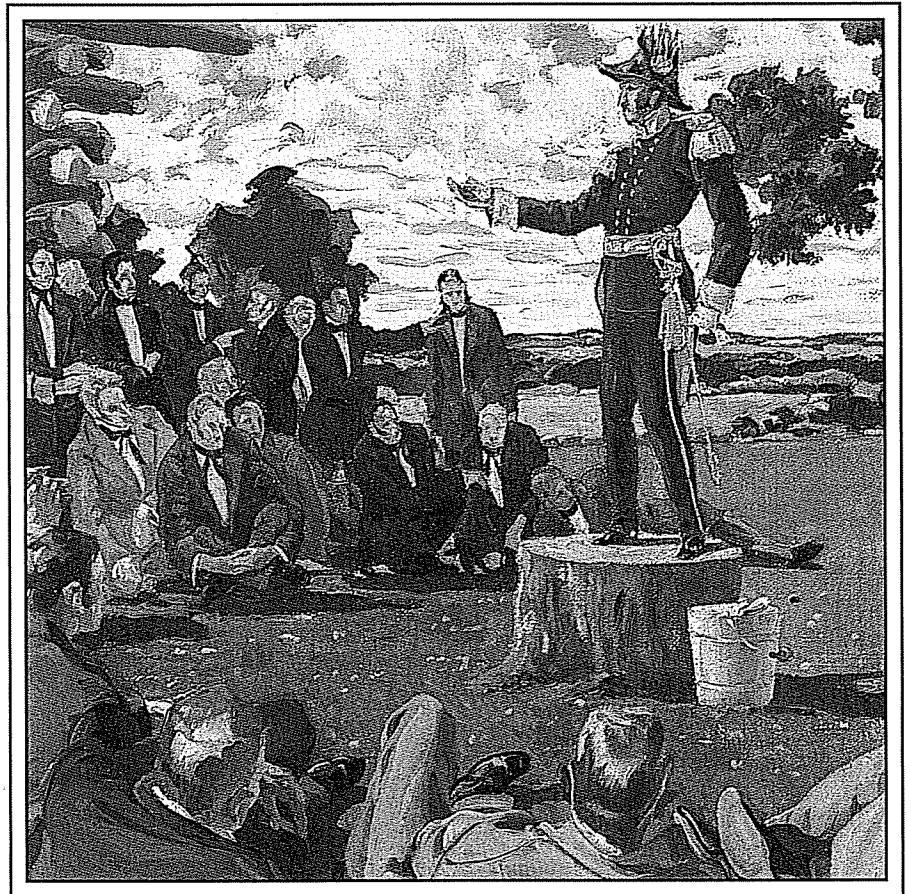
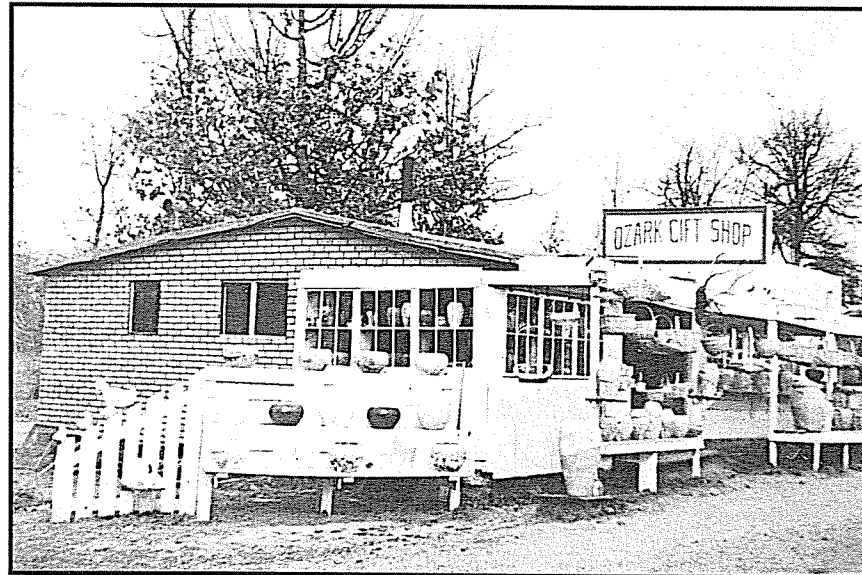


