \$1,000 owed to him, of which \$550 was loaned to Chin Show in the form of the half share of the laundry that Chin Show took over from him, and \$500 that he lent to Chin Mon Pon who put the sum in a separate laundry (CCCF file 616).

The Chinese hand laundry also served as an indispensable vehicle enabling the economically disenfranchised Chinese to move around in search of better economic opportunities. Laundry as a portable occupation is clearly demonstrated in the domestic migration between Chicago and other cities. St. Louis, as the second largest city in the Midwestern America in particular, was a

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<sup>6</sup> 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.

favored destination of remigration for many Chinese laundrymen in Chicago; the reverse movement also occasionally took place 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. A Chinese man named Sam Wah opened the laundry in 1887 at 329, Market Street. He seemed to be doing well in the business and after 1912 he opened two more laundries at 1408, North Jefferson Avenue and 4298B, Finney Avenue. After 1915 he was running four or five laundries simultaneously, including the one at 4381, Laclede Avenue that survived till 1986. In 1922, the aging Sam Wah brought his two nephews, Gee Kee One (also known as Gee Sam Wah) and Gee Hong, from Canton, China, to join him. Gee Kee One and Gee Hong initially arrived in San Francisco, where they learned the laundry business. Then the Gee brothers went to Chicago to open a laundry. Unable to adapt to the cold weather in Chicago, they came to St. Louis to join their uncle (Porter 1978-1986). 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 when both proprietors passed away (*Gould's St. Louis Directory*, 1872-1952; *Polk's St. Louis City Directory*, 1955-1980).

Lam Lap Goey was a laundryman in St. Louis for some years. In 1901, he moved to Chicago to look for new business while working in a laundry to support himself. Planning to start a laundry, he borrowed \$650 from Lam Chee Dai, a laundryman and friend he had known since he came to Chicago (CCCF file 383).

### *Earnings for Transnational Families*

The above account of Chinese businesses in Chicago, largely based on the INS records, provides us with first-hand information on various aspects of the business operations. Tin-Chiu Fan's empirical investigation further offers data on trade distribution and earnings of the Chinese laborers. In 1926, Tin-Chiu Fan, a graduate student at the University of Chicago, surveyed 161 Chinese male adult students from the area schools, 245 Chinese YMCA members, 1,215 Mon Sang Association members, and 3,001 members of the Chinese Association, utilizing the membership cards of the Chinese YMCA, records of the Chinese Association, and the weekly publications by Chinese YMCA, the monthly by Mon Sang Associations, and the bi-daily by the *Chinese Daily News*. While the survey of the 245 members of the Chinese YMCA shows 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 surveys on the 161 Chinese students, 1,216 Mon Song Association members, and 3,001 Chinese Association members all indicate that more than 90 percent of them belonged to the categories of trade and service (Fan 1926: 33-37).

The wage distribution of the Chinese laborers in 1926 ranged from monthly earning of \$160 for cooks, \$117 for laundrymen, \$100 for waiters, and \$50 for store helpers, according to Fan's study (Fan 1926:41). It was more or less consistent with the data in the INS records.

The Chinese laborers were not only able to sustain themselves on these merger wages, but also kept part of the income as savings. Some of the savings were deposited in a bank, lent to kinsmen, or hidden in a trunk at home, but a substantial part was sent home (CCCF file 2005/171). In their testimonies, numerous Chinese immigrants stated that they sent money to families in China. It is difficult to calculate the amount of remittances to China as they were made in varied forms like postal money orders, checks, or drafts. Madeline Y. Hsu's study states that from 1903 to 1937 the estimated remittances from overseas Taishanese to China increased annually from 110 million to 517 million Chinese dollars (Hsu 2000: 41). In the 1920s and early 1930s, remittances from the United States to Taishan constituted one-tenth of all the money sent to China from abroad (Hsu 2000: 40).

The money remitted home enabled families to purchase land, build houses, donate to charitable activities, and lead a lifestyle above the norm of thrift and frugality of the overseas Chinese. The construction of *diaolou*, or fortress building, and *yanglou*, or western building, became widespread in many 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. Frequent bandit attacks coupled with summer floods in Taishan made the Chinese immigrants concerned about the safety of the families they left behind on the homeland. To ease their worry, the Chinese working overseas transmitted money home for the construction of the fortress-like buildings to protect family members from bandit attacks and summer floods. Having lived abroad for an extensive period of time, the Chinese immigrants were influenced by western architecture to varying degrees. They often designed the buildings themselves while aboard, combining western architectural styles with Chinese practices, and sent the blue prints home along with their remittances (*Xinning Magazine* 2006). To effectively defend the residents from bandits and floods, the fortress buildings are normally six to seven stories, often with *meurtrières* on top.

