Cultural Protectors, Resisters, and Assimilators: An Exploration into Chinese Community Organizations in the United States

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Introduction

The idea for this project has transformed significantly from my original proposal. It began with the ongoing gentrification of Chinatowns around the country. After researching the development of Chinatowns, the term “ethnic enclave” came up repeatedly. A term associated with ethnic enclaves was ethnic suburbs, or “ethnoburbs,” which has similar characteristics as ethnic ghettos or inner-city enclaves but is a suburb dominated by a nonwhite ethnic group.¹ My main research interest lies with Chinese immigration and Chinese American history, which led me to the San Gabriel Valley – an ethnoburb that contains the largest concentration of Chinese in the United States currently. The original plan was to research how the San Gabriel Valley changed over time, beginning with the first influx of Asian immigrants after the Immigration Act of 1965.

After spending time at archives around the San Gabriel Valley and Los Angeles, my research interests shifted. After reading historical papers and interviews with Southern Californian Chinese Americans, the recurring theme of community organizations emerged. Both the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) and the Chinese American Citizens Alliance (CACA) were praised for their integral role in helping grow the Chinese community. Multiple interviewees mentioned how their parents were members of the CCBA, how they joined CACA to fight discrimination or at least noted that they were familiar with the organizations’ activities. When I think of Chinese America, I immediately think of immigration restrictions,

railroad labor, or Chinatowns. I had never encountered literature on Chinese-formed organizations dedicated to protecting and supporting the lives of Chinese people.

After reading more about these community organizations, I realized they played an integral role in shaping the Chinese community in the United States. It was not just one or two major organizations, but dozens of medium-sized and smaller organizations that were mentioned by newspapers and in the interviews. Besides the CCBA and CACA, there were smaller family associations, Christian associations, social organizations, and even local bands and orchestras that formed as the Chinese population in the United States grew throughout the decades. Organizations’ behaviors expressed the daily needs of Chinese people, which offers insight into how Chinese people conducted themselves regularly. I wanted to explore how and why these organizations surfaced, especially the most influential ones. I sought to understand what motivated people to join certain organizations instead of others, what these organizations’ founding principles were, and whether they were effective in achieving their goals.

On a completely different scale, these organizations remind me of college organizations. At Wellesley and other colleges, cultural organizations celebrate and raise awareness of different cultures among the student body. Applicants applying to the board of Wellesley’s Chinese Students’ Association (CSA) frequently mention how they are looking for an on-campus community or a second home. Students of Chinese descent are often drawn to CSA because of the shared cultural connection it provides. I see CSA and similar institutions’ cultural organizations as a contemporary version of nineteenth and twentieth century Chinese community organizations.

The events that different cultural organizations hold also indicate the interests of their general members. How are they looking to combine their cultural interest or identity with their
collegiate experience? What cultural aspects or traditions are most salient to a diverse study body? Some organizations host events celebrating popular culture, while others focus more on traditional dance or music. For many Chinese American and Chinese International students, these events are the closest Chinese cultural experiences they will have at Wellesley. Therefore, the function that cultural organizations serve at Wellesley is like that of the Chinese community organizations discussed in this thesis. Organizations are led by members who dictate the organization’s future direction. This contributes to programming and participation in activities that reflect the views of their members, which is why studying organizations is enlightening.

One of CSA’s problems is a divided general membership between Chinese American students and Chinese International students. Some international students find events inauthentic and are unsatisfied with the “white-washed,” Americanized CSA events. The tension observed between Chinese Americans and Chinese International students is not unlike the dynamics between the older generation of Chinese immigrants and the second-generation Chinese Americans in the twentieth century. And, it is indicative of the separation between being Chinese immigrants and American-born Chinese people and how their perspectives and connection to Chinese culture varies greatly. Other cultural organizations on campus similarly struggle to integrate the diverse identities and experiences within their culture. This example is meant to demonstrate how even on a small college campus, one organization conveys some of the needs, hopes, and conflicts within a subset of the college community.

In Fall 2018, CSA attempted to bring actress and rapper Awkwafina to Wellesley. There was a massive backlash against CSA due to accusations against Awkwafina appropriating African American culture. That raised concerns over anti-Blackness in the CSA board, CSA general members, and Wellesley’s entire AAPI community. Although CSA operates on a micro-
level compared to the community organizations discussed in this thesis, it is fascinating to see how people find solace, find representation, and address conflict when working as a collective entity. Organizations often come to represent a much larger population than its actual membership base, and people easily identify the organization for specific characteristics. For better or worse, these organizations become a representative voice, which offers researchers a better understanding of the dominant perspectives and preferences of the organization’s members.