MISSOURI HISTORICAL REVIEW



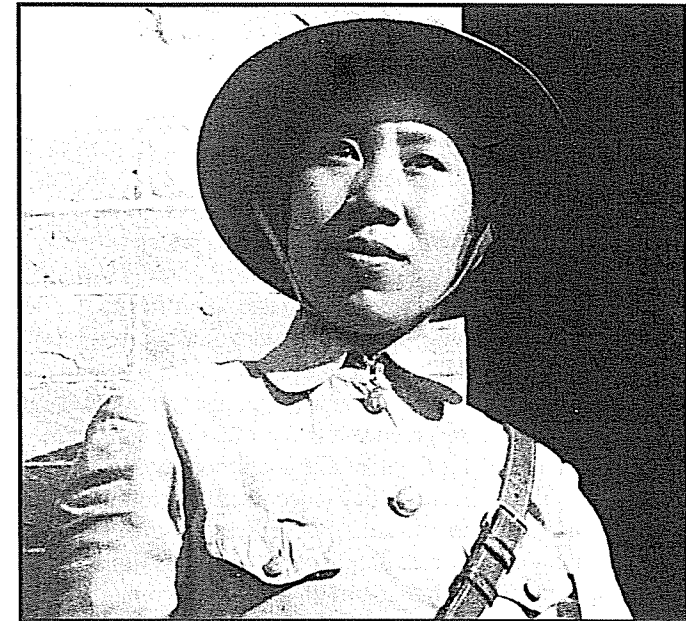
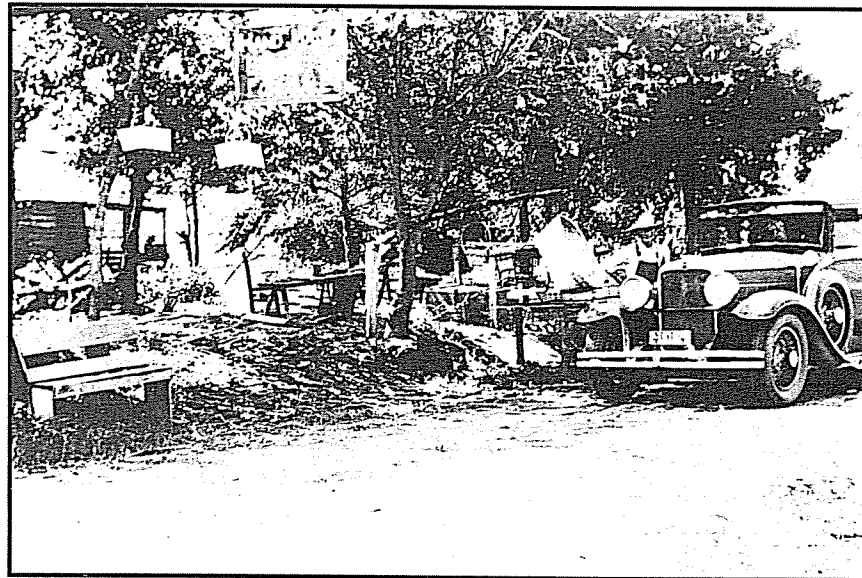
THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF MISSOURI, COLUMBIA



Courtesy of Oral Potere

Bartram's Ozark Gift Shop and Childers's Artful Woodwork attracted many travelers along the Mother Road in Phelps County.

Courtesy of Elbert I. Childers



Courtesy Sze-Kew Dun

Sze-Kew Dun: A Chinese-American Woman in Kirksville

BY HUPING LING*

Unlike most Chinese immigrants who landed and settled in large urban Chinese communities on the West or East Coasts, Sze-Kew Dun chose Kirksville, a remote, rural community in northeast Missouri, to be her adopted home in 1954 and has become a respected member of the community.¹ Like many Chinese intellectuals of her age, she received her higher education

*Huping Ling is an associate professor of history at Truman State University, Kirksville. She holds the M.A. degree from the University of Oregon, Eugene, and the Ph.D. degree from Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.

¹ According to the U.S. census, of the total Chinese-American population of 117,629 in 1950, 109,434 resided in urban areas, predominantly in California and New York. See "Population, by Race and Sex, 1930 and 1940, and by Race and Sex, Urban and Rural, 1950" and "Population of Minor Races, by States: 1950," Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1954 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1954), 37. Sze-Kew Dun has been well known locally for her paintings and friendliness. See *Kirksville Daily Express*, 11 March, 27 April 1958.

in China and the United States. This pursuit, however, took over three decades, interrupted by war and social upheavals in China and, later, the establishment and maintenance of a family in America. Like many women her age, Sze-Kew has been a homemaker for most of her life, assisting her husband, a professor of physiology, and raising their son. Additionally, she has gained a reputation as "one of the ten outstanding Chinese women artists today." Over the years she has held numerous exhibitions of her paintings, and in 1993 she published an autobiographical novel.²

Sze-Kew Dun's life history has displayed qualities common among women of various ethnic origins—determination, resilience, and adaptation. She is representative of a minority group of Chinese women who settled in small Missouri towns, maintained successful professional and personal lives, and contributed to the development of the local communities.³ Sze-Kew's personal story symbolizes the struggles, successes, assimilation, and contributions of Chinese-American women. How she chose to settle in a rural community and maintained a rich intellectual life is an intriguing tale. In addition, her experiences document how a minority woman can assimilate into the majority society while preserving her cultural heritage.

Sze-Kew was born into a well-to-do family in Guangzhou [Canton], Guangdong Province, China, in 1919.⁴ Because her mother died when she was only five years old and her father's work as a county judge required him to be away from home frequently, Sze-Kew's grandparents assumed primary responsibility for her care. After graduating from high school in 1937 as the top student of her class, Sze-Kew entered Xiangqin University, a leading provincial university of Guangdong, to study geography. As soon as she entered the university, the Japanese launched a full-scale war against China. Responding to the Nationalist government's call to organize a resistance war, Sze-Kew joined the military training program for high school and college students sponsored by the Guangdong provincial government. She received a strict military training, marching over fifty miles during the daytime and camping at night, and acquired nursing skills by tending to wounded soldiers. After one year of military training, she returned to Xiangqin University to continue her education. In 1941 she obtained her bachelor's degree in geography and also won the national college thesis competition.

² *Kirksville Daily Express*, 11 March 1958; Lu Ding, *Dailu Nianhua [Those Golden Years of My Life]* (Taipei, Taiwan: Lu Ding, 1993).

