

MORE THAN HATCHETMEN: CHINESE EXCLUSION AND TONG WARS IN

PORTLAND, OREGON

by

Brenda M. Horrocks

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

History

Approved:

Colleen O'Neill, Ph.D.
Major Professor

Angela Diaz, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Li Guo, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Richard S. Inouye, Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2019

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ABSTRACT

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by

Brenda M. Horrocks, Master of Arts

Utah State University, 2019

Major Professor: Dr. Colleen O'Neill
Department: History

During the middle to late nineteenth century, Chinese immigration hit record levels in the United States. This led to the growth of Chinatowns across the West Coast. Many citizens and government leaders argued that Chinese immigrants posed a threat to the American way of life and took jobs away from white men. These fears stoked anti-Chinese sentiment and were driving factors for riots and massacres protesting Chinese immigrants. The Sinophobia culminated in the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which strictly limited Chinese immigration. To help adjust to a new country, increased limitations on their labor, and widespread discrimination, Chinese immigrants created associations centered on addressing the needs and providing services denied to them by local and federal government. One type of group formed, known as tongs, particularly focused on physical and economic protection. Historically, examination of the tongs reduced them to criminals, referring to them as the gangs of Chinatown. This thesis shows that tongs were more complicated and played an important role in Chinatown. They provided protection for their members, legal assistance when necessary, and helped men find employment. Tongs often fought one another in conflicts known as

tong wars during the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries. Looking at Portland's 1917 Tong War, this thesis examines how local government, tongs, and other Chinese organizations fought one another for control of Chinatown. During the 1920s, tong wars declined and by the late 1930s, tong wars ceased to exist. Tong wars ended due to the improved circumstances of Chinese immigrants and their descendants.

Individually, and as groups, Chinese immigrants fought against prejudice in their jobs and communities. They hired lawyers and fought discrimination in the courts. Federal and local legislative changes took place, including the overturn of the Chinese Exclusion Act by 1943, which allowed for new immigration and the opportunity for immigrants to become citizens. As members relied less and less on tongs for protection and assistance, most tongs transitioned from being key pillars in Chinatown to simple fraternal orders. This work broadens understanding of immigrant communities and the responses of immigrants to discrimination.

(113 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

More Than Hatchetmen: Chinese Exclusion and Tong Wars in Portland, Oregon

Brenda M. Horrocks

During the middle of the nineteenth century, vast numbers of Chinese immigrants arrived on the west coast of the United States. Here, they sought a better life for themselves and their families back home. The new arrivals often became targets of violence and discrimination as anti-Chinese sentiment grew in the country. Chinese immigrants protected and provided for themselves by creating a variety of organizations in their communities. One such organization became known as the tong. Many groups organized themselves around family names, regional background, or employment, but tongs accepted anyone who wanted to join. The promise of physical protection, economic gain, and acceptance in a community incentivized many Chinese men to join tongs. Tongs provided a space in which Chinese men could reclaim masculinity and practice traditional gender roles. Faced with discrimination, physical abuse, marginalization, and governmental neglect, tongs filled the power vacuum in Chinese communities. Tongs became powerful leaders within Chinatowns across the West. Beginning in the 1880s, tongs clashed with one another in events known as tong wars. By 1930, the era of tong wars came to an end. Once the powerhouse of the Chinese community, tong influence declined as Chinese residents successfully gained recognition, and fought back against racism and legislative discrimination. During the twentieth century, tongs transitioned from groups focused on economic gain (often through vice) and physical protection of its

members to a fraternal order within Chinatown. Examination of tongs, tong wars, and the reasons for their decline creates greater understanding of Chinese communities and a broader understanding of how immigrant communities respond to discrimination within communities, and denied governmental protection and assistance.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Colleen O’Neill, Dr. Angela Diaz, and Dr. Li Guo for their mentoring, edits, and encouragement. To Dr. O’Neill, thank you for your guidance and helping me to improve my writing. Thank you, Dr. Diaz, for your example, and for opening my eyes to the importance of transnationalism. Dr. Guo, I am thankful for your enthusiasm, and for introducing me to new ways of thinking about my project.

I offer my special thanks to the Utah State History Department. Over the years, numerous professors within the department have shaped my education and provided invaluable advice. I am grateful to each of you.

Thank you to the archivists at the National Archives in Seattle, for guiding me through the Chinese Exclusion records. I am indebted to the archivists at the City of Portland Archives, especially Mary Hansen. She seemingly knows everything about Portland, and patiently helped me track down a few hard-to-find documents. Thank you, Mary, for our conversations and sharing your knowledge with me. I would also like to express my gratitude for those at the Oregon Historical Society, particularly Elerina Aldamar. Thank you for taking an interest in my project and helping me find what I need. It means a great deal to me.

This thesis could not have been completed without the support of my parents. I love you both. Special thanks to my cohort, who became a second family to me. Finally, to Jonathan, thank you for believing in me.

Brenda Horrocks

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

The War of the Tongs, a film featuring an all Chinese cast, first premiered on February 19, 1917. The movie was written by a Chinese American and shot in San Francisco's Chinatown. The film follows Wong Wing, a tea merchant's clerk, as he falls in love with a girl named Suey Lee. Another man, Chin Ting, a rich landlord and head of a local Chinese fraternal association known as a tong, also desires Suey Lee. This struggle grows and becomes the central conflict between the opposing tongs. A tong war breaks out as fighting ensues between the two groups, resulting in the death of several men, and only in the final moments is Suey Lee saved from Chin Ting by her lover.¹

Ironically, the film portrayed a romanticized version of a very real conflict taking place only one state away. At the time of the film's debut, fighting in Portland's Chinatown between the allied tongs Hip Sings and Bow Leongs against the Hop Sings and Suey Sings was already well under way. Sparked by a skirmish in Portland in early February, the tong war of 1917 quickly spread through Chinatowns across the West Coast. *War of the Tongs* portrayed a glamorized version of tong wars. The film depicted tong wars as moral battles, fighting for true love, the involvement restricted to tong members, and devoid of outside participants. However, the reality of tongs and tong wars proved messier. Fighting often broke out over debts, Chinatown residents often found themselves in the crossfire, and local government frequently involved themselves in the conflict.

¹ Bruce Calvert, "War of the Tongs," The Silent Film Still Archive, Last modified April 2, 2008. https://www.silentfilmstillarchive.com/war_of_the_tongs.htm.

This thesis seeks to explore the Chinese associations known as tongs, the reasons for their existence, and the roles they played within Chinatowns during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Simplistically classifying tongs as the criminal component of Chinatown ignores the important contributions of tongs to their communities.² I argue that tongs provided an important role in the community by checking government overreach. Tongs also provided physical protection for its members, which local law enforcement routinely denied them.

Tongs developed as a response to the pervasive hostility and discrimination that greeted Chinese immigrants upon their arrival to the United States. Denied fair wages, access to labor, and equal standing before the law, Chinese immigrants turned inward for protection and assistance, creating a variety of associations. While many groups organized around a family name, or status, the tongs offered a more egalitarian approach as they accepted members regardless of their socioeconomic background and independent of family names.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the majority of tongs participated in numerous illegal activities, including opium smuggling, gambling, and illegal immigration. Disagreements frequently arose between tongs over control of these ventures. Often disagreements developed into physical confrontations known as tong wars that lasted anywhere from a few days to several months. However, during the 1920s and 30s, the wars declined rapidly and then stopped. I argue that tong wars ended due to

² Scott D. Seligman, *Tong Wars: The Untold Story of Vice, Money, and Murder in New York's Chinatown* (New York: Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2016). In his book, Seligman focuses on the illegal activities of tongs, the violence of tong wars, and the need for local government to bring an end to it.

Chinese residents successfully fighting against discrimination, both on group and individual levels, in the courts as well as the workplace. Combating discrimination not only brought an end to tong wars, but also altered the nature of tongs themselves. As members ceased turning to their tongs for assistance, most evolved into simpler fraternal organizations.

The first chapter of this thesis centers on the beginning of Chinese immigration to the western United States, discussing the discrimination immigrants faced at work and in communities, along with the legislative restrictions placed upon them. As the Chinese immigrant population increased in the west, so did anti-Chinese sentiment. As disgruntled workers argued that Chinese immigrants stole jobs from white workers and posed a threat to communities, angry citizens rioted, protesting the presence of Chinese. The sinophobia of the era also developed into violent action against the Chinese, as massacres of Chinese residents occurred in parts of California, Wyoming, and Oregon during the late nineteenth century. Surrounded by a hostile environment, many Chinese residents learned English, joined Christian churches, and assumed western styles of dress and grooming. However, the groups that Chinese immigrants organized themselves into proved to be the most successful avenue for Chinese immigrants to survive, and for some, to prosper within society.

The second chapter covers the creation of the first tong and the subsequent growth of tongs in the United States. Early on the group known as the Chinese Six Companies operated as one of the most powerful Chinese organizations in the western United States. However, dissatisfied with its preferential treatment for select family groups, a merchant named Mock Wah formed the Kwong Dock Tong along with a small group of men. The

Kwong Dock Tong is recognized as the first tong. From here tongs continued to grow and more than fifteen existed by the end of the nineteenth century.³ I argue that tongs served a multitude of purposes for Chinese residents, both revealing and filling the failings of local government in providing for new immigrants. Tongs promised men, and their families, physical and legal protection, gainful employment, and a brotherhood. Tongs allowed men to reclaim masculinity and traditional gender norms in a society that restricted their labor and ability to create families. Using the case study of Portland's Tong War of 1917, this chapter examines tong wars and the impact of them on Chinatowns. Not only did rival tongs fight against one another, but against the local government as well as it used the tong war as a pretext to crackdown on Chinatown, often using extralegal methods to control the region.

Chapter three continues the examination of Portland's 1917 Tong War, as the war entered the courtroom with cases being heard against tong members. A few months later the tongs signed a peace pact effectively ending the war. I argue that the peace pact held for a number of reasons, but primarily because the tongs themselves initiated and controlled the peace negotiations, rather than having it forced on them by government leaders.

Although a few more conflicts occurred during the next decade, tongs wars quickly became a memory, rather than a reality of life. Historians have argued a variety of reasons to explain the end of the tong war era. Seligman claims that tong wars ended

³ Eng Gong and Bruce Grant, *Tong War!* (New York: Nicholas L. Brown, 1930), 5.

due to the Great Depression coupled with a demographic shift.⁴ While the Great Depression brought about dramatic changes throughout all parts of American society, tong wars were already in decline previous to the Great Depression. As such, this economic argument fails to explain what initiated the downturn. However, sources reveal a more foundational reason for the end of tong wars. I contend that tong wars ended chiefly because the political and social situation of Chinese immigrants changed. Federal legislation began to change, and in 1943 President Roosevelt brought an end to Chinese exclusion when he signed the Magnuson Act. Likewise, this act allowed for Chinese immigrants to become U.S. citizens. Chinese residents pushed back against discrimination in the courtroom and the work force. As the twentieth century progressed, public opinion of Chinese immigrants changed, they gained better access to jobs and fair wages, and ability to integrate in communities. Once the powerhouse of the Chinese community, tong influence declined as Chinese residents successfully gained recognition, and fought back against racism and legislative discrimination.

Most history texts on Chinese immigration to the United States include a discussion of ‘tongs.’ At times, the author spends a couple pages discussing the nature and activities of tongs. Other times, tongs are briefly covered, simplistically described as the criminal groups in Chinatown.⁵ However, the existence of tongs and the roles they

⁴ Scott D. Seligman, *Tong Wars: The Untold Story of Vice, Money, and Murder in New York's Chinatown* (New York: Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2016), 258.

⁵ There is an absence of real discussion of tongs in Mary Roberts Coolidge's *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1909). Erika Lee does not address tongs in her work, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-194* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). Lucy Salyer's work conflates tongs with triads and gangs. As this thesis will show, these are separate groups. Lucy Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers: Chinese Immigration and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). 40-41. Exceptions to this are Marie Rose Wong and Sucheng Chan. Marie Rose Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of*

played within Chinatowns during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are much more complex. As tongs played a vital role in Chinatowns in relation to the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, local government, and individual residents, more research is needed on tongs themselves. Rather than being typecast as the worst parts of Chinatown, historians need to address the nuanced existence of tongs. Yes, they were involved in illicit businesses, violence, and at times corruption. However, they also provided a way for many Chinese men, unable to make ends meet, to make more money to provide for themselves and their families. They also provided legal counsel and representation for members when necessary, this is especially important as the cost of lawyers was often well beyond the financial capabilities of most individuals. This allows for greater understanding in why ethnic societies are created and what purposes they serve in minority populations and communities.

Chinese immigration is a well-developed field of study in history. Early on, California became home to one of the largest Chinese populations in the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, centered in San Francisco's Chinatown. In the past most scholarly works on Chinese immigration focused on California and then generalized those experiences to the rest of Chinese residents in the West. However, more recent historians, like Marie Rose Wong, in her work *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland Oregon*, examines the experience of Chinese immigrants outside of San Francisco and California showing the ways in which their experiences were similar and different to those in California. California centric history fails to explain

Portland, Oregon (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004). Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991).

the population growth Wong reveals in Portland during the Exclusion Era, nor does it recognize that enforcement of the Exclusion Act varied across location and the people in charge.⁶ As historian Marie Rose Wong argues, the enforcement of the Exclusion Act was not properly funded, nor did it have sufficient oversight to maintain uniformity in its execution. Focusing on Portland, this thesis examines the 1917 Tong War and how tongs, other Chinese organizations, and the local government all fought for control of Chinatown.

Transnationalism has also furthered the field of immigration studies. Historians such as Fredy González, Kornel Chang, and Grace Peña Delgado emphasize the importance of borderlands between the United States and Mexico, as well as between the United States and Canada.⁷ These works are crucial for understanding the impact different nations had on immigration and the ways that borderlands were used to circumvent exclusion in the United States. The region around the nation's borders became important areas for tong activities involving drugs and human smuggling.

Conflating all Chinese immigrant experiences to those found in California homogenizes Chinese immigrant identity and neglects regional difference, particularly during the Exclusion Era. The portrayal of Chinese residents, in the United States, as a uniform group also perpetuates stereotypes that simplistically divides the community into

⁶ Marie Rose Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 7. Most historians write only that Chinatowns shrank. Wong successfully argues against this showing that although it was rare, it did occur in Portland's Chinatown.

⁷ Fredy González, *Paisanos Chinos: Transpacific Politics among Chinese Immigrants in Mexico* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017). Kornel Chang, *Pacific Connections: The Making of the U.S.-Canadian Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). Grace Peña Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

merchants, launderers, and poor laborers. This limits analysis of the intersection of race and class; not only within Chinatowns, but throughout the United States, particularly the role of class in minorities claiming whiteness. Even though most Chinese immigrants to the United States came from the Guangdong (廣東), province of China, Historian Daniel Liestman critically argues they were not all the same. Rather, as Liestman contends, the Guangdong region of China was ethnically diverse and this diversity continued into the United States as they emigrated.⁸

While earlier works described Chinese immigrants as passive agents being acted upon, this thesis emphasizes their agency. I build upon the work of historians like Ronald Takaki and Erika Lee, in recognizing the group and individual agency of the people involved.⁹ However, at times historians portray only group agency, homogenizing the goals and efforts of Chinese immigrants and Chinatown.¹⁰ Rather, more work like Erika Lee's is needed, portraying individual agency, along with group agency, and recognizing that the desires of one Chinatown, did not necessarily reflect the desires of another, or even all the residents within the Chinatown.¹¹

⁸ Daniel Liestman, "Nineteenth-Century Chinese and the Environment of the Pacific Northwest," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 90, no. 1 (Winter, 1998/1999), 17.

⁹ Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1909). This work creates a narrative in which Chinese immigrants simply react, with limited agency, to things happening around them. Coolidge's account contrasts sharply with the description provided by Ronald Takaki and Erika Lee. Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, 2nd ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998). Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-194* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

¹⁰ Immigrant agency is visible in the works of Takaki, Wong, and Salyer, but it is a simplified version of agency that, at times, promotes a false sense of unity within Chinese communities. Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, 2nd ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998). Marie Rose Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004). Lucy Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers: Chinese Immigration and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

¹¹ Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

The methodology of this thesis focuses on a textual approach, with newspapers, memoirs, and government records. Where possible this thesis focuses Chinese perspective itself, rather than an outsider point of view. This follows the practice of historian Gary Okihiro, who moved beyond the traditional narrative that preferenced white voices by emphasizing the voices of immigrants.¹² However, many sources concerning Chinese immigration are government and newspaper documents, both of which are primarily filtered through white voices. For the government records, particularly the *Exclusion Case Files*, I emphasize Chinese speakers. Other primary sources used in this thesis include a memoir of a previous tong leader, contemporary Chinese accounts of Chinatown, articles written by select Chinese residents, interviews with members of the Portland Chinese community, oral histories, and local and federal government documents. Together these sources reveal the negotiated presence of Chinese with Portland, the role of tongs in the community, the events of tong wars, and the ways in which the Chinese community changed during the twentieth century.

For years, historians have debated the use of newspapers as primary sources in historical analysis. Like most primary sources, they are fallible. Similar to personal accounts, newspapers reflect the reporter's bias and may mischaracterize the facts.¹³ However, newspapers both inform and reflect the attitude and worldview of the community they serve. In this way, newspapers prove to be a powerful source for

¹² Gary Okihiro, *American History Unbound: Asian and Pacific Islanders* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

¹³ Joseph Baumgartner, "Newspapers as Historical Sources," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* vol. 9, no. 3 (September 1981), 256.

understanding opinion and views of a particular group.¹⁴ Newspaper sources, particularly the *Oregonian*, are frequently utilized in this thesis. As a reputable newspaper close to the events, it is useful in tracing tong wars and the public perception of them. It is not a vehicle for yellow journalism, but has existed since the early nineteenth century and was respected for its fair coverage.

At times, a scholar may even leave out the tong wars in discussion of the tongs.¹⁵ As such, this work argues that the tong wars showcased the strength of tongs, while also weakening them. Of those who do address tong wars and a broader description of tongs, most fail to address the transition of tongs during the twentieth century. Other scholars leave out the earlier story of tongs when they were at their greatest, or discuss them as they become mythologized in Chinatown tourism.¹⁶ However, it is important to recognize that the declining influence and changing nature of tongs during the twentieth century signaled the success of Chinese residents in fighting discrimination, as well as causing another power vacuum within Chinatown.

The study of race and immigration is central to this thesis. Mae M. Ngai's work on immigration reveals as the US government created and passed immigration law, it created the category of 'illegal aliens.' Thus, those previously within the country legally

¹⁴ This method of using newspapers in historical analysis is visible in works such as Robert L. Nelson's *German Soldier Newspapers of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

¹⁵ Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, 2nd ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998) Unlike this work, Marie Rose Wong in *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon* briefly discusses tong wars, even this thesis' case study of Portland's 1917 Tong War.