This thesis examines the existence of three Chinese/Chinese American community organizations – the Six Companies, tongs, and the Chinese American Citizens Alliance. Chinese community organizations are forms of social institutions. Sociologist Rose Hum Lee defines social institutions as ones “whose functions reflect the basic needs of the members of the social system… [they] are the most permanent forms of human organization, outliving the individual.”

Using community organizations is an informative model for looking into a collective group’s thoughts and processes. These organizations attracted different members and conducted their businesses differently as well, sometimes within the parameters of the law, sometimes extralegally or even with violence. Chinese community organizations served a minority population ostracized from the majority society, which meant there was often an even stronger reliance and connection to these organizations. Additionally, the earliest Chinese immigrants emigrated without their families, circumstances which eliminated their immediate support network. That increased the urgency for mutual aid organizations that promised loyalty and brotherhood.

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The Six Companies, also known as the CCBA, was one of the first Chinese organizations created in the United States. It prided itself on being the spokesperson for the entire Chinese population in the United States.\(^3\) Other prominent organizations included tongs, which began in California and expanded nationally, gaining a negative reputation along the way because they participated in illegal activities. Tongs were more business-oriented and less concerned with legislation and arbitration than the Six Companies. The Six Companies and tongs formed in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and the two became the most important organizations in the community. Beginning in the 1920s, both organizations’ influence declined as a generational shift occurred, and Chinese Americans were disinclined to join either. Instead, CACA rose in importance, ushering in a generation of Chinese American community organizations. The evolution of community organizations accounts for the gradual shifts in preferences, ideals, and hopes in the broader Chinese community throughout history.

Many students consider CSA to be a family, bringing people with similar backgrounds or cultural interests together to make the transition to Wellesley easier. Like CSA, the Six Companies, tongs, and CACA all formed social and cultural communities that provided a support network for its members. They were widely integrated into the Chinese community, which means they are an excellent source for understanding the beliefs and motivations of the Chinese community throughout the decades. Chinese immigrants away from family and Chinese Americans alienated by the outside society were all looking for a community of their own. The essence of community organizations was the camaraderie and comfort they provided; people were accepted, welcomed, and understood by their fellow countrymen once they joined an organization. And depending on the type of person that gravitated towards specific organizations,

that was an indication of that specific organization’s role in the Chinese community. These organizations all provided opportunities for Chinese people to connect and establish their social networks in the United States.

One of the most remarkable aspects of community organizations was that it made Chinese people agents of change in their own lives. So often, Chinese people are presented as objects of harsh discrimination and violent acts, and their agency and experiences are overlooked or forgotten entirely. Looking specifically at select organizations enlightens audiences to the group agency that they encouraged through their proactiveness. Sometimes Chinese people are presented as reactionary or passive actors, but based on the actions of these organizations, there was a strong group and individual agency exhibited by Chinese people. The Six Companies and CACA monitored legislation, hired lobbyists, and advocated fervently for pro-Chinese political causes.

They regularly acted to prevent further discrimination against themselves, like when CACA actively promoted the election of candidates that supported Chinese American rights. Tongs exercised incredible agency by leveraging their force and business operations against government officials and the greater community, resulting in their members profiting handsomely. All these organizations established themselves by coordinating membership fees and loyalty from the Chinese community. These resources gave organizations the ability to protest, resist, and partially resolve some of the challenges directed at Chinese people.

Organizations are valuable because a person can study how their members interacted in group settings, how the hierarchy was structured, and how members were managed by one another. Additionally, the way these three different organizations provided a community for their members illuminates their priorities, opinions, and even the futures they envisioned for their
members. All three of these organizations faced extreme racism, but how they dealt with these challenges varied. By examining the experiences of these organizations, it becomes clear what types of discrimination occurred and how these organizations internalized these attacks differently through their varied responses. An additional facet of comparing these three organizations is witnessing how they understood and interacted with Chinese culture differently, or how active a role that relationship played into their daily activities.

An organization’s actions, like distributing pamphlets or sending members to testify during U.S. Congress, illuminates the historical and political moment. By following the history of each organization, the issues they grappled with become clear. Whether it was managing dissent among Chinese people or negotiating with the local authorities, all these activities explain more about the Chinese experience. For example, the Six Companies mediated conflicts between Chinese people which made them into a community symbol for peace. This suggests that these arguments were frequent and severe enough to warrant third-party intervention and, by extension, an overarching governing structure to which they could turn for advice, resolution, and protection.