³ While working on this project, the author interviewed over fifty Asian-American women, mostly Chinese, from Kirksville, La Plata, and Greentop, Missouri. The majority of these women have maintained successful professional lives and satisfactory personal lives.

⁴ There are two Chinese spelling systems—Wade-Giles and Pinyin—in scholarly writings. To avoid confusion, the author will use the Pinyin system for Chinese names, unless a preferred transliteration of certain proper nouns, such as "Chiang Kai-shek" (Wade-Giles) for "Jiang Jieshi" (Pinyin) and "Yangtze" (Wade-Giles) for "Changjiang" (Pinyin), has been widely used.

Wars and social upheavals in China delayed Sze-Kew's plans to further her education in geography. She first worked as a researcher at the National Geography Research Institute in Chongqin, Sichuan, jointly supported by the wartime Nationalist government and the British government. With the communist victory imminent, Sze-Kew moved to Taiwan in 1947, where she taught geography courses at the Teacher's College of Taiwan. In 1952 the Nationalist government initiated a program to grant scholarships to individuals for study in the United States after five years of government service. Sze-Kew applied for and received one of the eight annual governmental scholarships of \$500, enough for a trip to America. Meanwhile, she applied to the University of Oregon in Eugene and was accepted with a scholarship.⁵

Using the \$500 from the Taiwanese government for a steamship ticket, Sze-Kew sailed to the United States via Hong Kong in 1952. When she arrived in the geography department at the University of Oregon in February 1953, she found herself the only female student.⁶

⁵ Sze-Kew Dun, interviews by author, Kirksville, Mo., 13 August 1992, 1 August 1994.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 13 August 1992.

Prior to her arrival in the United States, Sze-Kew Dun (second row, fourth from left) taught geography at the Teacher's College of Taiwan.

Courtesy Sze-Kew Dun



Since her scholarship only covered tuition, Sze-Kew had to find means of support. A friend introduced her to Alvin C. and Grace Stockstad, an American couple who operated a local appliance store. The Stockstads offered Sze-Kew room and board in exchange for daily and weekly household chores.⁷

After having been an independent career woman for many years, Sze-Kew now had to start from scratch, supporting her graduate education by being a housekeeper. She recalled this experience:

It was fun to live with the Stockstads. [When I first met them,] they asked me if I knew how to vacuum carpet, and I said no because I had never done housework in China. So they taught me how to clean the house. I remember one time I broke a cup while washing dishes. I told Mrs. Stockstad I wanted to pay for it. But she laughed: "If nobody broke anything, those shops will have to close!" In another occasion, when I was cleaning the fireplace, one of the ornaments on the fireplace fell down and wrecked the glass door of the fireplace. I thought this time I would be in big trouble, and I tried to find people to fix it. When the Stockstads learned [of] the accident they comforted me: "Don't worry! Our insurance will cover the cost of repairing." Two weeks later, they had the door of the fireplace fixed. I was very upset at myself and wondered why they still wanted to hire me. So I went to ask them why they hired me. The Stockstads answered: "We have hired you because you are very honest and very sweet. You are always smiling to us." It was true. I treated them like my parents. Every time when I heard their car enter the garage driveway, I would run to the door to greet them and help them to take off coats, and they were so pleased. They were also very nice to me, and because of that their only son was very jealous of me.⁸

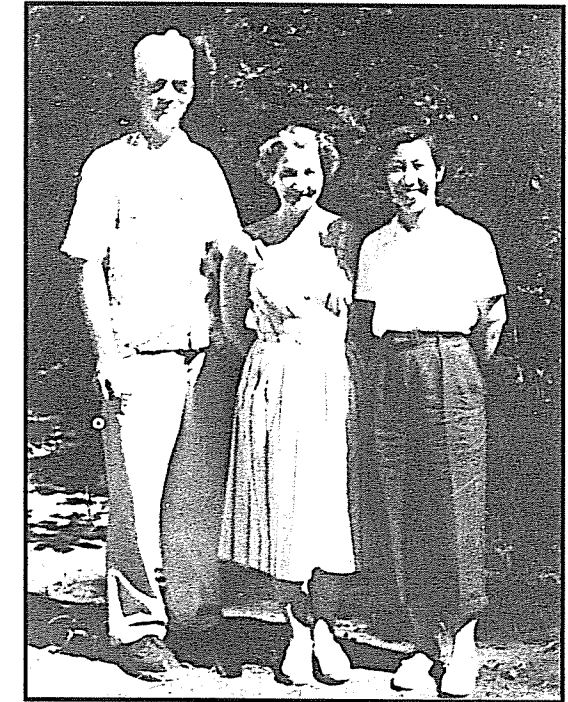
The couple became Sze-Kew's first American friends. She called them her "foster parents," and they offered her parentlike care, support, and advice on occasion. Mrs. Stockstad taught Sze-Kew practical tips on American life: how to cook American dishes, how to decorate a house, and how to make friends but not to be hurt. In return, Sze-Kew introduced Chinese culture to the Stockstads and their friends. The relationship between the young woman and the Stockstads grew so strong that the couple often called her their "Chinese daughter," and they financed her wedding when she married Fwu Taring Dun.⁹

Hard work and success characterized Sze-Kew's life at the University of Oregon. She had difficulty with English and oftentimes could not follow the

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Since the interviews of Sze-Kew Dun were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, the quotations in the article have been translated by the author from the original transcript in Chinese. Sze-Kew Dun, interviews, 13 August 1992, 19 July 1995.