¹⁶ Marie Rose Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 203. Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 103.

could now be labeled as illegals, due to new legislation.¹⁷ As Ngai showed in her work, illegal status shapes all aspects of life including work, family life, and gender roles.¹⁸ As Chinese immigrants were not only categorized as ‘non-white’ racially, but also seen as illegals in the eyes of the public, assimilation within society became more difficult and they became labeled as permanent outsiders. Historians such as Ronald Takaki have examined how race, and the impacts of racism on legislation, led to a transition in labor patterns. This legislation pushed Chinese miners into other forms of work in laundries, farms, and on the railroads.¹⁹ Peggy Pascoe’s work on marriage and miscegenation also reveals how legislation shaped American opinions on race, gender, along with the appropriate and inappropriate ways for different races to interact.²⁰ While certain forms of labor permitted interaction between ethnically Chinese people and whites, marriage, and even socialization for many, between the two groups were taboo.

Critical Race Theory, specifically as shown in David Roediger’s work on whiteness, reveals the social constructs of race and the culture of racism.²¹ The Chinese Exclusion Act passed in 1882, only seventeen years since the Civil War ended. The United States was preoccupied with race in the new post slavery world. Ideas on race

¹⁷ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), xxi.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, 2nd ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998). Another work that discusses transition to different labor options is Cecilia Tsu, *Garden of the World: Asian Immigrants and the Making of Agriculture in California’s Santa Clara Valley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). Another work showing the impact of racism of legislation for Chinese immigrants is Erika Lee, *At America’s Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

²⁰ Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²¹ David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, 3rd ed. (New York: Verso, 2007).

continued to shape what was possible for racial minorities, and how society viewed them. Using Roediger's example and building on the work of Erika Lee, this thesis examines the impacts of race and how powerful members within Chinatown complicated racial constructs.

In this thesis, I will use Edward Said's theory of Orientalism to explore the ways in which newspapers, government officials, and citizens regarded Chinese immigrants as inferior to themselves in almost all possible ways.²² This work is also shaped by social movement theory, as described by Sidney Tarrow, to understand the mobilization and group efforts of Chinese immigrants in forming protective organizations.²³ Furthermore, as tongs participated in both legal and illegal activities, this work incorporates David Brotherton's theory on gangs and how they appeal to marginalized people.²⁴ These works provide a framework for examination into the broader impacts of race, immigration, discrimination, and marginalization in shaping communities and opportunities available immigrants.

Chinese immigrants to the United States actively shaped the communities that they lived in. Faced with hostile treatment, physical abuse, and unable to find protection from legal authorities, Chinese men united together to protect one another physically, to provide economic assistance, and to create social spaces to form relationships. While frequently stereotyped as simply "Chinese gangs," these groups proved to be much more.

²² Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 25th Anniversary Ed. (New York: Random House, 1994).

²³ Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, rev.ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 23-24.

²⁴ David C. Brotherton, *Youth Street Gangs: A Critical Appraisal* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 57.

CHAPTER II A NEED FOR PROTECTION: VIOLENCE AGAINST CHINESE IMMIGRANTS

Beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Chinese arrivals to the United States faced frequent violence, widespread racism, and discriminative legislation. Nativism inspired the passage of restrictive laws and codes on the Chinese, which culminated in the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. Anti-Chinese sentiment bred discontentment among whites that erupted in anti-Chinese riots and massacres during the late nineteenth century. To alleviate the prejudice facing them, many Chinese converted to Christianity, adopted western dress, and learned English. However, the violence and racism continued and the US authorities consistently denied the Chinese community both protection and assistance. Confronted with these denials, Chinese immigrants organized themselves into groups to protect themselves and their communities. They formed groups centered around the need for self-preservation economically, financially, and physically. Hostility towards the community led to a dispersal of Chinese immigrants across the United States, as many left areas like San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Seattle for “safer” cities like Portland, and areas further east in the United States.

The Early Arrivals

Large scale emigration from China to the United States began in the middle of the nineteenth century. The discovery of Gold in California in 1848 spurred many across the globe to flock to the western coast in hopes of making their fortune. News of the

discovery quickly reached those living in the southern part of China's Guangdong province.²⁵ The people of this area suffered from famine; caused by excessive rain, subsequent flooding, and political unrest. Rebellions and a weakening Qing dynasty exacerbated the problems in China.²⁶ The economic and political chaos of southern China encouraged many, chiefly single young men, to make their way to Gum Saan, or the Gold Mountain, as California came to be known.²⁷ The Gold Rush brought over 300,000 people to California by 1854. The 1852 census for California shows a population of around 260,000. Chinese immigrants accounted for only 25,000, or 9.62% of the total population.²⁸

Chinese men travelled to the United States in hopes of finding wealth in the gold mines, but they often encountered a hostile reception. As the new Chinese arrivals competed with other American and immigrant men, discrimination and violence towards the Chinese miners quickly increased. Frequently pushed out of their claims by others, many Chinese miners often reworked abandoned mines. Using this strategy, Chinese miners could "avoid confrontations with white miners, but also to make a return on their labor."²⁹ They crafted strategies to make a living in a new country, competing economically with other native and immigrant men.

²⁵ Guangdong, also spelled Kwangtung, refer to the same province in the southern region of China.

²⁶ Additionally, the instability caused by the Opium Wars further exacerbated the problems caused by the 1851 T'ai P'ing Rebellion. For more information about the social, political, and economic conditions in China during the nineteenth century, see Philip P. Choy and Dong, Lorraine, and Marlon K Hom, *The Coming Man: 19th Century American Perceptions of the Chinese* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 17.

²⁷ Erika Lee, *At America's Gates* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 1.

²⁸ *California State Census of 1852*. California State Library. Ancestry.com

²⁹ Philip P. Choy and Dong, Lorraine, and Marlon K Hom, *The Coming Man: 19th Century American Perceptions of the Chinese* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 31.

Many Chinese miners left California and traveled north with the discovery of gold in the southern Oregon territory in 1851.³⁰ By 1855, the initial Gold Rush in California died out. Most Chinese enjoyed only marginal success in the mines, with only a few making their fortunes. Nevertheless, mining opportunities far outweighed the earning potential available back home in southern China. As such, hundreds of Chinese men continued to emigrate from China, bound for the western United States. When they arrived, these men entered various forms of employment from laboring in mines, to work in shipping, canning, and railroad construction.

Chinese laborers frequently sent part of their earnings back to China to help provide and care for family members back home. As it was not proper or economical to bring their wives and children, Chinese men supported their families across the world by sending money back. This changed later on as more wives and children joined husband and fathers in the United States as emigration from China continued into the twentieth century. Despite the regulations and exclusion, some Chinese merchants successfully brought their family members into the country. The same could not be said of Chinese laborers, who lacked social standing, funds, and legitimacy in the eyes of the US government.

The Change of American Attitudes

Chinese enthusiasm for emigration to the United States lasted beyond the influence of the Gold Rush. The period between 1870 and 1880 saw Chinese immigrant

³⁰ Philip P. Choy and Dong, Lorraine, and Marlon K Hom, *The Coming Man: 19th Century American Perceptions of the Chinese* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 23.

figures increase from 63,199 to 105,465; with over eighty percent living along the West Coast.³¹ Curious Americans considered early Chinese immigrants as oddities. Quickly however, this curiosity turned into derision. Racist attitudes towards the Chinese grew throughout the century, substantially so during times economic downturns and financial panics. However, the violent acts towards the Chinese along with restrictive legislation failed to dissuade Chinese emigration. Rather, many Chinese continued to take the journey from Southern China to the United States in hopes of a better life.

Business owners viewed the Chinese as a smart investment. From employers' perspective, they worked hard with little to no complaints, for a lot less money than their white counterparts. As discussed by a contemporary sociologist, Mary Roberts Coolidge, in 1909, California businesses, on average, paid Chinese laborers \$1.25 a day, compared to the \$2.50 -\$4.00 earned by whites for the same labor.³² Chinese workers labored in the development of cities, the construction of railroads, and assisted the growth of many businesses across the West. Employers, politicians, and city leaders regarded Chinese workers as a great resource that could facilitate both company and infrastructure development, proving a benefit to American cities. Nineteenth century historian Tuthill wrote that

“The cleanliness, politeness and good behavior of the Chinese was in everybody’s mouth and what they contributed saved several counties from bankruptcy. Certain of our manufacturing industries could not without their aid have gained a foothold thus early; nor could the Central Pacific Railway, an enterprise vital to every interest in the state, have been pushed forward with the speed it has been; not so much in the latter case, from

³¹ Marie Rose Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 62. This ten-year period was the most dramatic in terms of Chinese population growth in the United States. Wong places the exact percentage living on the West Coast a little above 83% and records a 40% increase in Chinese immigration from 1870-1880.

³² Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909), 343.

their cheapening of labor as in their filling a demand that must otherwise have remained unfulfilled.”³³

Leaders within the city placed emphasis on the idea that Chinese did the labor that no one else would. This contrasts with the depiction of the Chinese as ‘stealing jobs,’ revealing that the Chinese filled the gaps left by white labor.³⁴ This positive attitude towards Chinese labor declined over time, and during the late 1860s and 1870s, sentiment among workers, union leaders, and city officials changed as many felt the Chinese had worn out their welcome.

By the second half of the 19th century, Chinese foreignness, displayed in their Buddhist beliefs, Confucian morals, and even their traditional dress seemed to many Americans as contradictory to American ideals of Christianity, democracy, and freedom. Popular American culture deemed the Chinese residents as perpetual aliens, both unwilling and incapable of assimilation and participation in the American nation. Residents, close to areas of large Chinese populations, noted immigrants’ continued allegiance to China as a sign of disloyalty to the United States. Citizens also argued that use of the Chinese language demonstrated an immigrant’s continuing loyalty to China over the United States, and served as evidence of their refusal to integrate into society. Critics, including various politicians and labor unions, pointed to how Chinese immigrants spent their wages, and argued that they threatened the health of the American economy by sending back home part of their wages to family members in China, instead

³³ Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909), 343. Here Coolidge is quoting from Franklin Tuthill, *The History of California* (San Francisco: H.H. Bancroft & Company, 1866).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 344.

of spending it on American products and businesses.³⁵ Furthermore, these critics considered the Chinese as carriers of disease, literally threatening the health and safety of white communities. As historian Joan B. Trauner shows, both federal and local officials often used the Chinese as scapegoats to explain the failure of sanitation programs introduced during the nineteenth century, even though the programs typically had little to do with the Chinese people.³⁶

Increasingly, American men used the arguments of moral bankruptcy, economic burdens, and carriers of disease to justify violence towards the Chinese. Additionally, the argument that Chinese men deprived white men of job opportunities and a fair wage became a pervasive theme in anti-Chinese rhetoric. Anti-Chinese sentiment spread rapidly during times of economic downturn as job stability became uncertain. As recessions, depressions, and panics occurred during the late 1800s, hostility towards the Chinese festered. The Panic of 1873 and the Long Depression furthered the stereotype of Chinese workers stealing jobs from honest white laborers and encouraged violence and legislation against the Chinese, while also petitioning for the government to prevent further immigration from China.³⁷

Chinese immigrants became the scapegoats for frustrated workers and the

³⁵ Jules Alexander Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreak in Tacoma, 1885," *Pacific Historical Review* 23, no. 3 (Aug., 1954), 272.

³⁶ Joan B. Trauner, "The Chinese as Medical Scapegoats in San Francisco, 1870-1905," *California History* 57, no. 1, *The Chinese in California* (Spring, 1978), 70.

³⁷ The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed a variety of recessions, panics, and depressions. All of which furthered nativist sentiment throughout the country. Some of these include the 1853-54 recession, the Panic of 1857, the 1860-1861 recession, 1865-67 recession, 1869-70 recession, the Panic of 1873, the Long Depression (spans from 1873-1896 as a whole), 1882-85 recession, 1887-88 recession, 1890-91 recession, the Panic of 1893, Panic of 1896, and the 1899-1900 recession. Additional information regarding economic downturns and recessions in the United States can be found in the seventh chapter of Victor Zarnowitz's *Business Cycles: Theory, History, Indicators, and Forecasting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

political targets of various labor unions.³⁸ Organizations such as the Workingmen's Party of California, created in 1877, emphasized the threat of Chinese labor to white men, with chants and slogans, 'The Chinese must go!'³⁹ Almost a decade later, workers and trade unions created the American Federation of Labor, with Samuel Gompers as the president. AFL dialogue surrounding Chinese labor echoed that of the Workingmen's Party, in arguing that employment of Chinese workers meant less work for white laborers while undercutting wages, subsequently forcing white laborers to work for less pay. The Knights of Labor also pushed a nativist agenda centered on the ills of the Chinese presence in the United States and the problems they caused for white, American workers. These groups also reinforced stereotypes of Chinese immigrants as dirty, diseased, and inferior to the American people.⁴⁰ The activities and rhetoric of both groups encouraged riots against the Chinese and asserted the needs for legislative action against them.

Violence Towards the Chinese

Xenophobic behavior expressed through violent treatment and anti-Chinese riots became common place in areas with large Chinese populations. As a result, many Chinese residents banded together in organizations for protection. Many Chinese also migrated to safer areas, like Portland, to escape the abusive treatment they suffered at the hands of their white neighbors. As more Chinese entered the city, Portland's Chinatown

³⁸ Groups, such as the Knights of Labor, stirred up anger against the Chinese by arguing that the "coolies" took jobs away from more deserving white men. Clayton D. Laurie's "'The Chinese Must Go': The United States Army and the Anti-Chinese Riots in Washington Territory, 1885-1886," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (Jan. 1990), 23.

³⁹ Roger Olmsted, "'The Chinese Must Go!'" *California Historical Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (Sept., 1971), 285.

⁴⁰ Clayton D. Laurie's "'The Chinese Must Go': The United States Army and the Anti-Chinese Riots in Washington Territory, 1885-1886," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (Jan. 1990), 23.

grew and changed.

One of the earliest, large scale events of anti-Chinese violence occurred in Los Angeles, known as the Chinese Massacre of 1871. The *Sacramento Daily Union* reported that on October 21st, a disagreement between Chinese residents led to a shootout between two men. During the shootout, bullets hit nearby officer Bilderain and a bystander, Robert Thompson, with the latter later dying from his injury.⁴¹ A few days later on the night of October 24th, the *Sacramento Daily Union* reports that violence broke out and “crimes which cause Christianity to weep, civilization to blush, and humanity to mourn” took place.⁴² On that night over 500 men gathered in Chinatown, after hearing about the white casualties from the days before. A rumor also spread of Chinese killing whites in the city.⁴³ The mob of 500 men entered Chinatown, attacking and slaughtering the Chinese residents without restraint. During the night of the 24th, the mob tortured and hung eighteen Chinese men, in a twisted form of vigilante justice. Only ten faced charges brought against them for their roles in the murder of the men. However, since courtrooms did not permit Chinese testimony against whites, the judge dismissed most of the cases due to insufficient evidence.⁴⁴ The newspapers recorded witness statements that on the night of October 24th, the police officers did little to help the men targeted by the mob and that “it does not appear that any attempt whatever was made by any officer to arrest any of those who, in their presence, were openly and greatly violating the law, even to the

⁴¹ “From Los Angeles – Riot and Bloodshed – Shooting Affray – Fifteen Chinamen Hung,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, October 25, 1871.

⁴² “The Los Angeles Massacre,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, December 4, 1871.

⁴³ Scott Zesch, *The Chinatown War: Chinese Los Angeles and the Massacre of 1871* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012),132.

⁴⁴ For more information regarding the Chinese Massacre of 1871 see Scott Zesch’s *The Chinatown War: Chinese Los Angeles and the Massacre of 1871* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

taking of human life.”⁴⁵ Despite the inaction of police officials to protect Chinese residents, coverage of the massacre during the subsequent months consistently implied that ultimate blame for the carnage lay with the Chinese themselves.

Only six years later, to the north, the San Francisco Riot broke out. On the night of July 23rd, 1877 after a meeting of the Workingmen’s Party, a mob, composed of 500-600 angry white men, descended on Chinatown. Spilling into the morning of the 24th, the mob destroyed property throughout the Chinese community, including a number of Chinese laundries and the Chinese Methodist Mission.⁴⁶ Police, the militia, and volunteers joined together to put an end to the riot. The following day, Mayor Bryant denounced the riot and reassured the city that as long as he was mayor, such violence would not be permitted. He further promised that “any attempt to excite a riot will be crushed at the commencement.”⁴⁷ However, over the next few decades, his pledge of protection proved empty as the violence witnessed in the San Francisco Riot of 1877 indicated only the beginning of such abuses for the Chinese community.

While local leaders in Tacoma condemned the Chinese Massacre of 1871 in Los Angeles and the mob actions in the San Francisco Riot of 1877, anti-Chinese sentiment boiled over into violent action in 1885.⁴⁸ Problems began when a water company decided to cut costs by hiring Chinese men instead of whites. With high levels of unemployment among white men, this decision by a local employer further augmented the animosity

⁴⁵ “The Los Angeles Massacre,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, December 4, 1871.

⁴⁶ “Riot in San Francisco,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, July 24, 1877.

⁴⁷ “The Mayor’s Proclamation,” *Daily Alta California*, July 26, 1877.

⁴⁸ Newspapers at the time frequently referred to the Tacoma Riot of 1885 as the Chinese Expulsion in Tacoma.

many inhabitants felt towards the immigrant men. Many of these men joined together and created the Workingmen's Union. The union's anti-Chinese foundation upheld political aims to rid the city of the Chinese. This group grew influential and helped elect R. Jacob Weisbach, a merchant well known for his dislike of Chinese residents, to office of City Mayor. These actions, along with the creation of a new branch of the Knights of Labor in Tacoma, created more opportunities to lash out against the Chinese.⁴⁹ On February 21st, the Mayor called a meeting where locals gathered to discuss the Chinese problem and potential solutions to it. Some of these solutions included segregation and condemning immigrant stores as violating the health code. At the end of the meeting, the community decided on a plan of exclusion, centered on pushing the Chinese out from the area physically and economically starve Chinatown, stating that it was "the duty of every good citizen to discourage the giving of employment to them."⁵⁰

That same evening, Tacoma residents formed a committee to spearhead the efforts and later ordered the local Chinese to leave permanently by November 1st or else action would be taken against them.⁵¹ Some Chinese residents left willingly, and on November 3rd, a group of 500 men, physically expelled the remaining Chinese. Many travelled on to Portland, to live and work, after facing such hostility in Tacoma.⁵² The *Daily Astorian* sympathized with the desire of residents to rid themselves of the Chinese problem, stating

⁴⁹ Jules Alexander Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreak in Tacoma, 1885," *Pacific Historical Review* 23, no. 3 (Aug., 1954), 271.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Andrew Gomez, "Expulsion," Tacoma Method, University of Puget Sound, 2018, <https://www.tacomamethod.com/#home-section>.

⁵² For a more complete discussion of the Tacoma Riot of 1885, see Jules Alexander Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreak in Tacoma, 1885" or Andrew Gomez, "Expulsion," Tacoma Method, University of Puget Sound, 2018, <https://www.tacomamethod.com/#home-section>.

that

“[t]here is a natural desire on the part of a good many on this coast to get rid of the Chinese. We nearly all want to have them go and stay gone, believing that it is for the material interests of the country. Anything that can be done to further this desire is right and proper to do. Anything that tends to keep back the furtherance of the endeavor is wrong and improper.”