Meijia dayuan, or the Moys Compound, serves as a typical example of the Western buildings in Tingjiang, Taishan County. The remittances from the

Moys in Chicago and other places abroad in the 1920s and 1930s made possible the construction of the Meijia dayuan (CCCF file 617). Completed in 1932, it had more than 100 western-style buildings erected over 80 *mu* (or 14 acres) of land. The buildings were two or three stories with uniform height, neatly arranged around a huge rectangular courtyard serving as a local market (Ling 2007).

Wengjialou or Weng's Family Buildings in Miaobian Village, Duanfen Town, Taishan County, was another example of the western-style buildings constructed by the overseas Chinese. The five family buildings were constructed between 1927 and 1931 by Weng Songping's grandfather, who made his fortune in Hong Kong as an owner of *Jinshanzhuang*. Three of the five buildings were given literary names originating from the Chinese classical novel, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. The architectural design of the buildings was artistic but practical, combining eastern and western features, i.e. traditional Chinese tiled roofs on top of western-style buildings. Unlike the traditional buildings in Guangdong Province, which feature a broad covered porch in front of the house, the Weng Family Buildings were closer to those found in European countries and American metropolises. Basements consisted of kitchen and storage rooms, and the living rooms and bedrooms were on the second and third floors. The narrow and tall buildings made defense easier in the face of menace caused by floods and bandits. The brick and concrete buildings had endured nearly 80 years of weathering, and were still in good shape (Ling 2007). In 2002, they were registered and listed as a Historical Site by the Taishan City government.

The Moy Family Compound and Weng Family Buildings have been filmed and featured in a number of TV programs and journal articles in China.<sup>7</sup> They exemplify and embody the transnational ties between the homeland and the Chinese emigrants, and demonstrate the profound social and economic impacts of transnational migration. Family members and relatives were the direct beneficiaries of the modern buildings. The tall brick and concrete buildings protected people back home from natural disasters of flood and social instability. The modern design and amenities improved the living conditions of family members and relatives of the Chinese abroad. These buildings also brought western customs and cultural habits to China such as western-style toilets, bathrooms, kitchens, and a more hygienic life style (Ling 2007).

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, "Exploration and Discovery," CCTV 10, July 6, 2007; and *Xinning Magazine* 新寧雜誌, No. 4 (2004): 14-15.

Remittances from overseas Chinese have not only been used for constructing fortress-like buildings and western buildings for family members and relatives in home villages, but also for establishing 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 into most parts of China, and the cultural current in China had been dominated by ideas and experiments that emphasized western learning, resulting in the establishment of western schools throughout China. Taishan, as a premier native place in Guangdong Province for overseas Chinese, witnessed a surge of new elementary and secondary schools funded by donations from overseas Chinese. From 1907, when the first western elementary school was founded, to 1919, 18 local schools were newly established. The decade of the 1920s saw a rapid increase in the new schools: 42 were built, probably due to the economic prosperity in the United States and abundant funds from overseas Chinese. Eighteen new schools were added to the list during the 1930s and 17 in the 1940s (*Taishan xian huaqiao zhi* 1992: 120-27).

The remittances to China did not just benefit those back home, but also provided psychological satisfaction for those who were overseas. Many large-sized and grandiose fortress and western buildings were the equals of multi-million-dollar mansions of the present day. They overtly displayed the wealth a successful emigrant Chinese possessed. That the Chinese emigrants were willing to invest substantial amounts of money in real estate in the homeland suggests the importance of the homeland in their minds. To those who dwelled in a foreign land, the ultimate goal and highest form of success was to return home with money, or to be recognized, honored, or envied by fellow villagers for their monetary contributions to the native village. This mentality was instilled and deep-rooted in the minds of most Chinese emigrants. It has remained as a strong motive for them to maintain continuous social, economic, and emotional ties with the homeland.

#### *Hong Sling as a Quintessential Transnational Businessman*

The life story of Hong Sling offers a compelling narrative on how a transnational Chinese businessman in Chicago navigated between the shores of the Pacific Ocean and operated transnational businesses successfully. Hong Sling was born in China in 1855. He came to the United States in 1875 at the age of 20, landing in San Francisco. He first worked in Wyoming as a manual laborer for two or three years. He then moved to Utah as a labor contractor and railroad agent. From these jobs he accumulated enough savings to enable him to invest in businesses in Hong Kong, United States, Cuba, and Panama,

thus building his career as a transnational businessman (CCCF files 2205/1638, 2005/182-E).