⁹ Ibid., 13 August 1992, 19 July 1995.

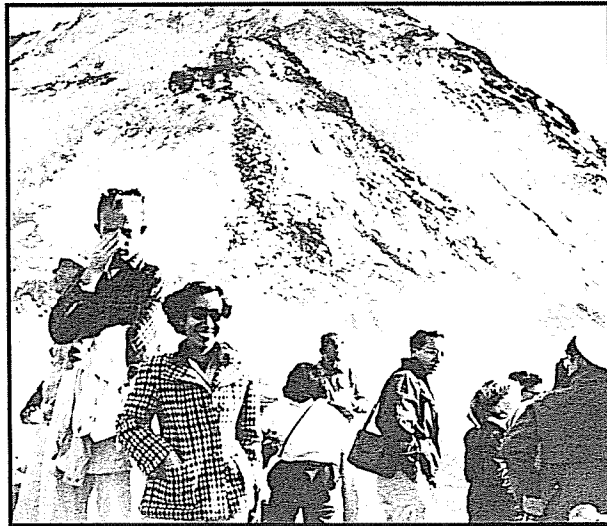


Grace and Alvin Stockstad of Eugene, Oregon, played a vital role in Sze-Kew's successful transition to life in the United States.

Courtesy Sze-Kew Dun

lectures. To understand the lectures, she had to read the textbooks over and over. Mrs. Stockstad volunteered to edit Sze-Kew's papers. With determination and hard work, Sze-Kew managed to have a good academic record. In addition to maintaining good grades, in January 1954, she conducted an exhibit of her traditional, Chinese southern-style paintings in the university gallery. It attracted a local crowd. Several area newspapers reported the event, and professional artists commented on the works. Wallace Baldinger, a professor of art at the University of Oregon, enthusiastically praised Sze-Kew's paintings: "Before seeing her pictures I thought that no Chinese today, after the tragic years of recent history in China, could possibly paint in the central line of Chinese tradition and that, too, with such freshness of feeling, and assurance of touch. With fervor comparable to that of the great Southern Sung masters she captures in her works the very immensity and rugged grandeur of the mountains. In so doing, she betrays a command of brushwork possible only to one who has devoted years to constant drill and intensive application in the handling of the brush."¹⁰

¹⁰ [University of Oregon] *Asian Student*, 5 February 1954; *Eugene Oregon Daily Emerald*, 25 January 1954; Sze-Kew Dun, interview, 19 July 1995.



Courtesy Sze-Kew Dun

Oregon's impressive mountains and beautiful terrain afforded Sze-Kew the opportunity to take field trips.

In 1953, while working on her master's degree, Sze-Kew met a young Chinese scholar, Fwu Taring Dun, through a Chinese professor of physics at the University of Oregon who was the husband of Fwu Taring's cousin. The relationship developed rapidly. Late that year, Fwu Taring decided to take a position at the Kirksville College of Osteopathy and Surgery in Missouri. Not only was the cost of living lower in Kirksville, but the college also offered a higher salary than the University of Washington at Seattle, where he was an assistant research neurophysiologist. Fwu Taring proposed to Sze-Kew and asked her to accompany him to Kirksville. Then in the middle of her master's program in geography, Sze-Kew had difficulty in choosing between finishing her education and marriage. She was deeply in love with Fwu Taring, however, and she accepted his proposal.¹¹

When Sze-Kew called her aunt, Yi-yuan Chen, in Taiwan, she opposed this decision. Yi-yuan Chen, who had been an important role model in Sze-Kew's life, had participated in Chiang Kai-shek's Northern Expedition from 1926 to 1928 and was later appointed as the secretary of the women's department in the Nationalist government in Nanjing.¹² She had studied at the University of Michigan in the early 1930s and was named the first female

¹¹ Sze-Kew Dun, interviews, 13 August 1992, 1 August 1994, 19 July 1995.

¹² The Northern Expedition of 1926-1928 was a military campaign led by Chiang Kai-shek. It attempted to wipe out the northern warlords who ruled China after the 1911 revolution. For more information see Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 523-531.

general in the Nationalist army during the Sino-Japanese War. In 1949 she had moved to Taiwan with the Nationalist government and become a senior member of the Legislative Yuan of the Republic of China. Sze-Kew's aunt wanted her to finish the degree before marrying. Although Sze-Kew respected and admired her aunt, she defied her this time: "All right! I will break off with him and finish my degree. But don't blame me that I could not find a husband." Sze-Kew's aunt and grandmother, who also went to Taiwan to join Sze-Kew in 1949, had always been concerned about her chance to marry so they finally permitted Sze-Kew to marry Fwu Taring.¹³

In August 1954, the newlywed couple arrived in Kirksville and decided to make the town their home. From the outset, Sze-Kew constantly faced the challenge of balancing her family and her educational and occupational pursuits.

Kirksville is located in the northeast corner of Missouri, thirty-five miles from the Iowa state line and seventy-two miles from the Mississippi River. Before the town was laid out in 1841 and became the Adair County seat in 1842, some European-American settlers had resided in this area known as "The Cabins." Jesse Kirk, an early settler, lived in the present vicinity of Kirksville and kept a tavern. According to tradition, Kirk offered a turkey dinner to the surveyors in exchange for naming the new town in his honor.¹⁴ During the last 150 years, the settlement has grown into a small city with two nationally competitive institutions of higher education—Northeast Missouri State University (NMSU) and Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine (KCOM)—along with manufacturing, agriculture and stock raising, and food processing industries.