However, the paper continues that while the desire is right, the actions taken hindered the long-term goal and that the Chinese issue needed to be dealt with appropriately through appeals to Congress.⁵³

Several months after Tacoma expelled its Chinese residents, followed suit. On February 6-9th, white workers joined together and forcefully entered Chinese homes. Once entered, they forced the Chinese to pack their belongings and leave for the Queen of the Pacific steamship. In total, the white workers pushed more than 350 Chinese out of Seattle and onto the ship.⁵⁴ The mid-1880s witnessed a variety of other riots and massacres directed at the Chinese including the Rock Springs Massacre of 1885 in Wyoming and the Hells Canyon Massacre of 1887 in Oregon. These violent acts encouraged migration of Chinese to areas perceived as safer, like Portland and cities further east. The influx of Chinese to Portland changed the dynamics of Chinatown. The abuse of Chinese immigrants by white citizens drove many to join protective associations.

⁵³ “At Tacoma,” *The Daily Morning Astorian*, November 6, 1885.

⁵⁴ Clayton D. Laurie, “‘The Chinese Must Go’: The United States Army and the Anti-Chinese Riots in Washington Territory, 1885-1886,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 81, no.1 (Jan., 1990), 26.

Legislative Restrictions Against the Chinese

Along with physical violence, the Chinese immigrants experienced legislative prejudice. Many nativist groups sought to eliminate Chinese communities throughout the States, mainly in the West. Formal and informal restrictions limited where the Chinese could live, the sort of labor they could perform, why they could marry, the ability to testify in court, and even included the denial of rights to native born Chinese Americans.⁵⁵

The earliest legal restraints on the Chinese took form in local and state legislation. In 1850, the state of California passed the “Act for the better regulation of the Mines, and the government of Foreign Miners.”⁵⁶ This act meant that all non-native miners in California needed a license in order to work in the mines. This license included a date of issue, the citizenship of the person, age, and “complexion.” The license cost \$20 and required renewal every thirty days. The Collector of Licenses collected the names of anyone who refused to comply or neglected to renew their license and turned them over to the Sheriff whose “duty it shall be to summon a posse of American citizens, and, if necessary, forcibly prevent him or them from continuing such mining operations.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵Philip P. Choy, Lorraine Dong, and Marlon K. Hom, *The Coming Man: 19th Century American Perceptions of the Chinese* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 168. As Choy, Dong and Hom point out, the denial of rights of citizenship to Chinese Americans contradicted the guarantee of said rights protected under the fourteenth amendment. It was not until the Supreme Court case of *U.S. v. Wong Kim Ark* in 1898 that the government considered Chinese-Americans to be citizens by birth and protected by the fourteenth amendment. This book also shows the transition of American perceptions towards the Chinese from curious to disdain. This is done through analysis of cartoons in various newspapers throughout the 19th century.

⁵⁶ “An Act for the better regulation of the Mines, and the government of Foreign Miners,” Chapter 97 of the Statutes of California, Passed at the First Session of the Legislature (San Jose: J. Winchester, State Printer, 1850), California State Library, Law Department, 221.

⁵⁷ “An Act for the better regulation of the Mines, and the government of Foreign Miners,” Chapter 97 of the Statutes of California, Passed at the First Session of the Legislature (San Jose: J. Winchester, State Printer, 1850), California State Library, Law Department, 222.

Commonly referred to as the Foreign Miner's Tax, this piece of legislation proved significant in two ways. The first is the appeal of the tax to other miners seeking to lessen the competition. At \$20, the license was very expensive and discouraged many from continuing their efforts in the gold mines. Secondly, this tax became an additional source of revenue for the state. As such, this law encouraged Chinese miners to leave the goldfields, and provided additional tax revenue to the state.⁵⁸ However, the tax failed its secondary role. The California legislature repealed the act the next year in 1851, on the grounds that it financially hurt the state.⁵⁹ A new license tax for foreign miners became state law in 1852. Rather than the previous \$20 per month, the new license called for a fee of \$3.⁶⁰

Many states also passed anti-miscegenation laws, criminalizing marriage between whites and the Chinese. In Oregon, the first piece of anti-miscegenation legislation passed in 1862. In 1866, the state legislature further clarified and limited intermarriage in the "Act to Prohibit the Intermarriage of Races." This act outlawed marriages between white persons and African Americans, whites and Chinese, and whites and Native Americans. Those found to be breaking this law were subject to imprisonment from three months to one year in jail.⁶¹ Oregon's proscription on 'unsuitable' marriages occurred

⁵⁸ For additional information regarding the role of anti-Chinese legislation in the early days of California, with a focus on taxation, see Mark Kanazawa's "Immigration, Exclusion, and Taxation: Anti-Chinese Legislation in Gold Rush California," *The Journal of Economic History* 65, no. 3 (Sept., 2005), 781.

⁵⁹ "Repeal of the Foreign Miners' Tax Law," *Daily Alta California*, March 20, 1851.

⁶⁰ The state raised this fee over the next couple decades. "An Act To provide for the protection of Foreigners, and to define their liabilities and privileges," Chapter 37 of the Statutes of California, Passed at the Third Session of the Legislature (San Francisco: G.K. Fitch & Co. and V.R. Geiger & Co., State Printers, 1852), California State Library, Law Department, 84-85.

⁶¹ "Act to Prohibit the Intermarriage of Races, 1866," *Oregonian*, November 2, 1866, The Oregon History Project of the Oregon Historical Society.

within a wider framework of restricting interracial marriage. Peggy Pascoe points out that “although such marriages were infrequent throughout most of U.S. history, an enormous amount of time and energy was nonetheless spent in trying to prevent them from taking place.”⁶²

Cities also restricted Chinese labor. In Portland, the city required a license for all Chinese laundries. In April of 1885, eleven Chinese laundries wrote a letter to the city requesting that the license fees be reduced to \$5.⁶³ Portland also banned Chinese men from working on city projects and construction. Any work the city outsourced included a clause in the contract that the “undersigned promises and agrees not to employ any Chinese labor on the work.”⁶⁴ Such agreements show the appeal and centrality of Chinese labor for Portland businessmen and concerted effort of local workers to push Chinese laborers out of the wider job market.

Anti-Chinese sentiment, evidenced in both local and state ordinances, culminated in the creation of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.⁶⁵ This act built upon previous restrictions found in the 1875 Page Act which prohibited the immigration of Chinese women. The passage of the Exclusion Act placed severe restrictions on Chinese immigration for a period of ten years. After the initial ten years passed, Congress

⁶² Peggy Pascoe, “Race, Gender, and Intercultural Relations: The Case of Interracial Marriage,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 12, no. 1 (1991), 6.

⁶³ “Petition of Chinese laundrymen to the City of Portland requesting a reduction in their washhouse licenses,” April 10, 1885, Resolutions – 1879-Chinese Labor, Council Documents, Stanley Parr and Record Center, City of Portland, Portland, Oregon.

⁶⁴ “To the Committee on Sewers and Drainage,” Improvements – Sewers, Council Documents, 1891. Stanley Parr and Record Center, City of Portland, Portland, Oregon.

⁶⁵ Treaties between the United States and China were precursors to the national anti-Chinese legislation. Beginning with the 1858 Treaty of Tianjin, the two nations formally declared a friendship between them and their people. The Burlingame Treaty of 1868 followed, building upon ideas established in the previous treaty. Then in 1880, the Angell Treaty was signed. It was designed to control immigration from China into the United States, modifying the previous treaty between the two countries.

renewed the Exclusion Act for an additional ten, and further broadened its restrictions. In 1902 Congress made Chinese Exclusion permanent.

The Exclusion Act banned Chinese laborers, both skilled and unskilled, from entering the United States. The government continued to permit students, doctors, and merchants, entry into the United States.⁶⁶ As a nation, the United States prided itself on its immigrant heritage, yet it saw non-white immigrants as dangerous, who needed to be regulated.⁶⁷ While racist attitudes existed towards other immigrant communities, like Eastern Europeans and the Irish, Congress only codified the contempt towards Chinese immigrants into national law to stop entry into the United States. Unlike other immigrant groups, American society epitomized the Chinese as those unwilling and incapable of assimilation. White Americans perceived even children of Chinese ancestry, born and raised in the United States, as permanent outsiders. While denying Chinese immigrants the opportunity to integrate into society, American citizens and legislation of the United States also criticized those immigrants for wanting to return to China. This placed Chinese residents in limbo and made it impossible for the Chinese to avoid discrimination and racist violence.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was the first piece of national immigration legislation that excluded people based solely on nationality. The Chinese Exclusion Act revealed the changing feelings towards immigration in the United States, as many blamed immigrants

⁶⁶ “Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882,” *Our Documents*, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=47#> (accessed October 10, 2018).

⁶⁷ The transition of a proud nation of immigrants to controlling immigration is a central idea in Lucy Salyer’s *Laws Harsh as Tigers: Chinese Immigration and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 1. More information about the creation of a federal body to control immigration and the role of judicial processes in immigration is available in her book.

for stealing jobs, especially during economic downturns. The act also shows how racism impacted immigration legislation. The Statistical Abstract of the United States from 1882 reports that over three million immigrants entered from Europe from 1872 to 1882; with roughly one million coming from the British Isles and another million from Germany. For the same period, the record shows 168,213 immigrants entering from all Asian countries combined.⁶⁸ Also, during the nineteenth century, many Irish immigrants entered the United States, seeking relief from the Great Famine. Many American workers bristled under the increasing Irish population, but Congress did not enact legislative restrictions against Irish immigration. While Asian immigration had not even reached 200,000, the United States saw the Chinese as a threat serious enough for comprehensive, national legislation restricting their immigration.

Workers and government officials alike hoped the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act would discourage emigrating Chinese citizens from traveling to the United States. One purpose of the law involved policing national borders to prevent unwanted Chinese laborers from crossing. While the wording of the act made it comprehensive in scope, the government's ability to enforce the law quickly became challenging as both interpretation of the act and insufficient funding problematized its execution.⁶⁹ Enforcement of the Exclusion Act originally fell to the responsibility of the Customs Service, a part of the

⁶⁸ "Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1882," *United States Census Bureau*, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1883/compendia/statab/5ed.html> (accessed October 10, 2018). While the census breaks down European immigration by individual countries, it only shows a broad category of "Asian immigration". Information for the individual countries is not included in this particular census.

⁶⁹ Marie Rose Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 76.

Treasury Department. Customs officials at ports interpreted the law in various ways.⁷⁰

Ultimately how ports interpreted and imposed the act differed not only from place to place, but also between officials.

Circumventing Exclusion

The size of most Chinese communities across the West decreased as a result of the Exclusion Act. However, Portland's Chinatown experienced growth during the Exclusion Era.⁷¹ Chinese immigrants traveling to Portland from other areas along with the system of illegal immigration created after the passage of the Exclusion Act created this influx. For the Chinese, the Exclusion Act did not mean the end to immigration. It did however make a previously long process that much more difficult; as well as raising the price tag attached to the already expensive journey.

Under the Exclusion Act, documentation became central for Chinese migration to and from the United States. A Chinese laborer entering the United States typically needed to purchase forms showing false family relations, creating new identities. They purchased false documents of "fictive kin," claiming to be family members of a legally permitted Chinese immigrant. These people became known as "paper sons and daughters," documents rather than blood created these relations.

Not all Chinese people pursued this avenue. A key component of the Exclusion Act allowed merchants, doctors, and students to immigrate. As such, laborers regularly claimed membership in a higher social class; often posing as merchants. Places existed in

⁷⁰ Ibid., 76.

⁷¹ Ibid., Table 5.

China where those preparing to emigrate could borrow clothing and pose for photographs to authenticate their claims to a specific social status. With this, customs officials began to focus on the physical body, as part of the interview process, looking for signs of labor in calloused hands and weathered skin. The Department of Commerce and Labor issued certificates for registered Chinese laborers as they journeyed to China. It was necessary to present a verified certificate upon returning to the United States. The form included the statement declaring oneself to be a Chinese laborer. A few lines below included a section for physical marks and “peculiarities for identification.” Here, along with a photograph, officials wrote down weight, height, eye color, complexion, and any other physical identifiers like scars, abnormalities, etc.⁷²

Physical identifiers became cues as to the status of incoming Chinese. As in the questioning of the merchant Ngan Lim, customs officials questioned men as to whether or not their wife’s feet were “natural or bound.”⁷³ Inspectors frequently decided the legitimacy of family claims based on whether or not the applicant and the professed relation shared enough similar facial features. An example of this is Low Ying Ho and Low Heen, “alleged merchant and member of the Chew Chong Company,” stating that “There seems to be a strong family resemblance between Low Heen and the photograph of the applicant.”⁷⁴ With this simple judgement call of one individual, the customs official granted Low Ying Ho entry into the United States.

⁷² “Statement of Registered Chinese Laborer,” 1465 Lee Tung On, RG 85, *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service Portland District*, National Archives, Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle.

⁷³ “Interview with Ngan Lim,” 1460 Ngan Lim, RG 85, *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service Portland District*, National Archives, Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle.

⁷⁴ Letter to J.H. Barbour, Inspector in Charge (Portland, Oregon) from John B. Sawyer, Chinese Inspector – July 17, 1908, 1456 folder, RG 85, *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service Portland District*, National Archives, Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle.

Regardless of the avenue chosen, documents known as coaching letters became an essential part of successful entry. Upon arrival to the United States, Chinese immigrants often found themselves interviewed by a custom official. These letters provided answers to questions asked during the interrogation. These questions varied and could include easy questions like ‘who is your brother?’ and more detailed questions like asking the exact route an acquaintance took when they travelled to China.⁷⁵ Questions such as the latter could even confuse ‘legitimate’ immigrants into answering incorrectly. As such, coaching letters became widely used during the Exclusion Era. Hidden in peanut shells, orange peels, and baked goods, these documents made their way to immigrants in detainment.⁷⁶

Interviews by customs officials involved multiple players. Whether a first-time arrival in the United States or applying for reentry, immigration officials questioned, and frequently re-questioned Chinese residents along with family members and business associates. Interviewers commonly asked immigrants about their family relationships, along with where their family members lived, their ages, what part of China they came from, and more. For example, when Long Chong sought entry into the United States, he along with friends and family became subject to multiple interviews and a myriad of questions. During Chong’s entry process, immigration official Albert Long interviewed Chong’s acquaintance, Gow Why. Albert Long asked Gow Why numerous questions

⁷⁵ “Interview with Goon Dip,” 1463 Lam Pan, “Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files (1893-1948),” RG 85, *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service Portland District*, National Archives, Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle.

⁷⁶ “Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files (1893-1948),” RG 85, File 55452/385, *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service Portland District*, National Archives Building, Washington D.C. Discussed in Marie Rose Wong’s *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 109-111.

about Chong, Long Chong's father, the village he lived in, the mother's name, where his parents died, the kind of feet his mother had, and more.⁷⁷ These interviews routinely included questions that necessitated more information than most people knew about one another. As such, it reveals the difficulty of the interview process and why many Chinese, whether of the permitted class or not, often used coaching letters or devices to assist them in interviews.

Providing statements from white witnesses proved particularly important for Chinese, especially those applying for reentry to the United States. Henry Roberts and Nathan Wise gave statements for Low's application to reenter the United States after his visit to China. These men knew Low Chew from business and provided testimony as to whether or not Low Chew performed any manual labor within the last year.⁷⁸ These statements reveal the problems that many Chinese faced in the United States. The two racial groups interacted infrequently and only in specific situations. Yet, the legal existence of many Chinese residents, at this time, depended on the testimony of a white citizen.

The interpreter also played a key role in the interviews done by customs officials. The interpreter held significant power during an interview as historian Mae M Ngai articulates, "how the interpreter used that power – and one could not always be sure – could either assist or thwart the immigrants' chances for entry into the country, for

⁷⁷ "Interview of Gow Why," 1499 Long Chong, "Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files (1893-1948)," RG 85, *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service Portland District*, National Archives, Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle.

⁷⁸ "Interview of Henry Roberts of Roberts Bros., Interview with Nathan Wise," Low Chew 1509, "Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files (1893-1948)," RG 85, *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service Portland District*, National Archives, Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle.

justice, for survival.”⁷⁹ Because of this, the interpreters played an important role in the immigration process and even in relations between the Chinese community and government. Parents and spouses also influenced interviews by custom officials. The Exclusion Act Case Files include notes from officials recording their suspicions of family members, often parents, for coaching their children and relatives during the interview process.

On July 23, 1908, Chun Geow sat across from Immigration Official John B. Sawyer. Accompanied by her mother, Geow answered question after question posed by Sawyer concerning her brother Chun Woy, who recently returned to Portland after a trip to China. At times, Geow misunderstood Sawyer’s questions and so her mother clarified what the official asked in Chinese. Believing the mother to be coaching Geow, Sawyer told the mother to be silent. Sawyer recorded the following, ‘Note: Mother continually coaches the witness. Mother is cautioned to keep quiet. She states her daughter does not understand.’⁸⁰ While it is possible that the mother coached her daughter during this line of inquiry, it is also plausible that Chun Geow genuinely became confused during the interview and her mother tried to help her understand the questions being asked.

Chinese immigrants often evaded immigration officials, but they needed a network of people in the United States and China to carry out their plans successfully. The case, *Yip Fong vs the United States*, illustrates such a network. In October of 1909,

⁷⁹ Mae M. Ngai, “‘A Slight Knowledge of the Barbarian Language’: Chinese Interpreters in Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth-Century America” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 30, no.2 (Winter 2011), 5-32.

⁸⁰ “Interview of Chun Woy,” 1390 Chun Woy, RG 85, *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service Portland District*, National Archives, Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle.

the Multnomah District Court brought charges against Yip Fong, alias Chong Fook, along with Chow Bot, for violation of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, stating that both men did “knowingly, willfully and unlawfully aid and abet the landing in the United States of America at Portland, Oregon, from a foreign vessel to-wit, the steamship “Henrik Ibeen,” of a Chinese laborer to-wit, Go Wing Zee....” The county further charged Yip Fong and Chow Bot with also assisting Lum You, alias Lum Lop Ly, an alleged Chinese laborer, into the United States via the steamship Henrik Ibeen.⁸¹ As both Go Wing Zee and Lum You came from China with no previous residency in the United States and appeared to be laborers, the District Court found them violating the Chinese Exclusion Act and denied them entry into the country.

Further investigation revealed letters between the men and Tom Hin, a Hong Kong merchant, discussing their plans to bring three to five more men into the country on another trip. The letter also advised Tom Hin that they secured a second safe location available “if the boatswain should say too much.”⁸² Officials also discovered a Chinese bill of contract between Tom Hin and partners Jow Bot and Yip Fong, for smuggling Chinese laborers into the United States. According to the bill, the price for each laborer totaled \$450, \$60 of which had been paid before leaving Hong Kong. Payment was conditional upon successful entry. Tom Hin would pay Jow Bot and Yip Fong only if the immigrants safely entered the United States. He warned, “if the said goods are unable to

⁸¹ “United States of America, vs Yip Fong, alias Chong Fook,” US vs Yip Fong, Pleadings and Correspondence 1909 2 of 2, #0254, RG 85, *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service Portland District*, National Archives, Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle.