His prosperity in business and family life all became evident in Chicago. In 1892 Hong Sling moved to Chicago, favoring the city's position as a hub of transportation and the site of the imminent World's Columbia Exposition the following year. That year, two groups of Chinese merchants competed for the private Chinese concession at the World's Columbian Exposition. Both planned to focus on building a Chinese theater, to which various shops and other attractions would be added. It was a surprise to many that the newcomer in town, Hong Sling, who teamed up with Gee Wo Chan and Wong Kee to form the Wah Mee Company to finance and operate the Chinese Village, was able to defeat the rival bid by Moy Dong Chow and Moy Dong Hoy, the two older Moy brothers and dominant figures of the late-19th-and-early-20th-century Chicago Chinatown.<sup>8</sup>

Hong Sling's bidding success in part lies in his more than sufficient funds. The three investors of Wah Mee put up \$90,000 for the village (or approximately \$1.7 million in the early 21st century) (Ngai 2005). In addition, the Moy brothers seemed to have been less fortunate with the immigration authority. With ambitious plans, the Moys formed the Wah Yung Company in November 1892 and intended to build a second theater outside the fairgrounds on Cottage Grove Avenue, four blocks south of the Midway. The theater was to be designed by architect Francis J. Norton and would feature actors from Hong Kong. Unfortunately, the Immigration and Naturalization Services decreed the certificates of the 273 "actors" forged and denied them entry at Tacoma, Washington. Although the Moys managed to smuggle 32 actors from Tacoma to Chicago, these actors could not appear on the stage of the Wah Yung Company's theater as it was not finished on time.

The victorious Wah Mee Company also sent their representatives to import actors from China. In early 1893, 483 so-called actors landed in San Francisco and then boarded a Santa Fe Railroad train paying fares amounting to \$32,200. Hong Sling, manager of the Wah Mee Company, was furious at his handlers for bringing so many "actors" at such an exorbitant cost. He selected only 200 and sent the rest back to San Francisco (CAMOC 1893).

The Chinese Village in the Midway Plaisance became the enterprise of a syndicate funded, sponsored, and operated by Chicago Chinese merchants. The exhibit was a huge success. Hong Sling's investment and leadership in the Chinese Village in the 1893 World's Columbia Exposition elevated him as one

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<sup>8</sup> "Wroth Over Chinese Trouble," *Chicago Tribune*, April 19, 1893.

of the prominent businessmen in the Chicago Chinese community (CCCF files 2005/182-A-B-C-D-E).

With the success in establishing himself as a powerful and wealthy merchant in Chicago, Hong Sling began establishing a family. At the end of 1897, he went to China and married Toy Shee, a woman 14 years his junior who was born in San Francisco but returned to China at a young age. Hong Sling stayed in China for five months, before the newly-weds boarded the Steamer "Gaelic" in the spring of 1898 and sailed to the United States. They landed in San Francisco and then took the train to Chicago. On October 28, 1898, their oldest son, Harry Hong Sling, was born in the Hong residence, a flat on the third floor at 324, South Clark Street.

1898 was also a prosperous year for the Hong in business. Cashing in on his newly-found fame and influence, Hong Sling opened his grocery business in Chicago, Sam Lung and Company that year. The store was first located on Wabash Avenue and State Street for a couple of years, then moved to 299 (the street number later changed to 431) South Clark Street. Hong Sling invested \$1,200 in the store, with 19 partners each investing \$1,000. He served as manager and hired about a dozen employees, mostly clansmen of the Hong. See Hoo She, the bookkeeper, also served as an acting manager whenever Hong Sling was on his transnational business trips. As one of the largest Chinese grocery stores in Chicago, its clientele included not only Chinese immigrants who came every weekend to purchase goods and to socialize, but also white patrons who did business with Hong and befriended him and his family (CCCF 2005/182-C-E). The store often served as inn for itinerant Chinese immigrants who stayed in Chicago on transit or for a short duration (CCCF, file 282).

Apart from Sam Lung and Company, Hong Sling's businesses in Chicago involved an investment in Hong Fong Lo, a corporation that managed one of the largest Chinese chop suey restaurants in Chicago. Hong served as president of the company, providing advice from time to time. Hong was also the passenger agent for the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad. By 1913, his business in the United States was worth about \$30,000. That sum, however, was dwarfed by his business interests in Hong Kong, where he invested in banking, insurance, and merchandise in five stores worth about \$80,000. His transnational business network also spanned South America, including an interest in Cuba and Panama (CCCF files 2005/182-E, 2005/1638).