Among all the factors contributing to the Duns' settlement choice, the two higher educational institutions in Kirksville probably proved the most decisive. Northeast Missouri State University, known then as Northeast Missouri State Teachers College, was founded on September 2, 1867, by professor Joseph Baldwin, an educator from Indiana, to train teachers for the public school system. In the last century, the school has evolved from a regional normal school to a highly regarded liberal arts institution.¹⁵ On July 1, 1996, Northeast Missouri State University changed its name to Truman State University, the sixth name change since the institution's inception.

¹³ Sze-Kew Dun, interviews, 13 August 1992, 1 August 1994, 19 July 1995.

¹⁴ E. M. Violette, *History of Adair County* (1911; reprint, Kirksville, Mo.: Journal Printing Company, 1977), 342; Amanda Thompson, ed., *Pages of Our Past: Adair County, Missouri* (Marceline, Mo.: Heritage House, 1993), 4.

¹⁵ Violette, *History of Adair County*, 191-196. According to *Money* magazine's annual survey of the nation's top one hundred college best buys in 1994, NMSU ranked fifth in the nation, making it the only midwestern school in the top ten. See *Kirksville Daily Express*, 25 August 1994, and *Kansas City Star*, 10 October 1994.

Another school of monumental importance founded in Kirksville is the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine, known until 1972 as the Kirksville College of Osteopathy and Surgery (KCOS). In 1874 Andrew Taylor Still founded the science of osteopathy, a theory of medicine contending that normal body functions can be restored through the manipulation of the musculoskeletal system. After searching for an ideal town in which to establish his college, Still opened the first American school of osteopathy in Kirksville in 1892. Since those early days, the medical school has expanded greatly and inspired thirteen other accredited osteopathic colleges in the United States.¹⁶

To the Duns, Kirksville College of Osteopathy and Surgery provided an ideal setting for Fwu Taring to conduct research and teach while Northeast Missouri State Teachers College offered Sze-Kew the opportunity to continue her education. Fwu Taring became an associate professor of physiology at KCOS, with teaching duties of only one physiology course per year. He devoted most of his time to research in his lab and the presentation of papers on nerve conduction and transmission of impulses across the synapses at professional conferences.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Sze-Kew enrolled at Northeast Missouri State Teachers College, majoring in fine arts, a field she had enjoyed for a long time.

The two colleges were not only working places for the Duns but also provided them with a social network to other professionals and their families. Walter H. Ryle, the seventh president (1937-1967) of Northeast Missouri State Teachers College, hosted social activities and annual banquets for faculty members and their families during his presidency. The Duns attended and greatly enjoyed these banquets.¹⁸ Apart from the presidential banquets, the lectures on current political issues delivered by No-Yong Park—a Harvard Ph.D. in international relations and a guest lecturer at NMSU from 1940 to 1974—provided cultural highlights for the Duns and the town. The couple also became personal friends of President Ryle and Irvin M. Korr, the chairman of the physiology department at Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine in the 1950s, and they frequently exchanged visits.¹⁹

In this college town, Sze-Kew also developed friendships with two other Asian-American women. Bella Shao, the wife of a late professor of economics at Northeast Missouri State University, moved to Kirksville with her husband in 1954. Although Bella had been born in San Francisco and Sze-

¹⁶ Thompson, *Pages of Our Past*, 5.

¹⁷ Georgia Warner Walter, *The First School of Osteopathic Medicine* (Kirksville, Mo.: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1992), 304, 307, 334.

¹⁸ Sze-Kew Dun, interview, 16 March 1996; Bella Shao, interview by author, Kirksville, Mo., 10 September 1992.

¹⁹ See *The Index*, Northeast Missouri State University, 1940-1974; Sze-Kew Dun, interview, 16 March 1996.

Kew in Guangzhou, both spoke Cantonese and enjoyed each other's company. The two women formed a lifelong friendship.²⁰ Lanhei Kim Park, a Korean woman and the wife of Dr. Park, resided in Kirksville every spring when her husband came to lecture and spent the rest of the year in their permanent home in Ocean Side, California. Trained in fine arts and interested in Chinese literature, Lanhei had much in common with Sze-Kew, and the two consequently became close friends.²¹

The small town itself proved very hospitable to the Duns. Kirksville was a typical cozy midwestern small town in the 1950s. Most of the businesses, such as banks, grocery, drug, and clothing stores, along with other shops, were located on "the square," the downtown business district, and everything lay within walking distance. None of the present supermarkets, fast-food restaurants, and other businesses along Highway 63 existed then.²² The cost of living in Kirksville was low. For \$1.50, one "[could] get a good meal in a decent restaurant such as [the] Old Trading Post." House rentals ranged from \$65 to \$85 a month. Although a small town, Kirksville served as a cultural center for the area. People from the neighboring towns came to this "friendly city" to shop and to seek medical services.²³ The townspeople always greeted the Duns when they met in the street. After many years of unsettled life, Sze-Kew felt at home in Kirksville.

At Northeast Missouri State Teachers College, Sze-Kew's artistic talent again drew attention from both professionals and the general public. The Division of Fine Arts sponsored Sze-Kew's personal art exhibit in February 1955. The exhibition of twenty-eight traditional Chinese paintings offered a fresh taste of Chinese art to the local community.²⁴ Since Northeast Missouri State Teachers College did not then offer master's programs in either geography or the fine arts, Sze-Kew considered applying to a graduate school on the East Coast. The arrival of Weysan, the Duns' only child, in 1955 altered Sze-Kew's educational plans.