⁸² “Translation of a Chinese letter, to Tom Hin from Jow Bot,” US vs Yip Fong, RG 85, *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service Portland District*, National Archives, Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle.

land and are returned to Hong Kong...then this money will not be delivered and this bill will be invalid.”⁸³ Newspapers reported that the vessel *did* contain five immigrants, but the police only detained two. Apparently, the remaining three were successfully smuggled into the country.⁸⁴

Chow worked on the Norwegian ship as a carpenter, and according to Yip Fong’s confession and a statement made by District Attorney Evans, Chow was “an old offender against the immigration laws of the United States.”⁸⁵ Supposedly, Chow previously smuggled between twenty-five to thirty men into the country on the steamship *Minnesota*, which landed at Seattle. For Chow, the business was worth the risk; each Chinese man brought into the country successfully earned him \$350. Sometimes bribes cut into his profits. During an earlier trip aboard the *Henrik Ibsen*, an officer approached Chow Bot and threatened to expose him. However, Chow supposedly paid the officer off and was allowed to continue.⁸⁶

Even with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, Chinese immigrants found ways to circumvent exclusion. But their struggle with the law would not stop there. Upon arrival, they still encountered hostility, resentment, and violence from white communities. Even so, Chinese immigrants found ways to cope in the new country.

⁸³ “Translation of a Chinese bill or contract,” US vs Yip Fong, RG 85, *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service Portland District*, National Archives, Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle.

⁸⁴ “Smuggling Plot Told,” *Morning Oregonian*, October 30, 1909.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Navigating Discrimination

Discrimination and violence haunted the lives of Chinese residents in the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Chinese adapted to mitigate the racism shaping their lives. They converted to Christianity, learned English, as well as adopting western styles of grooming and dress. However, most of these required, in at least some form, a rejection of traditional Chinese culture. In contrast, joining and participating in protective Chinese group was the most effective method in confronting and combating the racism directed at the Chinese immigrants.

If a Chinese resident left Buddhism and converted to a Christian faith, they typically found a circle within the larger white community that offered a degree of social acceptance and, at times, temporal assistance. As evidenced in the story of Ah Ho, a female Chinese immigrant in the late nineteenth century who the Presbyterian Christian mission in Portland identifies as a “solid Christian,” describes the need to not “lead her own heart into temptation” nor tempt “some weak brother or sister of her own race” by keeping any mementos of her old Chinese faith.⁸⁷ Born to a Cantonese family, Ah Ho and her mother entered a Christian mission at a young age. Soon after entering, her mother fell ill and returned to family, leaving Ah Ho alone in the mission, left in the care of a Mrs. Happer. After a couple years, the mission returned Ah Ho to her family. However, soon after trouble arose in her home region and soldiers carried Ah Ho off with other young girls. After changing hands numerous times, Mrs. Happer found Ah Ho for sale in the street. Mrs. Happer purchased her and brought her back to the mission. Tricked by a

⁸⁷ Lucia Bell, *Ah Ho's gold chair: the life story of the Bible woman of the Presbyterian Chinese mission in Portland, Oregon, 1896*, Oregon Historical Society, 6.

woman working in the mission Ah Ho fled and found herself enslaved. With promises of a reunion with Mrs. Happer in America, described as a “Golden Hill, where everybody sat upon chairs of solid gold,” Ah Ho left China and headed for California. Ah Ho never shared much detail about her early days in San Francisco, except that the promises of freedom and reunion made to her were false. Sick and dying, Ah Ho ended up at the Presbyterian mission. There she recovered and found a new home with a Christian Chinese couple until she married. Ah Ho busied herself in the mission the rest of her days, proselytizing to fellow Chinese immigrants in San Francisco. From her arrival in the United States until her death, Ah Ho strived to exemplify a good Christian and American life. She proudly showed off her American home surrounded by American neighbors, whom she frequently visited, and spoke English.⁸⁸ The story of Ah Ho describes ways in which immigrants could find a degree of acceptance in the United States through adopting Christianity. While promoting Christian conversion, Ah Ho’s story simultaneously endorses a trade of Chinese culture, community, and language for the American versions, placing greater value on American qualities than Chinese ones.

Some Chinese adapted by altering dress and grooming habits. Chinese men cut their traditional queues and adopted short hairstyles to demonstrate their willingness to “westernize.” These grooming changes often accompanied the adoption of the western style of dress, exchanging loose Chinese clothing for suits and ties. Photographs of the members of the Chinese-American Citizens Alliance from 1921 show this transition in choice of clothing and appearance, as the majority of men, both young and old, are

⁸⁸ Ibid., 8.

dressed in suits with short hair, parted on the side.⁸⁹ Leong Gor Yun described how central American standards became for Chinese gentlemen, stating, “Once you have become a gentleman, you can enjoy a life of leisure, smoke the most expensive cigars, give lavish banquets, and wear the finest tailor-cut suits – not to forget a derby hat. You must also carry a copy of *The New York Times* when you are out; whether you look at it upside-down does not matter much. In short, you must put up a front regardless of cost.”⁹⁰ Here Yun reveals how adopting western culture, or at least appearing to have adopted western culture, became a signifier of masculinity and honor for Chinese immigrant men. For example, this passage shows that Chinese men did not necessarily need to know what the newspaper discussed, or even be able to read English, carrying *The New York Times* was enough.

Learning English became an invaluable skill for those Chinese residents who wanted to participate in the wider community. This allowed figures like Seid Back to become middlemen in dealings between Chinatown and the larger city of Portland. Reverend William Speer held the first English class for Chinese immigrants in 1853. He noted that even then most of the students were young men, mostly merchants or the sons of merchants, wanting to learn to help in business.⁹¹ They desired their non-Chinese neighbors to see them as contributing to the larger society, particularly since most Americans believed the Chinese hurt the economy by sending money back to China,

⁸⁹ “Chinese-American Citizens Alliance, Portland Lodge,” Chinese-American Alliance, Portland Lodge photographs collection, 1921, Org Lot 75, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

⁹⁰ Leong Gor Yun, *Chinatown Inside Out* (New York: Barrows Mussey, 1936), 57.

⁹¹ “School for Chinese,” *San Francisco Alta*, January 9, 1853. Quoted in Mae M Ngai’s “‘A Slight Knowledge of the Barbarian Language’: Chinese Interpreters in Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth-Century America,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 30, no.2 (Winter 2011), 8.

rather than spending it on American goods. As such, many merchants, and other wealthy Chinese men, financially invested in the community, in part to combat white distrust of Chinese immigrants. An example of this is from the earlier days of Chinese immigration. In 1856, San Francisco saw a rise in “lawlessness” among the white population. Leading men in the community revived the Vigilance Committee to control and protect the region. Several Chinese merchants helped fund the committee and “received a vote of thanks” for their efforts.⁹²

Group Organization

But Chinese efforts to adapt to a new society proved insufficient to address the widescale discrimination and racism they faced in the United States. Chinese immigrant men creating organizations centered on providing protection, economically, physically, and financially, proved the most effective. Standing together and supporting one another proved the most successful in combating the prejudices they encountered. Building upon group organizations that originated in China, Chinese immigrant men in the United States quickly organized themselves into associations. These groups helped to combat the violence and racism directed at them, as well as the social ostracization in a new country. Organized along different lines, these groups frequently clashed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The violence of massacres and riots endangered the Chinese immigrants. The legislative discrimination and inaction of government left them vulnerable to such

⁹² Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909), 25.

attacks. Unable to access protection from the state or acceptance within the larger communities, Chinese residents turned to their ethnic organizations to fill these needs. Groups known as the tongs focused on economic gain and physical protection. Promises of money and safety convinced many Chinese residents to join, which in turn empowered tongs within Chinatown. With increased responsibility and authority, these groups negotiated power and control of Chinatown with the local government.

CHAPTER III FIGHTING FOR CONTROL OF CHINATOWN

Shots rang out late on the night of February 8th where Fourth and Everett street meet in Portland. Arguments over a supposed three-dollar debt quickly escalated into a physical confrontation between two groups of men, all members of rival tongs. Shortly after 10 p.m., the men exchanged roughly twenty-five shots. By the end, one man had been killed with another two injured. M. Len died a half a block away, in front of the Kwong Yuen Lung Company, on Fourth street, after being shot in the chest during the fight. Another bullet hit a bystander, a Japanese man by the name of T. Hokira, who arrived in Portland only days before. Hitting his collarbone, the gunshot wound necessitated a visit to the hospital for care. The last of the injuries belonged to an unidentified Chinese man, who had been shot in the leg.⁹³ The events of February 8th marked the beginning of what became known as the 1917 Tong War, one of the bloodiest conflicts of Chinatown in years.

Tongs arose during the nineteenth century, in response to racism, to defend members against discrimination, violence, and governmental neglect. This negligence, coupled with the federal policy of the Chinese Exclusion Act, created a power vacuum within the Chinese community that empowered tongs and led to the tong wars. The 1917 Tong War in Portland demonstrates how exclusion enabled tongs to gain power and authority in Chinatown, the impact of tong conflict within Chinatown, and the power

⁹³ “Chinese Killed in Tong War Over \$3,” *Oregonian*, February 9, 1917. This article claimed that the men exchanged around twenty-five shots, whereas another article reported 30 shots. “Chinese Killed, Open Tong War Looked For,” *The Bridgeport Evening Farmer*, February 9, 1917.

struggle between the tongs and local government in controlling the Chinese community in Portland.

Chinese Organizations and Tongs

Quickly after the immigrants arrived in the United States in the 1850s, they developed a variety of organizations designed to protect their interests. Each organization played important roles for its members. Historians categorize these groups in different ways. Some only distinguish three main groups – the district associations, family associations, and tongs.⁹⁴ Others classify the groups into tongs (堂), fongs (family associations), and district associations (huiguan 會館).⁹⁵ Different bodies included family clans, district associations, labor groups, political associations, tongs, and peace societies. These groups helped recent arrivals transition to a new country, kept records, provided financial assistance, aided burial needs, and provided social networks. Widespread discrimination, violence, difficulty in immigration, and marginalization by government fostered the formation of these groups.

The organization known as the tong differed from others in that they participated both in legal and illegal activities. Tongs functioned as classic fraternal orders and associations that protected their members' political rights, financial stability and physical safety. They also trafficked in opium, managed brothels, and operated gambling rooms.

This dualistic nature of tongs allowed for them to successfully combat the US

⁹⁴ Marie Rose Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 26-27.

⁹⁵ Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, rev. ed (New York: Little Brown and Company, 1998), 235-236.

government's efforts to control the Chinese community.

The need for such groups is revealed in a petition Chinese leader sent to the Mayor and city council of Portland in 1890. Sickness ran rampant through Portland's Chinatown. Lacking access to a hospital, Chinese residents, including merchants Young Hay, Lam Pam, Ah Dimm, Ching Sing, and Woo Sue, petitioned the mayor and city council about the matter. These community leaders took it upon themselves to rent out rooms in a building on Second Street and fitted them to be a makeshift hospital "for their sick and disabled countrymen while sojourning in Portland and to provide them with proper treatment and means of attention."⁹⁶ The petitioners asked the city government to merely erect a flagpole in front of the building so residents could raise a flag with the initials of the hospital, the Bo Long Kong Sue Company, to help people find the building.⁹⁷ Constructing a makeshift hospital in Chinatown demonstrates the racial segregation the Chinese communities faced in Portland. The Chinese residents built their own hospital to gain access to Portland. The council forwarded the appeal to the Committee on Streets, who recommended to the City Council that the request be granted. Racial segregation explains how Chinatown relations with larger local government often resembled agreements or discussions between two governing bodies. Powerful groups, often headed by wealthy merchants, acted as emissaries representing Chinese will and needs to local, state, and even federal government agencies.

⁹⁶ "Health" Council Documents, 1890, A2001-049 46/2 Auditor's Office, Portland City Archives (Portland, Oregon).

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Government Failures and Filling Community Needs

Local and federal government officials failed to provide for the Chinese community's necessities, neglected to protect them from discrimination and violence, and undermined their civil rights. In response, Chinese immigrants formed their own quasi-political or governmental bodies to oversee the communities' needs and functions. As sociologists John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald argue, resource mobilization describes how people coming together and forming groups allows them to better access resources, attaining the goals and meeting the needs of the members.⁹⁸ Resource mobilization explains how the inability or refusal of the United States government, on all levels, to provide for and assist Chinese immigrants in assimilating, allows for the creation of tongs to lead and guide new immigrants in shaping their lives.⁹⁹ Since the Chinese residents lacked safety, assistance, and security in jobs, groups in Chinatowns organized to address these needs. The government ensured the existence and success of the tongs by leaving a power vacuum that leaders in the community filled through extra-governmental functions.

The earliest organizations were either clan or district associations, but the Chinese Six Companies, known also as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), proved the most well-known and perhaps the most influential. According to their official history, several district associations joined together in San Francisco to form

⁹⁸ John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 6 (May, 1977), 1213.

⁹⁹ Ted Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970. Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, rev.ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 23-24.

the Chinese Six Companies in the mid-nineteenth century and gave the new organization authority “to speak and act for the Chinese in the western continental United States in all matters pertaining to their general welfare, whether political, social, or civic”.¹⁰⁰ The district associations that joined together to create the Six Companies included the Sam Yap, Sz Yap (Kong Chan), Yeung Wo, Hip Kat, Ning Yeung, and Hop Wo.¹⁰¹ The booklet about the Chinese Six Companies illustrates the ways in which Chinese immigrant organizations developed in the power vacuum left by the United States government.

Such organizations became central to the management of Chinatowns. They oversaw the return of bodies to China for burial. They helped new arrivals find jobs and they mediated disagreements between Chinese residents. Some groups, principally the Chinese Six Companies acted as the voice of Chinese residents in the United States in dealing with local, state, and the federal government. Many organizations, including the Six Companies, hired their own lawyers to fight arrests, detainment, and other judicial problems that arose in Chinese communities.

Tong Roots

Scholars disagree about the origins of the tongs and if the organizations are a phenomenon unique to the United States or if they grew out of groups native to China.

¹⁰⁰ William Hoy, *The Chinese six companies; a short, general historical resume of its origin, function, and importance in the life of the California Chinese* (San Francisco: The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, 1942), Foreword, online version from University of Michigan, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015019233439;view=1up;seq=7> (accessed September 14, 2018).

¹⁰¹ C.N. Reynolds, “The Chinese Tongs,” *American Journal of Sociology* 40, no. 5 (Mar., 1935), 615.

Eng Gong, a former member of the Hip Sing tong in the twentieth century claims that tongs grew out of discontentment that many immigrants in California felt towards the Six Companies and the expansive role they played. He remembers that many immigrants chafed under its leadership and viewed the association as favoring the larger and socially prominent families over the rest of the immigrants, notably in settling disputes among Chinese residents through the Six Companies Tribunal. Frustrated with the Tribunal and unsuccessful in American courts, a group of men, led by a merchant named Mock Wah formed the Kwong Dock Tong. Recognized as the earliest tong in the United States, the Kwong Dock Tong originally began as a Chinese Vigilance Committee designed to protect its members and obtain justice, even resorting to violence if necessary.¹⁰² Subsequently, over fifteen other tongs developed including the Bing Kong Bow Leong, the Hop Sing, Suey Sing, and Hip Sing tongs.¹⁰³ As tongs developed, they spread out from San Francisco across the West Coast and some even made their way east through new branches of the tongs.

However, historian Ronald Takaki argues that tongs did not begin in the American West, but rather that the Kwong Dock Tong originated in Guangdong, China as an “underground anti-government movement.”¹⁰⁴ Other historians more explicitly trace the tongs back earlier, arguing tongs were an outgrowth of the Triad Society that attempted to overthrow the Ming Dynasty in the seventeenth century.¹⁰⁵ *Dreams of the*

¹⁰² Eng Gong and Bruce Grant, *Tong War!* (New York: Nicholas L. Brown, 1930), 27-28.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, rev.ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 235. Takaki spells the name of the tong differently, spelling it as the Kwang-tek-tong. But he does agree that they first appeared in California in 1852.

¹⁰⁵ Sucheng Chan argues that the tongs, particularly the Chee Kung Tong (Zhigongtang) started as an offshoot of the Triads and that many left China after the failure of the Taiping Rebellion around the mid-

West, a joint project involving Portland State University, Ooligan Press, and the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association explicitly states that the tong did not begin in China, but formed in San Francisco. It further clarifies the tong as a “form of the secret societies on the West Coast...” A sociologist in the 1930’s, named C.N. Reynolds, also found that the Chinese residents he spoke to always stated that tongs are only found in America, with “no precedent for it in China.”¹⁰⁶ While secret societies existed in China, within contemporary newspaper and oral accounts, discussion of tong activity, are almost exclusively in relation to the United States, primarily in regards to the western states and the region around New York. Conflating tong existence with any secret society in China oversimplifies the existence of these type of groups and ignores the different natures of these groups. Tongs specifically developed in response to discrimination and civil neglect, as well as a marginalization by the Chinese Six Companies. The United States government treated Chinese immigrants as second-class people, consistently the denying rights and ignoring needs of the Chinese residents. The Chinese Six Companies favored a select few families over the rest of entrants, who grew to dominate Chinatowns across the West. Denial by government leaders and favoritism by the Six Companies inspired many Chinese men to look elsewhere.

Tongs are difficult to define. As complicated organizations, they operated in legal and illegal spheres in the community. The Chinese term for tong is 堂 and it

1860s. Marie Rose Wong does not state that tongs grew out of secret societies in China, but that tongs may have modeled themselves on the Triads. Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 67. Marie Rose Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatown of Portland, Oregon* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 27.

¹⁰⁶ C.N. Reynolds, “The Chinese Tongs,” *American Journal of Sociology* 40, no. 5 (Mar., 1935), 613.

translates to ‘hall.’ On one level, the tong existed as a fraternal men’s club. On another level, newspapers, citizens, and even government officials viewed the tongs as nothing more than Chinese gangs involved in illicit activities. Scholars and the popular press emphasized the somewhat secretive nature of tongs with their “secret initiation rites and sworn brotherhood.”¹⁰⁷ However, such a limited description ignores the complex role tongs played in the community. Historically, many gangs have included poor members of marginalized groups, and come together to form a ‘resistant identity.’¹⁰⁸ Tongs similarly brought together marginalized people, Chinese residents across various social classes. Through the tongs, men formed new group identities that provide them strength, protection, and success. Even though most tongs participated in illegal dealings such as prostitution, opium, and gambling, they also participated in charitable projects for the community.

Incentives to Join

Membership in most Chinese organizations reflected family relations and the region of China they came from. Distinct from other Chinese associations, the tongs did not restrict membership to only Chinese immigrants and their American born descendants. Nor did they restrict membership to family networks, or even social standing. Regardless of ethnicity, wealth, social status, or family ties, Chinese tongs allowed any willing man the opportunity to join. Tongs united rich merchants and poor laborers in a new bond of brotherhood. Both old men and young worked together. While

¹⁰⁷ Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 67.

¹⁰⁸ David C. Brotherton, *Youth Street Gangs: A Critical Appraisal* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 57.

available to white men or other immigrant males, most tong members were either Chinese immigrants or those of Chinese heritage.¹⁰⁹ As tongs accepted any interested man to join their ranks, tong membership grew rapidly.¹¹⁰ As tong numbers grew so did their influence on the community. The tongs gained power due to the marginalized space of Chinese immigrants who found the elitism of the Chinese Six Companies unbearable, the family and district associations as unable to meet all their needs, and the US government's mistreatment of Chinese residents. However, the actions of the tongs often precluded a wider acceptance of the groups and reinforced their marginalization.