Hong Sling's wealth and frequent transnational travels made him "well known" to the immigration authorities in Chicago, and Howard D. Ebey, the Immigrant Inspector in Chicago, regarded him "a man of wealth and standing" (CCCF files 2005/182-A-B-C-D-E). Hong Sling's association with the

white Chicagoans also helped him obtain approvals for his return certificates by the immigration authorities, thus enabling him to travel and return smoothly, in the backdrop of Chinese exclusion laws and practices. His white friends included local businessmen, physicians, and politicians, who readily served as witnesses for his return certificates, appearing in person at the office of Immigration Inspector in Chicago. On December 3, 1913, for instance, Arthur W. Chapman, a mortgage broker whose office was located in the Tacoma Building at No. 5, North La Salle Street, testified for the approval of the American citizenship of Hong Sling's three children. Chapman had been acquainted with the Hong family for more than 23 years, during which time he had made monthly visits to Sam Lung and Company. He highly praised Hong as "one of the leading businessmen among the Chinese in Chicago," and "unquestionably" a "representative" of Chinese "in point of intellect, personality, and general good" (CCCF file 2005/182-E). H. L. Henson, a wholesale grocery businessman with McNeil & Higgins Co., who had more than 20 years of business dealings with Sam Lung and Company, also appeared at the office of Immigration Inspector in Chicago on December 12, 1913 to testify on behalf of Hong Sling for the same case (CCCF file 2005/182-E).

Hong Sling was profoundly Americanized in his values, outlook, and lifestyle. Undoubtedly, his wealth had helped him achieve a substantial assimilation. On December 26, 1904, his second son, William Hong Sling, was born in the Hong residence. Almost two years later, on November 3, 1906, Hong's youngest child, a daughter named Jennie Hong Sling, was born (CCCF file 2005/182-D-E). Hong Sling engaged Dr. Joseph Brennemann for the birth of William and Jennie, while most families in Chinatown could at best afford only a mid-wife for child birth (CCCF file 2005/182-E). All of his children attended the Jones Public School from kindergarten onward (CCCF file 2005/182-A-B-C-D-E). Upon graduation from the Jones school, Harry went on to Lane Technical High School on the north side, the affluent part of Chicago (CCCF file 2005/182-C). Many family photographs show Hong Sling's wife and children clad in stylish Western clothing, showing Hong's economic prosperity and inclination for assimilation.

However, as a transnational businessman mostly dealing with Chinese, Hong Sling preserved Chinese traditions and customs, while assimilating into American society. On Chinese holidays and other important occasions, Hong and his family members would be attired in traditional Chinese dress. One of the Hong family photographs, taken by professional photographer Gibson whose studio was located on Wabash Avenue over Jevne's grocery store around 1909, shows members of the Hong family adorned in fancy traditional Chinese costumes (CCCF file 2005/182-E).



Hong Sling Family, ca. 1913. Front row from left: Toy Shee, Jennie Hong Sling, William Hong Sling, Hong Sling, and Harry Hong Sling. Boy in back row unknown.

### **Conclusion**

This study reveals that Chinese businesses in Chicago were not merely menial and low-skill trades that were shunned or despised by more privileged Americans, as prescribed by conventional and prevalent notions by the general public. On the contrary, as evidenced by the various sources employed in this study, many of the ethnic Chinese businesses, especially the large and complex ones, were especially established and sophisticated transnational businesses that were run by men with vision, practicality, and long-term goals. These businesses effectively utilized transnational business networks in raising capital to get started, in the procurement of merchandise, recruitment of employees, and execution of business operations, serving Chinese communities on both ends of the transnational migration. The city's central location and easy access by water, land and rail enabled the Chinese grocery businesses to become wholesale suppliers to small grocers in the Midwestern region. Chicago's



Hong Sling Family, ca. 1908. Front row from left: Toy Shee, Jennie Hong Sling, William Hong Sling, and Hong Sling. Back row: Harry Hong Sling.

cosmopolitan atmosphere cultivated pioneers of Chinese fine dining. The Chinese laundries in the city also served as a prototype for those in other Mid-western cities and towns.

Those unique features suggest that the ethnic Chinese community in Chicago, one that is still severely under-researched to-date, had served as a vital link of the Chinese transnational migration and a center of commerce and trade

in the Midwest region of America. The shrewd business sense, practicality, and ingenuity of the Chinese entrepreneurs contributed to not only their individual business success, but also to the collective survival, sustenance, and success of the Chinese communities in the region and in their homeland.

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