As a mother, a wife, and a college student, Sze-Kew had a busy life. Regardless, she managed to remain active in her art work and local cultural events. On March 13, 1958, she presented a Chinese art program at the meeting of the Kirksville branch of the American Association of University

²⁰ Sze-Kew Dun, interview, 16 March 1996.

²¹ See Lanhei Kim Park, *The Heavenly Pomegranate* (Kirksville, Mo.: Simpson Publishing Company, 1973); No-Yong Park, *Chinaman's Chance: An Autobiography* (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1943), 125-131; and Sze-Kew Dun, interviews, 1 August 1994, 16 March 1996.

²² Bella Shao, interview; Sze-Kew Dun, interview, 16 March 1996.

²³ Bella Shao, interview; Sze-Kew Dun, interview, 1 August 1994.

²⁴ *Kirksville Daily Express*, 7 February 1955. See also "Sze-Kew Dun, Chinese Artist, Shows Unusual Art Display in Baldwin Hall," *Teachers College Index*, Kirksville, Mo., 16 February 1955.



Courtesy Sze-Kew Dun

On February 15, 1955, Northeast Missouri State Teachers College held a one-person show of Sze-Kew's traditional Chinese paintings.

Women (AAUW). Her landscape paintings as well as her refined Chinese dress caught the attention of the audience and the local media.

Mrs. Sze-Kew Chen Dun of Kirksville, an outstanding Chinese artist, presented the program on Chinese art . . . Mrs. Dun . . . presented many pictures that she had painted. The pictures are first brushed on with grey-black and then tinted. There are no heavy brush colors and much refinement is shown in each picture. The Chinese use brushes made of bamboo. They grind their paints themselves, and use a certain type of paper which is also made from bamboo.

Mrs. Dun's dress was a pure silk red chemise, which was made and tailored by hand in China. Her tan embroidered jacket was finger-tip and straight-lined with lamb's fur trim on the sleeves and around the front edges and neck.²⁵

On May 4, 1958, during a program at the arts fair sponsored by the Sojourners Club of Kirksville and the Kirksville branch of the AAUW, Sze-

²⁵ *Kirksville Daily Express*, 16 March 1958. The author of this article made a mistake: the special paper used for Chinese painting is made of rice, not bamboo. See also *ibid.*, 11 March 1958.

Kew demonstrated Chinese painting and discussed her art works with the audience. She also displayed a variety of unusual Chinese food items.²⁶

Sze-Kew's reputation as an outstanding Chinese female artist grew not only in Kirksville but gradually throughout Missouri and the Midwest. In 1964 the Columbia Art League sponsored an exhibit of her paintings in Columbia. In the following year, Sze-Kew's work was chosen from among 1,152 works as one of the 89 entries to be displayed at the fifteenth Mid-America Annual Art Exhibition. The exhibit showcased contemporary works produced by artists from an eight-state region including Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Oklahoma.²⁷

In 1971, at the age of 52, Sze-Kew finally earned her bachelor of science in education degree with a major in art and held her senior art show at Northeast Missouri State Teachers College. Later that year, she began to teach art classes at the elementary and junior high schools in Cairo, Missouri. These schools had never before offered an art class, and Sze-Kew's teaching greatly inspired the students' creativity. Art works produced by her students were displayed in Moberly and neighboring towns. While Sze-Kew truly enjoyed her teaching job in Cairo, some changes took place in her family. In 1973 her husband retired from the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine and purchased several rental properties; her son, Weysan, left for Cornell University. To assist her husband with the management of their rental properties, Sze-Kew quit her job in Cairo.²⁸

Although not working full-time outside of the home, Sze-Kew kept busy with reading, writing, and other intellectual activities. She subscribed to *The World Journal*, a daily Chinese-language newspaper with a wide readership among Chinese Americans, and closely followed the local and national news. Sometimes she wrote and submitted articles to *The World Journal*. In 1985 Sze-Kew started writing her memoir to distract herself from grieving the loss of Fwu Taring, who died of esophageal cancer that year.

In 1988 *The World Journal* invited readers to submit short novels on the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). Sze-Kew had personally participated in this war, and the suggestion by *The World Journal* incited her to write about her wartime experiences. Although her short novel did not attract the attention of the editor, Sze-Kew did not give up the project. She decided to write and publish a book herself. Many friends encouraged and helped her during the writing. A good friend of Sze-Kew, a Chinese student who had graduated from

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17 April 1958.

²⁷ *Columbia Art League Newsletter*, November 1964; Ralph T. Coe to Sze-Kew Dun, 23 April 1965, letter in possession of Sze-Kew Dun, Kirksville, Mo.

²⁸ *Kirksville Daily Express*, 25 January 1971; Sze-Kew Dun, interviews, 13 August 1992, 1 August 1994, 16 March 1996.

Northeast Missouri State University and returned to Taiwan, wrote to her: "It would be very valuable if you could write your experiences in Sino-Japanese war. There are not many survivors of the participants of the war."²⁹ In the summer of 1993, Sze-Kew visited Taiwan, and with the help of her friend, she had her autobiographical novel entitled *Dailu Nianhua* [*Those Golden Years of My Life*] published.