Tongs filled a need for relationships among Chinese residents. Discriminatory legislation issued by the local and federal government made it difficult or impossible for many Chinese men to bring over families. The Chinese Exclusion Act made it difficult for immigrants to travel back and forth between the United States and China, even to visit families. The social stigma and legislative prohibition on intermarriage heightened the problems faced by Chinese residents, as the gender ratio of most Chinatowns reflected an overabundance of men with a shortage of women.¹¹¹ In 1890, records show roughly 9,540 Chinese living in Oregon. Of that, men made up approximately 95% of the population.¹¹² Suffused with single men, the Chinatowns across the United States lacked nuclear

¹⁰⁹ Eng Gong and Bruce Grant, *Tong War!* (New York: Nicholas L. Brown, 1930), 27-28.

¹¹⁰ Ko-lin Chin, *Chinese Subculture and Criminality: Non-traditional Crime Groups in America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 53.

¹¹¹ Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2014), Foreword to the New Paperback Edition, xxi.

¹¹² Peggy Nagai, "Asian Women: Immigration and Citizenship in Oregon," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 113, no. 3 (Fall 2012), 336.

families.¹¹³ Within the tongs, men found opportunities for proxy families ties and close relationships. These relations assisted in transitioning to life after arrival in the United States. The fraternal nature of the tongs offered a sense of family to those men separated from their own. It provided a method of forming new ties; ensuring a place within a community.

Tongs fulfilled a wide scope of services for their members. They safeguarded Chinese immigrant tradition and culture. These organizations provided loan programs, political assistance and maintained Buddhist religious shrines in their headquarters.¹¹⁴ Tong affiliation also provided self-protection from government and other tongs. As government curtailed the personal rights of Chinese residents and the police did little to defend them, protection developed into a central feature and goal of tongs across the United States. Nevertheless, tongs could be ruthless against those who crossed them. “An eye for an eye” mentality permeated the various tong societies. Peace negotiations began, and tong wars ended, only after both sides saw the body count as equal and each felt they could declare themselves the winners.¹¹⁵

Tongs and Chinese Masculinity

Tongs also created an avenue for Chinese men to reclaim gender norms and assert traditional forms of masculinity. Early Chinese immigrants to the United States originally

¹¹³ Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909), 18. This book discusses the fact that single men, both old and young comprised the Chinatown populations.

¹¹⁴ Nancy D’Inzillo, ed. *Dreams of the West: A History of the Chinese in Oregon 1850-1950* (Portland: Ooligan Press and Portland State University, 2007), 57. This section also mentions that tong members donated about ten percent of their income for “upkeep fees” for the tong and its shrine.

¹¹⁵ “Attempts to Effect Peace in Tong War Fail,” *The San Francisco Call*, March 21, 1913.

hoped to make their fortune in gold mining. However, after non-Chinese miners tormented them and state lawmakers passed racist legislation that restricted their access to mining, Chinese men found job conventionally seen as feminine. Many immigrants began to work as cooks preparing meals or in laundries, washing clothes.¹¹⁶ In late nineteenth century Oregon, Chinese men worked in over thirty different occupations. However, the vast majority toiled as common laborers, laundry workers, domestics, cooks, and dishwashers; jobs seen typically as forms of female labor.¹¹⁷ Newspaper comparisons to the typical female body, further emphasized the physical differences between Chinese men and American men, that Chinese men tended to be shorter and slimmer. The feminization of Chinese men played a part in the larger orientalist perspective of China and Asian countries. For society in the United States, Chinese immigrants stood in contrast to traditional ideas of American strength, emphasizing American masculinity, by asserting Chinese inferiority. As Edward Said argues about the West viewing the East in derogatory terms, the United States characterized China, and those emigrating from it, as weak and backwards.¹¹⁸ Feminized through their labor and in commentary concerning their physical appearance, tongs provided a space for Chinese men to reclaim their masculinity.

The Chinese principle of 'face' incentivized men to join tongs. Similar to honor, which is often associated with conceptions of masculinity and who is able to successfully

¹¹⁶ Joan S. Wang, "Race, Gender, and Laundry Work: The Roles of Chinese Laundrymen and American Women in the United States, 1850-1950," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24, no. 1 (Fall, 2004), 60.

¹¹⁷ P Scott Corbett and Nancy Parker Corbett, "The Chinese in Oregon, 1870-1880," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (Mar., 1977), 77.

¹¹⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 25th Anniversary Ed. (New York: Random House, 1994), 39.

make claim to masculinity, “face” guaranteed a man’s standing and prestige in the community.¹¹⁹ Having “more” face yielded greater individual respect which then extended to his association in the community.¹²⁰ As such, especially the physical struggles between tongs allowed for the role of face, as an idea of honor, to play a central role in continuing conflict between tongs at war.

One specific way that honor shaped a tong war is in the way that men used women as a justification for conflict. Newspapers and tong members alike agreed that women represented a cause for friction between tongs.¹²¹ Several accounts of tong wars place the cause at a rivalry between two men over a sing-song girl with whom they fell in love.¹²² As most disagreements between tongs developed out of control over illicit trades, it is unlikely that the central reason behind a tong war lay with a woman, whether she was a prostitute, girlfriend, or family member. However, it is significant that tong members used this kind of language in justifying their actions. By placing the foundation reason for war with a woman, rather than drugs or gambling, the tongs again make claim to a sense of honor and reaffirm their masculinity. This version of masculinity and tongs is portrayed in *The War of the Tongs*, a silent film released in February 1917, the same time

¹¹⁹ Leong Gor Yun, *Chinatown Inside Out* (New York: Barrows Mussey, 1936), 57.

Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 8.

¹²⁰ Leong Gor Yun, *Chinatown Inside Out* (New York: Barrows Mussey, 1936), 54-58.

¹²¹ Jack Jungmeyer, “Woman is Usually Cause of Tong War, Chinese Declares,” *The Seattle Star*, March 1, 1916, Page 9, Image 9, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress.

¹²² Sing song girl is a common term used for a female Chinese prostitute. While these stories may have some truth to them, they are most likely exaggerated and romanticized as it commonly places a young tong member in love with a beautiful sing song girl who is also sought after by a rival tong leader. A version of this was even dramatized into a film titled *The War of the Tongs* which was released in February 1917. Examples of romance causing tong wars is discussed in Eng Gong and Bruce Grant’s *Tong War!* (New York: Nicholas L. Brown, 1930), 42-45.

that fighting erupted again in Portland.¹²³

The physical dress of tong fighters also reasserted Chinese masculinity. At a time when many Chinese immigrants and their American born children turned to western style of dress, these men stood out for their use of traditional dress and wearing the long queue.¹²⁴ Newspapers provided illustrations of highbinders, emphasizing the traditional dress, and frequently depicting them as holding a weapon, whether it be a knife or a gun.¹²⁵ The newspapers representations helped to reinforce a stereotype of not only tong members, but of Chinese people as whole, that further instilled ill feelings toward the immigrant community. This is similar to newspaper portrayal and American attitudes of Chinese women as all prostitutes during the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth.¹²⁶ As Marie Rose Wong points out, the Immigration Service argued that “the wife of yesterday was considered the prostitute of tomorrow.”¹²⁷ These stereotypes, and pictures of them, further heightened anti-Chinese sentiment and anti-Chinese leagues frequently used them. As American views held all Chinese women to be of disrepute, tong members came to be associated with only the worst parts of the groups.

¹²³ *The War of the Tongs*, directed by H.O. Davis (Red Feather Productions, 1917).

¹²⁴ The queue refers to the long-braided hair wore at the back of the head. A picture compilation of Chinatown in Portland 1897, 2012-30 A2004-.002.55-.63. Portland City Archives shows the ‘typical look’ of a Highbinder.

¹²⁵ An example of such a depiction is “Commissioned to Do Murder: Some of the Qualities Expected of a ‘Soldier’ Following the High-Binder Banner”, *Los Angeles Herald*, October 14, 1906, Image 37.

¹²⁶ Kitty Calavita, “Collisions at the Intersection of Gender, Race, and Class: Enforcing the Chinese Exclusion Laws,” *Law & Society Review* 40, no. 2 (Jun., 2006), 251.

¹²⁷ Marie Rose Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2004), 174.

Exclusionary Violence and Tong Assistance

As tongs developed and sought spheres of influence and control over areas of Chinese communities the organizations grew more violent and committed to illicit activities. Tongs operated in illicit businesses including opium running, prostitution, and gambling.¹²⁸ As tongs grew, they frequently clashed with one another. Conflict in one city could quickly spread to other branches of tongs and lead to hostilities and violence in Chinatowns across the Pacific Northwest.

The business of vice played a central role in the operations of tongs. Smuggling of opium, slave girls destined for brothels, and Chinese workers into the United States proved risky, but lucrative investments.¹²⁹ The Exclusion Act ensured the continuation of groups like the tongs because of their participation in illegal immigration, which remained as a great and continuing importance to the Chinese community. Rather than safeguarding American boundaries, the act increased borderland crime as laborers seeking entrance to America during the Exclusion Era paid tongs for entrance into the states.¹³⁰ The Washington Herald in 1915 reported that numerous laborers testified to paying anywhere between \$50 to \$200 to the Bing Kong tong to help them into the United States. After arrival, tongs forced the laborers to continue paying them over ninety

¹²⁸ *Dreams of the West: A History of the Chinese in Oregon 1850-1950* (Portland: Ooligan Press and Portland State University, 2007), 57.

¹²⁹ These risks included fines, arrests, and financial loss if authorities seized shipments.

¹³⁰ Not only tongs participated in border crossings. With the passage of the Exclusion Act, the Mexican-U.S. border along with the Canadian – U.S. border became central locations for illegal immigration of Chinese people. An entire field of study exists on the borderlands and many great works deal the border and Chinese immigration. Kornel Chang's book *Pacific Connections: The Making of the U.S. – Canadian Borderlands* is one. Another is Patrick Ettinger's article "'We Sometimes Wonder What They Will Spring On Us Next': Immigrants and Border Enforcement in the American West, 1882-1930", *Western Historical Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (Summer, 2006).

percent of their earnings or risk the tong exposing them and facing deportation.¹³¹ In this way, the Exclusion Act increased unlawful activities and facilitated third-party groups to benefit financially from it.

But such extortion did not always protect them. In fact, tong members experienced significant backlash from their own communities, as many residents, merchants, and businessmen sent Portland police anonymous letters demanding that the police take care of the tongs.¹³² According to Wen-hsien Chen, a sociologist, many arrests of Chinese people by immigration authorities began with grievances from their fellow Chinese neighbors within the community. Chen disputes the stereotype portraying Chinese immigrant communities as always unified by revealing that Chinese residents often sent letters or made phone calls complaining or informing on their neighbors to the local police.¹³³ Particularly during the time of Exclusion, the role of police became a force to unify Chinese residents, as well as an avenue to seek revenge against a neighbor.

Tong illegal activity involved non-Chinese people as well. American and other immigrant men frequented fan tan and gambling rooms.¹³⁴ They also purchased opium from Chinese suppliers. Local police and city leaders also participated in the illicit pleasures offered in Chinatown. A Portland native, Evelyn Low Ching's father owned a

¹³¹ "The Last of the Highbinders!" *The Washington Herald*, October 31, 1915, Washington D.C. Image 33. Another newspaper article in the Los Angeles Herald in 1906 claims tong responsibility for "three-fourths of all the violations of the Chinese Exclusion law." ("Commissioned To Do Murder: Some of the Qualities Expected of a 'Soldier' Following the High-Binder Banner", *Los Angeles Herald*, October 14, 1906.)

¹³² Marie Rose Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 201.

¹³³ Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 237.

¹³⁴ Ivan Light, "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction: The Moral Career of American Chinatowns, 1880-1940," *Pacific Historical Review* 43, no. 3 (Aug., 1974), 372.

tailor shop that turned into a front for a gambling room. She recalled that police officers and detectives often came into gamble during the day. Her father would slip them cards, that she later realized was a payoff from her father to the officials. In return these men gave advance warning of raids.¹³⁵ While it is unclear if Ching's father claimed tong membership, the participation of city leaders in illegal activities in Chinatown is important for recognizing the complicated relationship of Chinatown to the larger community. Gambling, opium, and other illegal businesses appealed to many Chinese because they could not legally own land and faced discrimination in the job market.¹³⁶

Illegal activities frequently created discord between tongs. Disputes over gambling often led to skirmishes between the tongs. In response, local police officers frequently patrolled Chinatown to prevent a tong war.¹³⁷ Regardless of how the conflict began, tongs called upon specific members, called the boo how doy, to do the actual fighting. The boo how doy, also known as the "hatchetmen" or "highbinders," acted as the members responsible for physical fighting. These men acted as enforcers for tong law and decisions. Famous throughout tongs and Chinese communities, the fighters took on a mythologized status. Stories described men who commonly traveled to the different branches, going wherever conflict arose. When fighting did break out, local police forces concentrated their efforts on finding and arresting the boo how doy. However, in Chinatowns, various systems warned the fighters of approaching police officers.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Evelyn Low Ching, "Oral History", December 12, 1994. Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

¹³⁶ Rose Lee Hum, "The Decline of Chinatowns in the United States," *American Journal of Sociology* 54, no. 5 (Mar., 1949), 422.

¹³⁷ "Police Fear Tong Trouble," *The Seattle Star*, January 30, 1915.

¹³⁸ Eng Gong and Bruce Grant's *Tong War!* (New York: Nicholas L. Brown, 1930), 105.

Absolute secrecy prevailed in Chinatown as residents refused to give information as to their location. Best known for their loyalty and dedication to the tongs, leadership could depend on their fighters to finish their assignments, such as shooting a rival tong member, even if it that ended with their arrest.

Arrests, interrogations, and court cases frequently plagued tongs, especially when rival organizations physically fought one another. As such, a tong's success relied on two key individuals: the attorney and interpreter. If arrested, tongs provided their men with lawyers to defend them at the group's expense. The attorney and interpreter enjoyed high status within a tong since they assisted the group with legal troubles and kept the members out of prison. For example, in 1905, Attorney Leroy Anderson kept Charley Lee and Lee Ding out of jail after they set fire to a building in Arizona. A third in their party, Smiley Lung confessed and gave evidence as to the involvement of the other two men. Despite this, the attorney successfully won the case and the judge declared Lee Ding and Charley Lee not guilty.¹³⁹ Without the assistance of the tong's attorney, the three men probably would have been found guilty and served time.

Discriminatory laws and racist practices created a need for groups like tongs and other mutual aid societies to protect themselves. The passage of the Exclusion Act in 1882 solidified their presence and importance in Chinese communities. By marking Chinese people as the ultimate "undesirable," the US government sought to curtail Chinese immigration.¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Chinese people still hoped to migrate to the US

¹³⁹ "Chinamen May Break Out in Prescott," *Bisbee Daily Review*, August 2, 1907.

¹⁴⁰ Erika Lee, "The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882-1924," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 3 (Spring, 2002), 37. This perception of Chinese by Americans is also a theme in *The Coming Man: 19th Century American Perceptions of the Chinese*. This

and inadvertently paved the way for a new opportunity for people to make money. The system of illegal immigration involved residents of the Chinatowns, corrupt custom officials, lawyers, and third-party groups. Exclusion allowed for merchants to claim a new social status. Merchants in late Qing China did not belong to high society. However, in the United States, as part of the permitted groups allowed entry, merchants gained new social standing, which many used to become key figures in immigration and leaders in the Chinatown. Alongside individual merchants, Chinese associations competed for power and control in the community. Chinese immigrant organizations existed long before the Exclusion Act, beginning with the earliest groups created in the 1850s as hopeful Chinese arrived in California to work the mines, but during the Exclusion era they became central to the Chinese community. More men joined tongs and conflict between tongs grew, predominantly over control of unlawful activities. These conflicts led to the creation of the Chinese Peace Society in 1912, created to mitigate tensions and negotiate peace between rivaling Chinese groups. Branches of the society existed in Portland, San Francisco, and New York City.¹⁴¹

Tong Wars

The 1917 Tong War in Portland demonstrates how an organization filled an ethnic niche made possible by discriminatory and neglectful government, racism, and the needs of Chinese men to belong within a culturally relevant community and access traditional

work traces the American attitude towards Chinese from the immigrants seen as curious and strange to diseased heathens. Philip P. Choy and Dong, Lorraine, and Marlon K Hom, *The Coming Man: 19th Century American Perceptions of the Chinese* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).

¹⁴¹ C.N. Reynolds, "The Chinese Tongs," *American Journal of Sociology* 40, no. 5 (Mar., 1935), 623.

forms of masculinity. Secondly, it shows the influences that Chinatowns and tong networks in Washington and California had upon Portland's Chinese district. Thirdly, it reveals the difficulty of government in reclaiming authority, legitimacy, and control over a group after failing to provide for the needs of the community. Lastly, the war exposes how Chinese leaders, highbinders, residents, and local government officials negotiated power in Portland. This negotiation is visible as the tongs defied the local government, as the local government attempted to reassert control over Chinatown through threats and arrests, and subsequently during the peace agreements as both government and tongs sought to dominate the discussions.

Low scale strife characterized tong relations in Portland, specifically during the twentieth century. However, more serious conflict began in 1916. In February fighting broke out supposedly over a disagreement over a slave girl between the Bow Leong and Hop Sings' tongs in San Francisco. An alliance of the Bow Leongs, Bing Kongs, and Suey Sings formed to fight against the Hop Sings.¹⁴² Hostilities continued to escalate between the tongs in Seattle and Portland, even after San Francisco members of the Bing Kong and Hop Sings tongs met and signed a truce.¹⁴³ Fighting came full circle as aggression renewed in San Francisco during early March. Tong members began to carry babies with them in public, as a protection against highbinders, as highbinders had an "unwritten law...that a father with a child in his arms shall not be shot."¹⁴⁴ A call for a Grand Jury took place and wealthy merchants attended in discussing how to end the

¹⁴² "Chinese Gunmen Shot and Killed Young Yin Luck," *Daily Capital Journal*, February 23, 1916.

¹⁴³ "The Hop Sings and Bing Kongs Fight Tong War," *The Pensacola Journal*, February 23, 1916.

¹⁴⁴ "Chinese Carry Babies as Protection from Gunmen," *Daily Capital Journal*, March 10, 1916.

conflict and protect the Chinatown.¹⁴⁵ Later that month, tensions between the tongs declined across California, Washington, and Oregon. 1916's Tong War across the Pacific coast shows that tong networks often extended the struggle, both geographically and temporally, and that different areas understood the war differently as the primary cause of discord became secondary to the regional problems. For this reason, tong wars ended in one city, while continuing in another, as branches of the various tongs primarily saw the struggle in a local sense, rather than the larger whole. The 1916 conflict which purportedly began over a disagreement about a woman in San Francisco, took on a local importance for Portland tongs in February with the killing of local Chinatown resident Chung Wah.¹⁴⁶

A few isolated fights occurred in subsequent months, but relative peace existed in Chinatowns. November began with new fears of a tong war about to break out over claims that members of the Suey Sings tong robbed a gambling resort. Four major tong leaders negotiated a settlement and prevented a war of retaliation.¹⁴⁷ Tensions ran high for the next couple weeks as fear of further violence worried Portland officials, Chinese residents, and other cities across the West coast.¹⁴⁸ A few months later, in early 1917, the worst tong war in years commenced with the shooting on February 8th.