Although Sze-Kew possessed extraordinary qualities and had unusual experiences, she considered her family life to be as important as her professional life. She regarded assisting her husband and raising their son as great accomplishments.

Having been raised in an affluent family in China, Sze-Kew had never learned to cook. During her youth, she either attended school or did field work, always eating in a cafeteria. When she stayed with the Stockstads in Eugene, she learned some American cooking. After her marriage to Fwu Taring in 1954, her interest in Chinese cooking increased. Sze-Kew did not

²⁹ Lu Ding, *Dailu Nianhua*, preface.

Courtesy Sze-Kew Dun



After many years of juggling family responsibilities—and a lot of hard work—Sze-Kew received a bachelor of science degree from Northeast Missouri State College in 1971.

think of cooking as some sort of household chore; instead, she considered it fun, like painting. Frequently, she ordered materials for Chinese cooking from shops in San Francisco, Chicago, or other larger Chinese communities. Weekends afforded opportunities for friends to come to the Duns' home and taste Sze-Kew's new dishes. After Fwu Taring died in 1985, Sze-Kew's kitchen became a public kitchen for the students from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other places who loved to cook Chinese food.³⁰

After Weysan's birth in 1955, his education also became a top priority for Sze-Kew. Unlike her friend Bella Shao and many other Chinese-American women who insisted on their children speaking Chinese in the home, Sze-Kew wanted her son to first learn perfect English to facilitate his assimilation into American society. For this reason, Sze-Kew hired a local woman to be Weysan's babysitter and to teach him English. Concerned that Weysan might pick up her own accent or incorrect grammar, she consciously and consistently avoided talking to her son in English. As a result of the strict training, Weysan had an excellent mastery of the English language and spoke without an accent. A straight-A student, he graduated from Kirksville Senior High School in 1971 as an honor student and was granted a four-year scholarship to Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, to major in premedicine.³¹

Sze-Kew also taught her son to be a good citizen. She encouraged Weysan to help their neighbors with yard work and to volunteer at local hospitals and the fire station. Weysan continued his volunteer service throughout his academic career at Cornell.³² In regard to her son's marriage, Sze-Kew was open minded and voiced no ethnic preference for a prospective daughter-in-law, unlike some Chinese parents, who rejected intermarriage and disowned their children in the event of such a marriage. Weysan dated several Caucasian women at Cornell and married one of them in 1984.³³

Sze-Kew not only wanted her son to assimilate fully into the majority society, but she also consciously mingled with Kirksville society herself. As a minority and a woman, she maintained close contact with various local women's organizations. She participated in many cultural and social activities sponsored by the Sojourners Club, the oldest women's organization in Kirksville. Although named the Sojourners Club because many of its early members were temporary residents in the town, it primarily served as a local housewives' organization, sponsoring activities to promote middle-class val-

³⁰ Sze-Kew Dun, interview, 1 August 1994.

³¹ Bella Shao, interview; Sze-Kew Dun, interview, 1 August 1994.

³² Sze-Kew Dun, interview, 1 August 1994.

³³ Many parents are concerned about the loss of their ethnic identity through cultural or physical amalgamation. Since intermarriage dilutes both cultural and physical ethnic identity, it might naturally cause conflicts and strains in some families. For further discussion on this topic see Betty Lee Sung, *Chinese American Intermarriage* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1990). Sze-Kew Dun, interviews, 1 August 1994, 19 July, 2 August 1995.



Courtesy Sze-Kew Dun

Sze-Kew (left) and her husband, Fwu Taring (far right), picnic with Bella Shao and her family (center) at Thousand Hills State Park, Kirksville.

ues and funding projects to improve the public environment. Sze-Kew also involved herself with AAUW activities. A branch of the AAUW began in Kirksville as early as 1922, and it grew rapidly after 1953 when the female graduates of Northeast Missouri State Teachers College became eligible for membership. Sze-Kew attended some of the organization's meetings and sponsored programs promoting her native art and culture such as demonstrating Chinese painting and displaying Chinese food items. Some veterans and senior members of the Kirksville branch fondly recalled these programs.³⁴ Through the cultural activities in these women's organizations, Sze-Kew not only introduced Chinese culture to the local community but also was warmly received by the majority society.

In addition to participating in women's organizations, Sze-Kew maintained friendships with many European Americans in the community. Roy Starbuck and his wife, Grace, who ran a house repair business in Kirksville, helped the Duns to maintain and repair their rental properties for over thirty years. Their relationship, however, developed beyond business, and the Starbucks and the Duns became close friends. Charles McClain, the tenth

³⁴ *A Book of Adair County History* (Kirksville, Mo.: Kirksville-Adair County Bicentennial Committee, 1976), 167, 168, 171; *Kirksville Daily Express*, 11, 16 March, 27 April 1958; Ruth Towne, interview by author, Kirksville, Mo., 10 August 1995; Mary Jane Kohlenberg, interview by author, Kirksville, Mo., 19 October 1995.

NMSU president (1970-1989) and later the commissioner of the state Coordinating Board for Higher Education, was also one of the Duns' personal friends. They became acquainted through their children—Weysan, the Duns' son, and Anita, the McClains' daughter—who were high school classmates and close friends. Sze-Kew recalled one occasion when McClain came to the Duns' to pick up his daughter. Since it was dinner time, Sze-Kew invited him to eat with them. The main course—soy sauce-braised pig knuckles—is a popular Chinese delicacy and Weysan's favorite, but a strange dish to the non-Chinese. Sze-Kew was a little concerned that McClain might be discouraged by the dish. Surprisingly, McClain told Sze-Kew that braised pig knuckles was also his favorite Chinese dish and greatly enjoyed the meal.³⁵

While Sze-Kew was very comfortable with her European-American friends, many considered her a magnet for the town's Chinese community. Although remote, Kirksville had witnessed a small but steadily growing Chinese community, primarily consisting of students and faculty at the two higher educational institutions and some private entrepreneurs and their families. Sze-Kew was locally known for her friendliness and readiness to help others. Consequently, she became the common friend of most Chinese in Kirksville, and her house served as a temporary motel, a Chinese cultural club, and the unofficial information center. Her house was therefore nicknamed "The Chinese Club," and Chinese students and faculty often made connections with one another there. Weekends found her house filled with Chinese faculty members and students. Sze-Kew took care of many students from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China, orienting them to the community, providing academic advice, and cooking Chinese food. Generation after generation of Chinese students graduating from Northeast Missouri State University have kept in touch with Sze-Kew and send her gifts on her birthdays and Chinese holidays.³⁶

Sze-Kew has enjoyed living in this small rural community, feeling safe and comfortable. When asked what she liked most about Kirksville, she put a sense of security and light traffic on the top of her list.³⁷ She commented on this aspect of life in Kirksville: "I feel very safe to live in Kirksville. The crime rate is very low here. When my brother and sister from China came to visit me in 1992, they were very impressed with the fact that even if people leave their belongings outside of their house nobody would steal them. They call this town a 'kingdom of

³⁵ Sze-Kew Dun, interview, 2 August 1995.

³⁶ Newsletters, Chinese Student Association, Northeast Missouri State University; Sze-Kew Dun, interviews, 1 August 1994, 2 August 1995.

³⁷ According to the yearly review and annual report of the Kirksville Police Department, arrests for crimes such as murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson have been decreasing annually since 1987, with an average of 115 arrests per year. See Kirksville Police Department, "Crime in Kirksville: A Yearly Review and Annual Report," (Kirksville, Mo., 1994), 50-51.

gentlemen.' It is also very easy to drive in Kirksville because the traffic is slow. Even if you hit someone you would not injure him."³⁸

Sze-Kew Dun's story is representative of many Chinese intellectual women who immigrated to the United States during and after World War II to seek better educational and occupational opportunities and strived to make their dreams come true.³⁹ The road to educational and occupational success in America, however, was never smooth for Sze-Kew or many of her counterparts. Sze-Kew continuously battled financial difficulty, language barriers, and cultural unfamiliarity and made choices between family and career. Although she repeatedly sacrificed her educational and occupational opportunities for her family's sake, she maintained a fulfilling intellectual life.

³⁸ Sze-Kew Dun, interviews, 1 August 1994, 2 August 1995.

³⁹ For works on Chinese intellectual women who came to America during and after World War II see author's article, "A History of Chinese Female Students in the United States, 1880s-1990s," *Journal of American Ethnic History* (forthcoming); Rose Hum Lee, "The Stranded Chinese in the United States," *Phylon* 19 (summer 1958): 180-194; Betty Lee Sung, *Mountain of Gold: The Story of the Chinese in America* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1967), 297-298; and Judy Yung, *Chinese Women of America, A Pictorial History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 82.

Sze-Kew (third from right) poses with Chinese students and faculty members at Northeast Missouri State Teachers College in 1964.

Courtesy Sze-Kew Dun



Sze-Kew Dun's story is also unique. She lost her mother at an early age. This loss, however, made her more flexible and adaptable. The Japanese invasion interrupted her education, but the consequent military training transformed her from a naive youth into a tough soldier. She benefited from the unusual experiences of her early life and developed characteristics of flexibility, adaptability, toughness, and perseverance. These qualities helped her assimilate into American society and achieve success in spite of the obstacles. Her stay in Eugene and her friendship with the Stockstads eased the hardship and difficulties that most immigrants confront in their first years in America and prepared her for a meaningful life in Kirksville. Although Sze-Kew's arrival in Kirksville was a consequence of her marriage to Fwu Taring Dun, the couple made an unusual but rational choice. The educational and occupational opportunities, the low cost of living in Missouri, and the favorable environment for child rearing and personal safety all contributed to this decision. Utilizing her internal strength, the experiences she gained in Oregon, and the external conditions in her community, Sze-Kew succeeded in maintaining a rich and active intellectual life while assisting her husband's and son's careers, contributing to the cultural diversity of the community, and assimilating into the local society.

Sze-Kew Dun's case indicates that small rural areas in the Midwest have been receiving Chinese Americans since World War II due to the lower cost of living and the higher level of safety. Yet, larger urban centers on the East and West Coasts have remained the arrival ports and places of settlement for most Chinese Americans. Her experiences also reveal that in the absence of an established ethnic support system, the story of survival and success for the Chinese in northeast rural Missouri is significant and relevant in studying ethnic adaptability and assimilation into American mainstream society.

Sze-Kew Dun's case might differ from other Chinese women who settled in small midwestern towns. Her life story, however, has offered significant insights into the experiences of Chinese-American women in the region and has expanded knowledge about the immigration history of Missouri.

Three of a Kind

Palmyra Weekly Southern Sentinel, January 21, 1857.

"You look as though you were beside yourself," said a wag to a fop who happened to be standing by a donkey.—"Right," quoth the fop, "and your being here makes quite a trio of notables."