¹⁴⁵ "Grand Jury to Take Hand in Tong War," *Daily Capital Journal*, March 8, 1916.

¹⁴⁶ "Chinese Fatally Injured in Portland Tong War Revival," *Sacramento Daily Journal*, February 22, 1916.

¹⁴⁷ "Tong war Settled by Big Four Leaders," *Daily Capital Journal*, November 6, 1916, Page 7, Image 7.

¹⁴⁸ Newspapers such as Oregon's *Daily Capital Journal*, Washington's *The Seattle Star* and *The Tacoma Times* contained articles about the possibility of tong battles.

Portland's Tong War of 1917

After the shooting, the local police department swiftly jumped into action. Officers, in plain clothes, descended on Chinatown and contacted leaders in the Chinese community. This shooting was not a simple disagreement turned shootout between any Chinese residents. The participants belonged to rival tongs including members of Hip Sings and Bow Leongs against men belonging to the Suey Sing Tong. With the conflict labeled a tong battle, Portland officials felt the urgent need to control and diffuse the situation, both within and outside Chinatown. Fear of the tong battle spreading to other Chinatowns and becoming a war worried many, as past events proved how easily a local disagreement could become an interregional conflict, difficult to stamp out.

As the tongs spread, so did the conflict between the opposing groups. As such, disagreement between tongs in one city could quickly travel and inflame all tong branches and Chinatowns across the West Coast. Like a wild fire, tong battles proved to inflame quickly; spreading discord, violence, and fear to all tong chapters, further inciting discord, violence, and fear, creating a cyclical effect that made it difficult to resolve. This made peace negotiations and outside control by police and city officials difficult to attain.

Newspapers could quickly turn any violent action between Chinese residents into reports of a 'tong war.' Such reporting reflected white fears of Chinese violence as well as the association many American citizens made between the Chinese and violence. However, between tong members, small conflicts swiftly developed into more serious struggles. Clashes could quickly escalate overnight. A fight between tong members in one city could grow into a conflict composed of all tong members and allied tong associations. The 1917 tong war is the perfect example of this. A shooting took place in

Portland's Chinatown and the next morning, newspapers declared a tong war. Soon other parts of the Pacific Coast, with significant Chinese immigrant populations, feared that the fighting would spread into their own communities.

Chinese residents and the Portland officials knew that a war had been sparked by the shooting of February 8th. Portland city police acted quickly, arresting thirty Chinese residents after the shooting. The police department released most prisoners, with a small number held on "minor charges pending investigation." The police also raided the Hip Sing headquarters. While at the headquarters, the phone rang, and the police answered, intercepting a call intended for Hip Sing members from the Seattle branch. Police officers could not understand the Chinese being spoken on the phone and hung up after refusing to let Portland branch leaders take the call.¹⁴⁹

Shootings between the warring tongs spread and resulted in the death of Harry Wong in Seattle, Washington and another man in San Jose, California.¹⁵⁰ These two murders occurred within two days of the Portland shooting and death of M. Len. Fearing further bloodshed, Portland city official, Deputy District Attorney Ryan, quickly issued a threat that raids of Chinatown would begin and wholesale arrests of all tong men would occur if shootings continued.¹⁵¹

City officials commonly issued threats to warring tongs in hopes of ending the violence. But tongs usually turned a deaf ear to the police even as they threatened to dismantle their associations and arrest of their members. Most of the time threats focused

¹⁴⁹ "Chinese Dies in Tong War," *Oregonian*, February 9, 1917. This article is a continuation from first article "Chinese Killed in Tong War Over \$3."

¹⁵⁰ "Tong War is Renewed," *Evening Times-Republican*, February 10th, 1917.

¹⁵¹ "More Shootings in Tong War Feared," *Oregonian*, February 11, 1917.

on the tongs themselves, but at times city leaders would threaten the Chinese community as a whole in hopes of pressuring the tongs into negotiating peace. Methods such as this called upon wealthy merchants and other prominent leaders in Chinatown to use their influence with the people to broker peace. Due to the severity of these threats, officials rarely turned to these methods. However, Portland officials opted for this route in 1917. The actions of San Francisco leaders five years earlier, in ending a Tong War in California in 1912, influenced this decision.

At the time in San Francisco, the Suey Sings, Sen Suey Ngs, and Hip Sings aligned together against the Hop Sings. In February, the Chief of Police D.A. White delivered an ultimatum to the tongs via a letter sent to Consul General Li Yung Yew and Secretary Wong Sam of the Six Companies. The ultimatum stated that if the tongs “have any regard for the welfare of the Chinese in general” they will agree to peace within twenty-four hours and present an agreement to the merchant organization. The agreement then needed to be on his desk by the next day. If the tongs did not agree to such conditions, White would have police patrols around the Chinatown to keep away white visitors and threatened that “Chinatown will be blockaded and literally starved out as far as the white patronage is concerned.” As the fighting occurred around the time of the Chinese New Year, White also refused to approve the use of firecrackers for the celebration.¹⁵² The threat brought the tongs to the table, where they brokered peace, for a time.

In 1917, Deputy Ryan’s threat against Portland tongs was neither out of the

¹⁵² “Chief Delivers an Ultimatum to Chinatown,” *The San Francisco Call*, February 12, 1912.

ordinary, nor particularly successful. Ryan followed his plan, but he was surprised by the result. On February 11th, only three days after the war broke out in Portland's streets, numerous Chinese residents posted notices written on red rice paper to the neighborhood's bulletins. These notices declared the neutrality of peaceful Chinese and made mention that they did not belong to any tong nor had tong affiliations.¹⁵³ The community members posted their statements with the hopes that by declaring themselves neutral, they would be protected from becoming targets of tong violence. These declarations of neutrality demonstrated the already waning power of the tongs in the community as individual residents voiced their noninvolvement in the conflict.

As residents of the Chinese district posted their notices of neutrality, many tong members, especially those in leadership roles left the city, with other members, primarily the tong fighters, arrived in Portland.¹⁵⁴ Rumors about groups of gunmen, from between seven to seventy-five, were headed from San Francisco to Portland to fight in the war.¹⁵⁵ In anticipation of their arrival, tong leaders and wealthy merchants went into hiding in Chinatown while others ostensibly fled to seek cannery jobs in Astoria and other parts of Oregon. Police Captain Inskeep noted that none of them looked like cannery hands or laborers of any sorts. He also noted that in the tong conflict of the previous year, a group of Chinese had given the same excuse for their sudden exodus from town.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ "Neutral Chinese Declare Selves," *Oregonian*, February 12, 1917.

¹⁵⁴ Newspapers frequently reported tong presidents and other high-ranking leaders leaving the city during a tong war for safety, while the tong fighters traveled to the city in conflict.

¹⁵⁵ Both estimates are provided in the *Oregonian* newspaper. On February 11th, the estimate was between 75-100. The next day the more conservative estimate of seven gunmen was given in the newspaper. It is much more likely that seven gunmen traveled to Portland rather than one hundred, for once they arrived it was necessary to conceal their location from other Chinese residents and local police.

¹⁵⁶ "Neutral Chinese Declare Selves," *Oregonian*, February 12, 1917.

Over the next couple days, officers arrested five men they suspected to have tong connections. Three came from Seattle, one from Portland, and one was preparing to leave for China. The police confiscated two revolvers from Yuen Wong, the Portland resident who officials considered to be a member of the Hop Sing. Wong denied any connections with the tong.¹⁵⁷ A couple days later, Deputy Ryan arrested ten more Chinese men outside of Salem suspected of belonging to the tongs. Seven of the men came from San Francisco and the others claimed they lived in Portland.¹⁵⁸ Newspapers reported that leaders of other western cities with Chinatowns worried about movement of Chinese men as well. In Seattle, police officers made their fifth arrest by February 13th and announced that many gunmen from Portland and San Francisco travelled to Seattle to partake in the Chinatown battles.¹⁵⁹

Newspapers were mostly silent about the events that provoked their arrests. What is apparent in these arrests and the decisions of police is the wariness of authorities that accompanied Chinese movement. Their inability to distinguish tong men from other Chinese immigrants or Chinese-Americans cast suspicion upon all male Chinese residents.

In all the chaos of fighting, fleeing, and declaring neutrality, peace negotiations could not begin. The Suey Sing tong maintained “their right to blood money or blood, with battle as the only other choice.”¹⁶⁰ Loyalty to fellow tong brothers and retribution

¹⁵⁷ “Police Gather in 5 As Tong Warriors,” *Oregonian*, February 13, 1917.

¹⁵⁸ “Ten Chinese Arrested,” *Oregonian*, February 16, 1917. The *Oregonian* notes that the men would most likely be held as participants in the tong war, until they could prove otherwise. This shows that presumption of innocence until proven otherwise did not extend to Chinese residents in the same way that it did for white Americans.

¹⁵⁹ “More Chinese Arrested,” *Daily Capital Journal*, February 14, 1917.

¹⁶⁰ “Police Gather in 5 As Tong Warriors,” *Oregonian*, February 13, 1917.

for the death of any member proved central to the tong societies. They could not agree to a peace plan until tongs felt that each tong suffered equally, and that each upheld the pride of their association.¹⁶¹ This combined the fraternal nature of the tongs with the promise for individual physical and financial protection from enemies; both within Chinese communities and outside in the larger American society. The tongs' existence depended on the loyalty of its members and its ability to uphold their promises. For their loyalty, members received physical and economic protection, a sense of belonging, as well as legal assistance if one ended up in prison.

As the majority of tong members left Portland, those who stayed behind looked after the tong headquarters and managed the highbinders. Chinatown appeared as a ghost town by mid-February. Streets were empty and doors remained locked. Numerous detectives and police officers stood watch in the district, ever ready for a tong showdown, knowing the Suey Sing's need for retaliation.¹⁶² This desire for reprisal kept the tongs from negotiating peace agreements.

Although the tongs grew out of a distrust and discontentment of the Chinese Six Companies, during times of conflict the organization successfully positioned itself as an intermediary between warring tongs during peace negotiations. In part, the mediatory role of the Six Companies grew out of their rapport with local government leaders, as mayors often invited or expected the Six Companies to take care of the problem. Local leaders of tongs and other pertinent Chinese organizations travelled to San Francisco for these meetings, where the main branches of the association and tongs existed. On February

¹⁶¹ C.N. Reynolds, "The Chinese Tongs," *American Journal of Sociology* 40, no. 5 (Mar., 1935), 623.

¹⁶² "Chinatown is Quiet," *Oregonian*, February 14, 1917.

17th, representatives of the Hip Sing and Suey Sing tongs, along with their allies, met at the building of the Chinese Benevolent Association, in Portland, with members of the Chinese Peace Society, to broker an agreement.¹⁶³ After several hours the meeting ended. Hostilities continued and peace eluded the conference. Contrary to the typical distrust between tong members and the police, the representatives requested police protection when they arrived at the summit on February 17th. When a threat by another tong appeared serious enough, associating with the police could be permitted, albeit in very limited situations.

Opposing the Local Government

Aggressions between the tongs continued for the rest of February and into March. Towards the end of March, the Mayor of Portland issued an ultimatum to the four tongs involved in the war. Mayor Albee sought the end of the confrontation and he planned on using the entire Chinese community as his bargaining chip. Together with Mayor Anderson of The Dalles and Acting Mayor Curtis of Astoria, Mayor Albee issued an ultimatum that a peace agreement needed to be signed. The Mayor required the Hip Sing, Suey Sing, Hop Sing, and Bing Kung-Bow Leong tongs to send representatives to a meeting and come out with a peace pact agreed upon and signed by the Presidents and secretaries of the implicated tongs within forty-eight hours. If tongs did not agree to peace within the allotted time, Mayor Albee stated that he would have the police sent into the Chinese district and begin arresting all Chinese residents on site; regardless of age,

¹⁶³ "Dove Driven Away by Warring Tongs," *Oregonian*, February 18, 1917.

gender, or tong affiliation. The people would then be held in jail until each could prove their legal right to being in the United States.¹⁶⁴

Here the conflict between tongs collided with the Exclusion Act. By threatening wholesale arrests of Chinese people, the mayor used the Act's prohibition on Chinese laborers, and other barred peoples, as a bargaining chip against the tongs, believing many residents within Chinatown to be in violation of this law. By threatening not only tong members, but all Chinese within Portland, Mayor Albee escalated demands made in previous tong wars and even those threats made earlier by Deputy Ryan. At this moment, Mayor Albee threatened to deprive all Chinese immigrants and even their native-born children of their personal and civic rights.

The combined threat of action against all Chinese residents in Portland drew the tongs to the table to discuss peace. The four tongs signed an agreement to keep the peace for a minimum of thirty days while they negotiated a long-term plan. The tong representatives also pledged to refuse "aid, assistance, countenance or shelter to any of their members or others who shall violate any of the covenants here in contained." They also promised to provide law enforcement officers with any information about members who violated the peace agreements or conducted illegal acts.¹⁶⁵

A month later, on April 26th, tong presidents and secretaries signed the formal peace agreement and put it on the Mayor's desk.¹⁶⁶ In it contained additional clauses discussing the terms of armistice. Each tong agreed to end the violence. Another part of

¹⁶⁴ "Ultimatum Sent Tongs by Mayor," *Oregonian*, March 29, 1917.

¹⁶⁵ "Portland Tong peace agreement," March 31, 1917, Mss. 190, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

¹⁶⁶ "Tong 30 days Agreement," March 31 1917, A2004-003 Albee, Portland City Archives.

the arrangement resolved to end future disagreements peaceably and without physical harm to others. The Portland branches of the tongs agreed to not participate in tong actions and fighting in other cities. Leaders also agreed to turn in any member of their tongs who violated the peace agreements. With the four signatures of the tong secretaries accompanied by the signature of the presidents of each tong, these men gave the appearance of turning over a new leaf for the Chinese community in Portland. The Mayor's threats seemed successful. Portland's control over the Chinese community and the tong groups looked absolute. The quasi-political organizations of the Chinese people seemed to fall in line with the desires and authority of Portland officials.

However, peace and control over the tongs proved short-lived. What looked like as a success of government authority in controlling a marginalized people, soon revealed itself to be otherwise. Within weeks, tongs renewed the fighting with the Suey Sing Tong battling with the Kung-Bow Leong Tong in the streets of Portland. This fight left three men dead and five injured.¹⁶⁷ The Mayor's authority and police coercion proved insufficient to end the conflict. Only Chinese community leaders negotiating on their own terms would bring the Tong War of 1917 to an end.

The Tong War of 1917 reveals how Chinese community leaders negotiated power and control with local, state, and federal government. Control of Chinatown between the government and the Chinese themselves fluctuated during the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. This power struggle was further shaped by racism and racial conflicts between the Chinese immigrant community and the larger white community of

¹⁶⁷ "2 Dead; 1 Dying; 5 Hurt in Tong Fight," *Oregonian*, June 3, 1917.

the region. It also highlights ways in which power is constructed between marginalized people and government. Governmental neglect and discrimination led to the creation of Chinese quasi-governmental organizations. At times, governmental authority sought to assert control over the Chinese community. However, these attempts proved ineffective because the government denied aid and essential services to the community. Instead, auxiliary groups filled these needs. In this way Chinese merchants and organizations, like tongs, became the intercessory figures between the immigrant groups and the US government.

CHAPTER IV
TONG TRANSITIONS: THE CHANGING NEEDS OF MEMBERS AND
COMMUNITY

“The Tong stands forth as the strongest organization to promote the welfare of the Chinese in America. The only drawback is the tong war with its dread toll of lives. But I feel, as every other Chinese feels, that these wars are to become a thing of the past, and that the pages of tong history will no longer record such bloody deeds as those of Hong Ah Kay, Sing Dock, Big Queue Wai, Yee Toy, and scores of other highbinders, and hatchetmen, and gunmen.”

- Eng Ying Gong, 1930¹⁶⁸

The Chinese tongs developed as Chinese immigrants sought mutual protection and aid. Contesting US government authority as well as control by other Chinese organizations, the tongs became the central power of Chinatown during the late nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth centuries. Yet, as the twentieth century progressed, their role in the community changed as the Chinese became more successful in fighting back against discriminatory laws and practices. As they did so, the tong’s power in the community ebbed. The tong wars died out and the tongs themselves transitioned into more traditional fraternal organizations. As the tong influence declined in Chinatown, the Consolidated Chinese Benevolent Association (previously known as the Six Companies) reemerged as the clear leader of Chinatown.¹⁶⁹ The 1917 Tong War in Portland marks the changes within tongs, the decline of tong wars, as well as the success of the Chinese in combating racism.

¹⁶⁸ Eng Gong and Bruce Grant, *Tong War!* (New York: Nicholas L. Brown, 1930), 287.

¹⁶⁹ Even today, the CCBA is the main organization of Chinese Americans, with branches throughout the United States.

Unsettled Peace and the Continuation of Conflict

In April 1917, Mayor Albee seemed unstoppable. Under threat of widescale arrests, he successfully brought the warring tongs together at the end of March, convincing them to sign a thirty day's armistice. Violence on the streets of Portland's Chinatown stopped. Business picked up, people walked the streets, and the Mayor could claim the victory.

Mayor Albee's actions inspired others city mayors to act as well. Mayor Gill of Seattle decided to hold a conference for the branches of the rival tongs in Washington and sign a truce. Rather than threatening widescale arrests, Portland's mayor, Gill stated "I intend to break up Chinese meetings, and if necessary close their tong halls and temples." This he claimed would be more effective because most of those involved were actually Chinese Americans, not immigrants.¹⁷⁰ Even Los Angeles followed suit, after tongs in Portland signed the permanent peace pact in late April. On May 5th, newspapers wrote that Mayor Woodman successfully brought the rival tongs together and convinced them to sign a treaty of peace for thirty days. "When they concluded this pact, I told them that unless that treaty were made permanent and that the tong violence cease in Los Angeles I would clean every mother's son of a Chinese out of the city under the provisions of the new immigration laws."¹⁷¹ Under the threat of arrest, deportation, or destruction of property, each Mayor individually brought the warring tongs of their city to the negotiation table. The Spring of 1917 seemed to herald the end of tong wars.

¹⁷⁰ "Rival Tongmen Summoned," *Oregonian*, April 3, 1917.

¹⁷¹ "Peace or Quit L.A., Tongs Are Told," *Los Angeles Herald*, May 5, 1917.

Over the next thirty days Portland's tongs worked to turn their temporary truce into permanent peace. At times, armistice seemed so close, at others times peace seemed almost ready to fall apart. At these moments, Mayor Albee reissued his threats against the tongs and Chinatown. On April 24th, with only six days left of the truce between the warring tongs, Mayor Albee promised that without a signed pact for permanent peace, he was prepared to begin an "anti-tong war crusade" on May first. On that day, officers would go around Chinatown and destroy the tong men's quarters.¹⁷² As the end of the month, and peace, drew near, Mayor Albee called for a conference at his office, on April 26th, between the rival tongs, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, the Chinese Peace Society, himself, the District Attorney, along with other state and federal representatives.

However, on the morning of the 26th, the four tong presidents, Chan Jung Tung of the Suey Sings, Young Toon of the Hop Sings, Moi Ling of the Bing Kong Bow Leongs, and Young Gee of the Hip Sings, joined together at the office of District Attorney Evans and signed their own peace pact.¹⁷³ While complying with the Mayor's demands, they asserted their own power and authority by ensuring the Mayor's absence in the signed agreement. This peace pact, also lacking signatures of other non-tong influential Chinese leaders, such as representatives from the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and the Chinese Peace Society, reasserted tong importance in Chinatown, while marginalizing the control and influence of other associations in tong affairs.

¹⁷² "Tong Peace is Doubtful," *Oregonian*, April 24, 1917.

¹⁷³ "Tongs Sign Peace; Effect is Doubted," *Oregonian*, April 27, 1917.

Portland tongs exhibited power in signing the peace pact of April 26th, by controlling when they signed and the officials involved in the signing. By including District Attorney Evans, the tongs guaranteed the acceptance to the pact. As a government official, District Attorney Evans' signature provided a legitimacy to the peace pact that the local government could not contest. By including only one government signature, the tongs reasserted that tongs controlled the conflict *and* the negotiation for peace, showing that peace would only be achieved on the terms of the tongs. They would not be pushed around.

Mayor Albee still held his planned afternoon meeting, in which Sheriff Hulbert, Immigration Inspector Bonham, City Detective Tichenor, and representatives from the CCBA and the Chinese Peace Society attended.¹⁷⁴ Chinese officials not included in the peace pact of April 26th warned the community that their lack of signatures weakened the binding nature of the pact and it might not hold. Le Ne Gim, president of the Chinese Peace Society told the Mayor that "I feel that the pact was not signed in the proper place or in the proper spirit, and may not amount to much." However, despite those concerns, the pact was legitimate in the eyes of local, state, and federal authorities.¹⁷⁵

Peace did not last. On June 2nd fighting broke out between Suey Sings and Bing Kung Bow Leongs, with over a dozen Chinese fighting in the streets of Portland. The battle left Chin Hong, a middle-aged influential merchant, and Chung Chow dead. Both belonged to the Bing Kung Bow Leong tong. The fighting also mortally wounded another member of the Bing Kung Bow Leong tong, along with an additional five people injured,

¹⁷⁴ "Tongs Sign Peace; Effect is Doubted," *Oregonian*, April 27, 1917.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

including some white citizens.¹⁷⁶ The police brought numerous Chinese men into custody during the aftermath, including Yee Guk and Suey Fong. Three weeks later, the Portland Police formally arrested Fung Lee, Guk Yee, Fung Shew, and Ju Low, for murder. The police also arrested Low, but only held him for ‘investigation.’¹⁷⁷ The next day the District Attorney issued more warrants for the arrests of numerous officers and members of the Hop Sing and Suey Sing tongs, including their presidents, Yung Toon, and Chan Jung Tung respectively. The police also detained Quon Sam, who worked as an interpreter for the tongs, Gong Wo and Lee Jan, both Suey Sing tong members, along with five other men associated with the Hop Sing and Suey Sing tongs.¹⁷⁸ With these warrants, Mayor Albee, the District Attorney’s office, and Portland police changed tactics. No longer did the police only arrest the gunmen involved, but began arresting the leaders of the tongs as well, charging them with violating the peace treaty. Frustrated with the continuing violence, Mayor Albee promised he would “even transgress his power in the effort to wipe the gangs of murderers from Portland.”¹⁷⁹ The next day he continued with “I am going to bat with these Chinese murderers just as strong as the law will permit, and maybe a little stronger, if the law is not lenient enough...”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ “2 Dead; 1 Dying; 5 Hurt in Tong Fight,” *Oregonian* June 3, 1917.

¹⁷⁷ “Arrest Dockets,” v.67 Box 69 A2001-073, Stanley Parr and Record Center, City of Portland, Portland, Oregon.

¹⁷⁸ “Warrants out for Tongmen’s Arrest,” *Oregonian*, June 4, 1917.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ “Mayor Says Tong Wars Must Stop,” *Oregonian*, June 5, 1917.

Tong War in the Courtroom

From here, the war not only changed between the tongs themselves, but also between the tongs and local government. The summer months of 1917 saw less violence and street fights than earlier in the year, but that did not mean the end of the war. The violence changed venues instead. Now, the war continued in the courtroom. During the summer, the District Attorney targeted several tong men for their roles in the war. Hop Sing gunman, Lee Yin, spent early June in court, on trial for murder charges. On June 9th the jury found him not guilty.¹⁸¹ Judge Gatens heard the trial of Wong Wen Teung, another Hop Sing gunman, charged with the murder of Joseph Gue from March 27th. The trial began on June 19th and by June 27th the jury found him guilty after only one hour of deliberation.¹⁸²

The various players interpreted the courtroom scene in several ways. For the new Mayor, George Baker, along with Chief Deputy District Attorney Collier the court trials against tong members signified the government's upper hand in stamping out the tongs and controlling the area. For the tongs, the courtroom became an extension of the fighting taking place on the streets. By June the Suey Sing and Hop Sing tongs had injured and killed more Bing Kung Bow Leong men than vice versa. For the Bing Kung Bow Leongs, who lost seven more men than the Suey Sings, the court room became an opportunity to even that score. The Bing Kung Bow Leong's attorney, Dan Malarkey, joined in as a special prosecutor, in the case against Wong Wen Tueng, seeking a murder conviction as form of retribution.

¹⁸¹ "Lee Yin is Freed," *Oregonian*, June 10, 1917.

¹⁸² "Chinese Murder Trial Nears End," *Oregonian*, June 27, 1917.

In retaliation, the Hop Sings stationed two heavily armed members outside the courthouse's entrance. Deputy Sheriff Phillips arrested them and contrary to normal police-tong interactions, the men informed the police of their names, Jung Hing and Ching Sing, openly declaring their membership in the Bing Kung Bow Leong tong. They confessed that their purpose at the courthouse was to kill both Moy Ham and Quon Sam, the interpreter and high-ranking members of the Hop Sings. As discussed by the local newspaper, the veracity of this story runs into some problems. As attorney Malarkey pointed out, tong men rarely, if ever, freely admitted membership in tongs to police officers. Typically, members denied any tong association when confronted by police. Also, the men at the courthouse were conspicuously armed, not bothering to hid their weapons.¹⁸³ Tong members usually concealed their weapons, and logically would have done so in close proximity to the courthouse. The aggressive nature outside the courthouse, along with the quick confession, led many to believe the two men actually belonged to Hop Sing tong and were posing as Bing Kung Bow Leong tong members.

When Yin Lee walked free, the Bing Kung Bow Leongs lost another round against the Suey Sings and Hop Sings. Frustrated at the news, tong members went to battle in the streets of Portland. On July 18th, rival tong members murdered Back Lee.¹⁸⁴ Since the renewal of violence in June, a grand jury began investigations into the tong war and charged more Chinese men.¹⁸⁵ By August, this led to the arrests various leaders of the four tongs for conspiracy and approving of murder. These tong leaders entered jail

¹⁸³ "Gunmen Arrested at Chinese Trial," *Oregonian*, June 26, 1917.

¹⁸⁴ "Tong War Breaks Out Again In Portland," *Daily Capital Journal*, July 19, 1917.

¹⁸⁵ "Tongs Object For Grand Jury Probe," *Oregonian*, June 7, 1917.

without bail. Collier hoped this police action would bring about another peace treaty. He told the incarcerated men that he could recommend their release and postpone their trials indefinitely, but only if they signed a permanent peace pact. This meant that only the actual gunmen charged with murder would be prosecuted. However, releasing the tong leaders was conditional. If they broke the treaty, they would be tried under those indictments again.¹⁸⁶ No such peace agreement ever materialized.

An agreement for permanent peace finally came in the beginning of September. Officials and representatives met in San Francisco and signed a pact purposed to bring about peace throughout all of the Pacific Coast. Seemingly directed from higher levels within the tongs, leaders in San Francisco then forwarded the peace agreement to the other branches and on September 13th, Portland tongs recognized the legitimacy of the peace pact by posting notices of it throughout Chinatown. Officers then signed a ratification of the peace pact affirming their commitment to its terms.¹⁸⁷ This peace pact held while previous ones failed due to several reasons. First, all tongs had tired of the war after racking up expensive bills as the fight lasted longer than anticipated. Secondly, the leaders, both locally and at the headquarters in San Francisco approved the peace pact, posting notice of it throughout the cities. Thirdly, the pact succeeded because the tongs agreed on a ceasefire and their genuine desire for peace, rather than government bullying tactics, brought them to the negotiating table.

¹⁸⁶ "Solid Tong Peace Pact in Prospect," *Oregonian*, August 8, 1917.

¹⁸⁷ "Peace Pact Confirmed," *Oregonian*, September 13, 1917.

The Death of Tong Wars

The 1917 conflict was not the last of the tong wars. During the early 1920's another war broke out. However, the frequency of tong wars decreased and over time they stopped altogether. In the 1920s, fewer stories covered conflict in the Chinese community. Furthermore, articles about tong wars ceased to be front page news, relegated to the back pages.¹⁸⁸ As newspapers impact and mirror community interests and beliefs, this change shows that the tongs are seen as less of a threat, and violence within Chinatown less interesting, as the twentieth century progressed. Another tong war occurred in the early 1920s along the west coast, but afterwards, it seems that tong wars stopped completely, with only one war in New York around the early 1930s. The tong wars that began in the 1880s and many thought a regular occurrence within Chinatowns stopped completely within roughly a decade.¹⁸⁹

Despite reduced press attention, conflict continued between Portland's tongs, but they changed how they settled disagreements. In Winter of 1918, tongs and the larger Chinese community feared the end of the peace founded in the previous year due to a disagreement between the Suey Sings and Hop Sings over a purported payment of \$4000 due to the Hop Sings by the Suey Sings. Rather than erupting in violence, the two tongs

¹⁸⁸ This change is visible in the *Oregonian*. 1921 and 1922 are exceptions to this. In 1921, five different front pages included articles about tong warfare for 1921 and two for 1922.

¹⁸⁹ Newspapers allow for an examination of this. For example, the *Oregonian*, the prominent newspaper for Oregon, printed 101 articles in 1917 using the phrase 'Tong war'. In 1918, eleven articles mentioned it. In 1919, only seven. With the outbreak of tong conflict in the early 1920's, there were 44 references in 1921 and 46 in 1922. However, after 1923 there were zero references until 1927. And from 1927 to the end of the century there are only three mentions of a "tong war." *Oregonian*, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon. A search through the Library of Congress's *Chronicling America* shows 180 references in 1917, 33 in 1918, 49 in 1919, 47 in 1920, 200 in 1921, 200 in 1922, 1 in 1923, 45 in 1924, 45 in 1925, and 145 from 1926 onward.

met and negotiated an immediate payment of \$800 instead. This arrangement successfully kept the peace between the tongs, despite their history of animosity.¹⁹⁰ Instead of being threatened into negotiations hosted at a government location, the tongs met at their headquarters and brought District Attorney Evans into the meeting. Tong conflict and negotiations began to transform.

Another change for mediating conflict between tongs occurred in Portland 1921. That year, another tong war broke out across the Pacific Coast, beginning with battles in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Stockton.¹⁹¹ The same day that newspapers reported the violence in California, representatives of the Hop Sing and Bing Kong Bow Leong tongs gathered together with District Attorney Evans in Portland and composed a preemptive peace pact. Sue Key Ling, president of the Hop Sings, along with secretary Moy Ham endorsed the agreement; as did President Moy Ling and secretary Louis Chung for the Bing Kong Bow Leongs. Wong Yuen also signed as a representative as the Peace Society. With all the necessary signatures present on the pact, the tongs sent the document around to the smaller tongs across the state; for the agreement pledged all tongs within Oregon to a state of peace.¹⁹² Again, in this meeting, the tongs invited District Attorney Evans, rather than Evans forcing the tongs together.

Not only did tongs leaders begin settling disagreements without explicit violence (at least most of the time) and keep Portland and the surrounding region away from the larger tong conflicts of the West Coast, but the leaders also permitted government

¹⁹⁰ "Chinese Dispute Settled," *Oregonian*, December 11, 1918.

¹⁹¹ "3 Slain, 5 Wounded In New Tongs War," *Oregonian*, February 16, 1921.

¹⁹² "Tongs Sign Peace Pact," *Oregonian*, February 17, 1921.

authorities to continue taking part in their peace negotiations. In both of these examples, local tong leaders invited District Attorney Evans to be present and assist in the meeting. Rather than being pushed around, tongs exhibited agency in the ways they addressed conflict, and at times worked alongside government officials, on their own terms, to settle quarrels.

Scholars have offered numerous explanations for why tong wars end by the 1930s and why tong influence in Chinatowns declined. Some historians focused on tong wars as unique to San Francisco during the 1880s -1890s. This myopic lens led to a conclusion that tong wars ceased due to the destruction of brothels, opium dens, and gambling rooms operated by the tongs in the San Francisco earthquake of 1906.¹⁹³ This deprived tongs of income and any further conflicts ended with the creation of the Chinese Peace Society in 1913, growth of merchant class power, rejection and suppression of the tongs by local police.¹⁹⁴ This argument is problematic because vice activities continued well after the earthquake of 1906 in San Francisco. While the Chinese Peace Society may have helped end tong wars, the creation of the organization did not mark the end of the violent conflicts. Also, the juxtaposition of tong influence to merchant power ignores that many leading merchants in Chinese communities belonged to tongs.¹⁹⁵ Rather than being at odds with one another, interests of tongs and merchants frequently aligned, particularly when merchants held leadership roles in tongs. Another argument states that tong power

¹⁹³ Richard H. Dillon, *Hatchetmen: The Story of the Tong Wars in San Francisco's Chinatown* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1962), xvi.

¹⁹⁴ Richard H. Dillon, *Hatchetmen: The Story of the Tong Wars in San Francisco's Chinatown* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1962), xvii.

¹⁹⁵ For example, Seid Back and his son Seid Gain Back were influential leaders in the community, wealthy merchants, and officers in the Bing Kung Bow Leong tong.

declined due to increased governmental control of Chinatown as figures such as Sergeant Manion constantly arrested tong members for illegal activities at every opportunity.¹⁹⁶

While increased patrol of Chinatown could impact crime rates and tong activities, this is overly simplistic and disregards the multifaceted ways in which tong influence declined.

Others reasoned that tong wars stopped due to the transition of Chinatowns' vice operations to a growth of tourism that required a more sanitized version of Chinatown. Sociologist Ivan Light argues that Chinese merchants desired tourism and this conflicted with tong operation of vice activities. In the end the merchants won out and seeing the success of tourism, tongs join in tourism as well.¹⁹⁷ This, Light claims, represents a shift in the public demand of what was wanted from Chinatown.¹⁹⁸ It is true that tourism did change Chinatown. While tourism and the desire for white clientele did play a role in changing Chinatown, Chinese restaurants and promises of participating in recreational vice, while maintaining anonymity already brought a male, white clientele to most Chinatowns.¹⁹⁹ The tourism of the twentieth century also emphasized seedier qualities of Chinatown, while downplaying other parts.

Various forms of vice are found in almost every community, and portrayals of Chinatown as a place of illicit activities relies on stereotypes and disregards the complex nature of the community. Such portrayals as seen in the play "The East is East and the

¹⁹⁶ Richard H. Dillon, *Hatchetmen: The Story of the Tong Wars in San Francisco's Chinatown* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1962), 269.

¹⁹⁷ Ivan Light, "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction: The Moral Career of American Chinatowns, 1880-1940," *Pacific Historical Review* 43, no. 3 (Aug., 1974), 394.

¹⁹⁸ Ivan Light, "The Ethnic Vice Industry, 1880-1944," *American Sociological Association* 42, no. 3 (Jun., 1977), 475.

¹⁹⁹ Ivan Light, "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction: The Moral Career of American Chinatowns, 1880-1940," *Pacific Historical Review* 43, no. 3 (Aug., 1974), 372.

West is West” pushed such stereotypes in the twentieth century to which Chinese residents criticized the uncivilized portrayal of Chinese in the United States and rebuked any Chinese that participated in such representations, both in plays and tourist performances.²⁰⁰ These depictions that played upon racialized stereotypes, whether in film and pictures reinforced negative biases and the idea of what Colburn and Pozzetta describe as the “innate criminality” many associated with immigrant and ethnic minority groups.²⁰¹ Tourism reinforced many of these perceptions as Chinatown guides displayed fake opium dens, tong battles, lepers, and told stories about the hatchetmen of Chinatown.²⁰² Over time, Chinatowns came to depend upon the tourism industry financially which incentivized residents to play into racial stereotypes and the perceived mystery of the community.²⁰³

More recent explanations include a series of changes to explain the decline of the tongs. Historian Scott Seligman argues that the onset of the Great Depression forced tongs to turn inward to address the needs of their members, coupled with a demographic shift within Chinatown that weakened the position of tong in the community.²⁰⁴ The Great Depression caused everyone to change their spending habits and focus more on

²⁰⁰ “To the Chinese Employed by American Theatres,” *Sing Shar Monthly*, no.3, p. 6-7, Portland, translated by Chia-Lin Chen, *Articles written by Portland’s Chinese, 1973*, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

²⁰¹ David R. Colburn and George E. Pozzetta, “Crime and Ethnic Minorities in America: A Bibliographic Essay,” *The History Teacher* 7, no. 4 (Aug., 1974), 597.

²⁰² Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, rev. ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 482-485.

²⁰³ Ivan Light and Charles Choy Wong, “Protest or Work: Dilemmas of the Tourist Industry in American Chinatowns,” *American Journal of Sociology* 80, no. 6 (May, 1975), 1342.

²⁰⁴ Scott D. Seligman, *Tong Wars: The Untold Story of Vice, Money, and Murder in New York’s Chinatown* (New York: Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2016), 258. In his last chapter, Seligman also discusses the changes of tongs in leadership, a generational shift, and living outside Chinatown. However, the main components of his argument center on a demographic shift and the Great Depression.

needs than wants. It is logical that tongs and their members experienced a similar shift. While this may signify a transition of tong attention, it does not explain why the tongs began to change and tong wars declined from early on in the 1920s. Characterized as the “Roaring Twenties,” American society experienced increases in wealth and excess in the 1920s, yet it is during this time that tongs began to change. For Seligman the Great Depression is the lynchpin, but that does not fit with the changes beginning over a decade prior to the Great Depression. Also, such a need as created by the Great Depression should increase rather than weaken the importance and power of the tongs, since members would turn to them for assistance. This is visible in other forms of organized crime in the United States during the Great Depression. During that era, crime rates rose as more gangs developed across the United States and Canada due to men seeking out new forms of economic survival.²⁰⁵ Ronald Takaki argues that the turn to tourism and the Great Depression go hand in hand. He argues that Chinatown turned to an increased centrality of tourism to combat the effects of the Great Depression experienced by Chinese residents.

The second part of Seligman’s argument is more convincing. Certainly, the demographic shift impacted Chinatown as a whole, but also the tongs within. While this demographic shift played an important role, it is a symptom rather than the cause for the decline of tong power in Chinatown. The tongs’ influence waned due to the increased success of Chinese residents in fighting against discriminatory laws, along with a

²⁰⁵ Dean Jones et al., “Street Gangs: A Review of Theory, Interventions, and Implications for Corrections,” *Research Branch*, Correctional Service of Canada (Sept., 2004).

subsequent growth of opportunities outside the tongs.²⁰⁶ The courthouse became an important space to combat racial discrimination.

As discussed by historian Sucheng Chan, Chinese immigrants fought against discrimination in the courts. During the period of exclusion, Chan records more than 1,100 cases involving Chinese plaintiffs or defendants.²⁰⁷ These cases centered on the issues of exclusion, right of naturalization, and economic discrimination. While many of these cases involved organizations like the Chinese Six Companies, numerous residents filed suits on their own.²⁰⁸ California merchant, Wu Wah hired a personal lawyer after immigration officials sought to arrest Wah and his wife in 1932. The couple sold their business and fled, moving from place to place over the next five years. Finally, in 1937 Wu Wah hired W.H. Wilkinson to represent them. With his help, the couple's arrest warrants were annulled, along with the orders for deportation.²⁰⁹ Others joined unions, striking alongside fellow workers. In 1936, around 3,000 Chinese sailors joined the National Maritime Union in New York, in their strike for better pay, equal treatment, and the right for Chinese sailors to shore leave.²¹⁰ Lastly, Chinese residents fought against not only legislative discrimination, but also against the power and control of Chinatown leaders and organizations. In the 1930s, Chinese laundrymen in New York banded together and created the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance after neglect from The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. The new group hired their own lawyers to fight

²⁰⁶ Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, rev. ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 481.

²⁰⁷ Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 90.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 232-233.

²¹⁰ Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 90.

discriminatory ordinances rather than turn to the CCBA.²¹¹

The reasons for the end of tong wars and declining tong influence in communities is more nuanced. Money was one such reason. Finances motivated tongs to end their conflicts.²¹² Newspapers, time and time again, discussed the desertion of Chinatown during tong wars. The streets became empty and many Chinese even left the city for The Dalles or Tacoma. As a result, businesses suffered. People stayed at home rather than visit stores, leaving goods unpurchased and restaurants unvisited. The longer a tong war lasted, the longer that Chinese employees and employers suffered monetarily. The merchants within the ranks of tongs especially felt the economic pressure of continued conflict and benefited from ending tong wars.

Along with money not going *in* to businesses, conducting a tong war came with a hefty price tag attached to it. Tong wars cost a lot of money and tongs hemorrhaged money. They paid gunmen, purchased guns, bullets, and other weapons, hired lawyers, and payed bribes. All of these added up. Leong Gor Yun in discussing the end of a tong war in New York stated both tongs wanted to end the war because “the Hip Sing was short of funds, and the On Leong short of hatchet-men.”²¹³ These shortages made both sides keen to broker peace.²¹⁴ Additionally, several of the tongs began to face lawsuits from bystanders injured as a result of tong battles. For example, J.W. Riggins, a grain handler struck by a stray bullet during the June 2nd battle, sued the Suey Sing and Hop

²¹¹ Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 95.

²¹² Marie Rose Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2004), 203.

²¹³ Leong Gor Yun, *Chinatown Inside Out* (New York: Barrows Mussey, 1936), 79.

²¹⁴ Scott D. Seligman, *Tong Wars: The Untold Story of Vice, Money, and Murder in New York's Chinatown* (New York: Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2016), 255. In this he is referencing Leong Gor Yun's 1936 book *Chinatown Inside Out*.

Sing tongs for \$25,310.²¹⁵ The same summer, Tony Marovich sued the Hop Sings for \$25,000 for his injuries resulting from a tong shootout.²¹⁶ Finances could often be the deciding factor in ending tong wars, at times outweighing honor and saving face.

Successfully Contesting Discrimination

As the Chinese increasingly found success in their efforts to combat discriminatory laws and practices, the need to turn to the tongs for help diminished. Originally created to provide aid, assistance, and protection to its members; particularly those unable to join other family or district associations, tong membership declined as residents succeeded without them. These victories made the changes to Chinatown possible, as those with enough money moved out to the suburbs, often only returning to Chinatown for celebrations and holidays. Chinese activism influenced the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, allowing for increased immigration to the United States and the renewal of Chinese family units in greater number.

As the Chinese fought back against prejudice, they accessed greater mobility for themselves, economically and physically. A change took place in Chinatown, as people financially capable of leaving, moved out, and left the community for the suburbs.²¹⁷ Gloria Wong remembered moving out of Chinatown to Ladd's Addition, a Chinese residential development in southeast Portland.²¹⁸ Evelyn Low Ching also moved out of

²¹⁵ "Tongs Are Sued for \$25,310," *Oregonian*, July 20, 1917.

²¹⁶ "Witness Identifies Chinese Murderer," *Oregonian*, June 22, 1917.

²¹⁷ Peter Huston, *Tongs, Gangs, and Triads: Chinese Crime Groups in North America* (Boulder, Colorado: Paladin Press, 1995), 88.

²¹⁸ Gloria Wong, "Oral History," November 25, 1994. Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

Chinatown as a child and into Ladd's Addition in the 1930's.²¹⁹ The Burnside Bridge separated Ladd's Addition from Chinatown and when it opened, Chinese residents able to leave, left Chinatown to live there instead.²²⁰ Gloria also recalls that her father did not join any tong, "because of business reasons," stating that "it was better to not join one and not the other." Rather than joining, he tried to stay on friendly terms with the various tongs and associations in Chinatown.²²¹ He worked in Chinatown, but the rest of his life existed within a disparate community, beyond the boundaries of Chinatown. Gloria remembers her family went into Chinatown only for celebrations and festivities. The movement Chinese residents out of the community changed the role of Chinatown in everyday life of Chinese residents and the insular nature of the community.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Magnuson Bill in 1943, which repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act and allowed for a return, in part, of traditional masculinity for Chinese men. While the repeal only permitted 105 Chinese immigrants to enter the United States each year, it did open, if marginally so, the legal immigration of a more diverse Chinese population.²²² It provided avenues for Chinese immigrants to become naturalized citizens. This act, coupled with the War Brides Act of 1945 and 1947 allowed Chinese men serving in the United States military to bring wives and children into the country. The Confucian order, once upset by the gender disparities in Chinatown,

²¹⁹ Evelyn Low Ching, "Oral History," December 12, 1994. Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

²²⁰ The Hawthorne bridge also connected Ladd's Addition and Chinatown. Gloria Wong, "Oral History," November 25, 1994. Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

²²¹ Gloria notes that her father may have joined the Lee Family Association, because they were Lees. Gloria Wong, "Oral History," November 25, 1994. Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

²²² Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 245. Lee is referencing Riggs, *Pressures on Congress*; David Reimers, *Still the Golden Door: The Third World Comes to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 11-15.

returned, as many men found opportunities to fulfill roles as husbands and fathers.²²³ The opening of immigration to the United States also brought in a greater number and variety of Chinese immigrants. Referred to as the second wave of Chinese immigration, many students entered the United States during the latter half of the twentieth century, with their entrance the typecast of the “model minority” replaced many of the negative stereotypes earlier in the century.²²⁴

As tong influenced declined, residents’ loyalty to China became more important within Chinatowns. Many residents of Chinatown continued to view themselves as patriots of China. In the *Chinese Language School Quarterly*, Portland resident Wong Wei-chen explained the community’s commercial connections with China and argued that the 1925 Portland Exposition presented an opportunity to further develop both.²²⁵ In 1921, Chen Ming-tai wrote about the Portland Chinese and development of the community. He described China as “our nation” and its economy as “our nation’s commerce.”²²⁶ He emphasized all Chinese as citizens of China, simply living abroad, and the need to keep their nation’s interests in mind as they seek to develop economically. This worldview remained prominent in Chinatown throughout the twentieth century, but

²²³ Confucianism created a strict system of order in traditional Chinese culture, with men as central power figures. Wives and daughters were expected to obey husbands and fathers, and after the death of her husband, a widow was instructed to obey her oldest son. A discussion of this is presented in Ronald Takaki’s *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, rev. ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 84-85.

²²⁴ Marc J. Meyer, “First Wave/Latest Wave: A Comparative Historical Analysis of Chinese Immigration” (Master’s Thesis, Utah State University, 2001).

²²⁵ Wong Wei-chen, “What Does the 1925 Portland Exposition Mean to Us?” *Chinese Language School Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (Aug., 1921), translated by Chia-Lin Chen, *Articles written by Portland’s Chinese, 1973*, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

²²⁶ Chen Ming-Tai, “What I Hope for the Chinese Community in Portland,” *Chinese Language School Quarterly* 1, no.2 (Jun., 1921), translated by Chia-Lin Chen, *Articles written by Portland’s Chinese, 1973*, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

the population increase of American-born Chinese complicated this understanding as more saw themselves as Americans as well.

The Evolution of Tongs

In the 1920s tongs embarked on a process that brought them closer to that of other mutual aid societies. The creation of mutual aid groups was not unique to Chinese immigrants. Particularly during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, mutual aid societies proliferated across the United States. From creating a men's club, to banding together racial and ethnic minorities seeking protection, to assembling workers together from suffering under miserable conditions; all of these motivated the creation of diverse mutual aid organizations.²²⁷ From the Elks and Moose lodges, to La Alianza and Knights of Columbus, these groups sought to improve their situations. While tongs always contained components of a mutual aid society, as the twentieth century progressed tongs moved away from outright violence and criminal acts and transitioned into more distinct fraternal orders that assisted members financially and politically, rather than the earlier focus on physical protection.

The uniformity of tong organization was lost during the twentieth century as tongs changed and took on different goals, resulting in dissimilar groups. The altered nature of tongs is evident in the decision of several tongs to change the English translation of their names during the mid-twentieth century. Both the On Leongs and Hip Sings dropped the

²²⁷ Mary Ann Clawson, "Fraternal Orders and Class Formation in the Nineteenth-Century United States," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27, no. 4 (Oct., 1985), 673.

‘tong’ part of their names, replacing it with ‘association’.²²⁸ This marked a desire of the groups to distance themselves from the public memory of tongs and tong wars from years earlier. Many created legitimate forms of business, such as the Hip Sings, that opened an official credit union, providing loans and financial assistance to its members.²²⁹

Contested Authority: The CCBA and Tongs in Chinatown

In many ways, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be understood as a contest for power between the tongs and the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. During the nineteenth century, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association originally organized under the name of the Chinese Six Companies. The Six Companies dominated Chinatown and asserted authority over the Chinese immigrants during the mid-nineteenth century. Soon after, men joined together in the first tongs and the struggle for control began between the two groups.

Tongs allowed for any interested man to join their ranks, regardless of status, wealth, family name, or district ties, resulting in a rapid growth of membership.²³⁰ The growth and the ties between them empowered the tongs as they contended with more elite organizations like family and district associations, as well as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. Often, the tongs overpowered these associations, prompting many within to join a tong for protection.²³¹ In these ways the tongs became central

²²⁸ Ko-lin Chin, *Chinese Subculture and Criminality: Non-traditional Crime Groups in America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 55.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

power figures in Chinese communities during the late nineteenth century, challenging the power of elites within the CCBA.

The struggle for power continued into the twentieth century. The CCBA inserted themselves in tong conflicts, playing the role of mediator, along with the Chinese Peace Society. Through this the CCBA came to be seen as essential participants in any tong negotiation. By 1930, even tong member Eng Gong stated that peace continued only because of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. Every Chinese resident paid two dollars to the group and it acted as a “tribunal of justice, and is to the Chinese what the Supreme Court is to Americans.”²³²

As the tongs’ influence declined, the CCBA rose again to be the center of Chinatown. Many saw the increased role of the CCBA and the Peace Society as a boon to Chinatown. Ta-K’uei attributed the end of tong wars to the increased role of the Peace Society, in that it required each group in the community to contribute a substantial amount of money to the committee and it would be “subject to confiscation should the members of that group break the peace and make some trouble.”²³³

A reason for the ultimate success of the CCBA over the tongs is that all Chinese, regardless of other associations and memberships, belonged to the CCBA.²³⁴ The CCBA also maintained a greater uniformity between its branches than did tongs. In these ways, the CCBA successfully reestablished itself as the umbrella organization for all Chinese

²³² Eng Gong and Bruce Grant, *Tong War!* (New York: Nicholas L. Brown, 1930), 281.

²³³ Ta-K’uei, “My Impressions of Portland’s Chinatown,” *Sing Shar Monthly* 1, no. 4 & 5 (April and May, 1931), translated by Chia-Lin Chen, *Articles written by Portland’s Chinese*, 1973, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

²³⁴ Eng Gong and Bruce Grant, *Tong War!* (New York: Nicholas L. Brown, 1930), 280.

residents in the United States. A key component that helped keep the tongs from contesting its authority again by including tong representatives in its leadership. However, as various groups are included in the CCBA, only members from the Lin Yan Association and the Leun Cheung Association are eligible to become president of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. The CCBA reasoned the necessity of this to prevent rival tongs from controlling the organization.²³⁵

Tongs, Triads, and Gangs

The transition of the tong into a fraternal organization that resembled many other contemporary mutual aid societies, did not signal the end of illegal activity in Chinatowns. Rather, it created an opening for new groups to rise up and fill the power vacuum left by the tongs. The triads became more prominent in the United States and in the 1950's the Chinese gang emerged. The first Chinese street gang developed in San Francisco, known as the 'Bugs' these mostly American-born Chinese quickly involved themselves in illegal activities and business within the city.²³⁶ Gangs did not exist as simple outgrowths of tongs, nor even the triads. These groups all viewed themselves as separate, with distinct identities from one another. Often, they intersected and membership in one group did not preclude joining another. For example, many gang members associated with tongs involved in crime, such as illegal gambling. This association ranged from some becoming members of a tong along with claiming gang

²³⁵ Ko-lin Chin, *Chinese Subculture and Criminality: Non-traditional Crime Groups in America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 49.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

membership to simply maintaining a relationship with tongs. Not all gangs aided tongs, however, those that did so acted as protectors for the tongs that still maintained gambling operations.²³⁷ In this way, the gangs introduced in the mid-twentieth century, took on similar responsibilities and roles that tongs previously assigned to their gunmen. Even in these groups, there is a continuance in the Chinese American tradition of belonging to multiple associations and groups.

From the late nineteenth century into the twentieth century, tongs helped shape Chinatowns and the lives of their members. While originally created with the intent of providing physical and financial protection to Chinese men, tongs quickly became involved in illegal activities. Conflicts between the tongs arose and often broke out into physical violence and fighting between rival tongs, escalated into tong wars. However, as Chinese residents pushed back against local discriminatory practices and federal legislation, the influence of tongs in Chinese communities decreased. Portland's Tong War of 1917 reveals how power was constructed between Chinese merchants, Chinese organizations, and the local government. This conflict shows the beginning of the tongs changing and how they became a fraternal order, while Chinese gangs arose and took over criminal actions in Chinatown by the mid-twentieth century.

²³⁷ Ibid., 59.

CHAPTER V CONCLUSION

Despite the occasional fears by Chinese residents, and the white community, during the 1920s, the 1917 Tong War proved to be the last major conflict between tongs in Portland. After dominating Chinatown and shaping the lives of its residents for decades, the tongs stepped back and left a new power vacuum in the community. However, with this power vacuum, not one specific group successfully filled it.

The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association filled a part of it, becoming the uniting organization of Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans across the United States. Most importantly, the individual members of the community filled the power vacuum left by the tongs, as residents succeeded in fighting against the racist hostility that each had experienced during their life. Furthermore, residents gained a political voice by joining or creating unions, and gained opportunities for citizenship as federal legislation changed. A transformation occurred within Chinatown as people moved out of the area to new neighborhoods, tourism expanded, and over time, the tong wars became more myth than reality as the generations involved passed away.

Tongs developed during a time of intense racism and discrimination towards Chinese immigrants. They became powerful figures in Chinatown as they promised to protect its members, help them find employment, and acted as a family for those without. Despite the stereotypes attached to them, tongs were more than “Chinese gangs” in the United States. Tongs did participate in crime, particularly gambling, opium, and prostitution. They frequently broke the law, and drew ire from newspapers and police officers alike. However, the tongs also provided protection for its members, loaned

money for needy affiliates, and wrestled with local officials for control of Chinatown. In this, the tongs often acted as a political voice, interceding for Chinese residents.

Recognizing their complicated nature, one can understand that tongs, as described by author Leong Gor Yun, “are not so black as they are painted. Not all Tong members are crooks and racketeers. A majority of them are peace-loving and law-abiding. Chinese of all classes join the Tongs...”²³⁸

This thesis explored the beginnings of Chinese immigration and how discrimination led to the creation of tongs. It examined the role of tongs within Chinatown, how tongs prevented governmental overreach in Chinatown, and how tongs clashed with one another in tong wars. Tong wars were a common occurrence from the 1880s to 1920, but quickly fell in decline as residents pushed back against discrimination, forcing legislative changes, that culminated in the overturn of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943. This thesis expands understanding of marginalized people and their responses to discrimination and prejudice. This project focused on Portland’s Chinatown and more broadly the interactions between Chinatowns and government on the West Coast. Further research is needed to explore Chinatowns in the Midwest and East Coast. Chinese tongs require further study, as to their roles later in the twentieth century and compared to similar groups created by other immigrant and minority populations.

Today, tong wars have disappeared, the tongs are a shadow of what they once were, and even most Chinatowns across the United States are in decline, including Portland’s. The old Chinatown within Portland is now a shadow of what it once was.

²³⁸ Leong Gor Yun, *Chinatown Inside Out* (New York: Barrows Mussey, 1936), 68.

Over the years, residents moved away from Chinatown for newer neighborhoods outside the city. The growth of Portland increased real estate prices within Chinatown, making it more expensive to live there, forcing many to leave their homes for elsewhere, and driving numerous shops out of business. Encroachment by new businesses with no ties to Chinatown have opened.

However, hope exists for Chinatowns as recent years have seen a new focus on protecting and revitalizing what is left of Portland's Chinatown. Chinatown residents, historians, business owners, and activists have joined to create a new project, blending the history of Chinatown with modernity. Business owner, Christopher Yen, states "We're trying to honor the character of this neighborhood, honor the history of this neighborhood, but build something new and tell new stories. As a Chinese American, it feels like important work to me and something that I'm actually, maybe, suited to do."²³⁹

Likewise, a new museum opened its doors in 2018. The Portland Chinatown Museum focuses on educating the public about Chinatown's past and protect the future of the community. Its mission statement is "Honoring Portland Chinatown's Past, Celebrating its Present, Helping to Create its Future."²⁴⁰ Portland is a perfect example of how conscientious citizens can help preserve historic Chinatowns, while allowing new growth in the area. Learning about traditionally immigrant communities is important, not only to better understand the past, but to understand how best cities and government can

²³⁹ Samantha Kar, "Portland's Historic Chinatown Shows Signs of Revival," *Portland Tribune*, August 14, 2019. Accessed August 24, 2019. <https://www.koin.com/local/multnomah-county/portlands-historic-chinatown-shows-signs-of-revival/>.

²⁴⁰ "Portland Chinatown Museum," Portland Chinatown Museum, Portland Chinatown History Foundation, 2018, <https://www.portlandchinatownmuseum.org>.

address the unique needs of immigrants and help them to integrate into the larger society. The construction of race and the impacts that it has on society is not a relic of the past. It continues to shape policy, both on local and federal levels. Understanding this creates opportunities for better policy, heightened awareness of potential prejudices in legislation, and how best to create communities and nations that serve each of its citizens and residents with respect.

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