Seeing how organizations interacted in the past encourages us to reconsider our preconceived notions about what it means to be Chinese or Chinese American in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It also challenges us to consider how Chinese people of diverse social, educational, and geographical backgrounds experienced life in the United States differently. There were a variety of reasons motivating people to emigrate to the United States, like wanting to receive a better education (students) or earn a higher wage to support their families back home (sojourners or laborers). Different types of Chinese immigrants gravitated to
different community organizations or had overlapping memberships. The development of these organizations also follows the growth and change over time of these organizations’ members.

Analyzing organizations also inform researchers about the variations in Chinese/Chinese American identity and diversity in peoples’ daily experiences. Major questions driving this thesis include: What did Chinese people seek out in their organizations? What constituted a community to them? What sorts of communities did they agree to join, and what behaviors did they condone? Seeing how these three organizations flourished and floundered throughout history signals the Chinese population’s social, political, and cultural evolution in perspective and attitudes. However, throughout history, no matter which organization held power and relevancy, all three organizations heavily impacted the lives of their members and the community around them. These three organizations were chosen because they were extremely visible organizations during their prime, and even decades later, Chinese people recall their presence. These organizations were spaces where Chinese people congregated, found community, and addressed the challenges of being a minority group as a collective.

The Six Companies, tongs, and CACA were all prominent and recognizable at the national level, particularly during the height of their power. While reading about Asian American or Chinese American history, the Six Companies and tongs are almost always mentioned. The Six Companies was a quasi-judicial figure in the lives of Chinese people, which meant the Six Companies handled many of the legal cases. Much of the Chinese experience in the United States is closely tied with immigration and legal conflicts, which brings in the Six Companies. Part of the negative reputation Chinese people earned was attributed to tong activity. Tongs had a monopoly on almost all the criminal activity that occurred in Chinatowns in the United States.4

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The Six Companies and tongs frequently crossed paths since one assumed the unofficial role of governing all Chinese activities while the other boldly acted outside the confines of the law. The Six Companies and tongs were loosely engaged in a power struggle as they learned to coexist with one another. Their relationship reveals the different attitudes – and morals – that existed within the early Chinese immigrant community.

These organizations were not mutually exclusive, either. Membership between them was fluid, which only raises more questions about the intricate relationships between the Six Companies, tongs, and the members who oscillated between the two. Additionally, with two viable organizations, it is interesting to consider the reasons why a person would elect to join either the Six Companies or a tong. Comparing the two reveals what one organization offered that the other either could not or was uninterested in offering. CACA was founded later than the previous organizations, but its reputation grew, and it maintained its status well into the twentieth century. CACA was primarily a political organization, but it also created language schools and held social events, so it functioned similarly to the Six Companies and other associations. By exploring the three narratives, we see how these organizations functioned separately from the others, but also how their stories intersect. This is not a comparative study in the sense that they are entirely juxtaposed with one another, but each chapter showcases each organization’s unique identity and its impact. Sometimes it might appear that these organizations operated on opposing sides when a more accurate rendering is that they often complemented each other.

The characteristics of each organization, how they framed their mission or purpose statement, and what they realistically promised their members all contribute to our understanding of Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans. Chinese people created these organizations, and they survived because there was continued membership interest. If an organization’s purpose
was irrelevant, then there would be no members interested in leading it or putting in the effort of hosting activities. Whether it was cultivating community, providing welfare and protection, or staging political protests, these groups engaged in various activities and objectives to retain their popularity for extended periods. And, when their organization began declining, that signals that there is a historic shift in the Chinese community. There are reasons behind the decline, usually because there is no longer a reason for those organizations to continue existing.

Chinese residents in the United States are often portrayed as a uniform group. This limits analysis of the intersection of race and class, not only within Chinatowns but throughout the United States. By studying these three organizations together, this thesis illustrates the incredible diversity within the Chinese diaspora. People of different backgrounds were attracted to different organizations because they all exhibited distinct attributes. For CACA applicants, they saw a group of like-minded Chinese Americans with goals of assimilating to American culture. A prospective Six Companies member might be an immigrant in need of translators, shelter, or employment prospects. Chinese men interested in joining tongs might be interested in accumulating wealth quickly or finding loyal friends. Those individuals were highly likely to differ in educational level, acculturation level, and employment prospects.

The activities with which these groups were involved reveal the challenges they encountered. It provides a glimpse into the daily lives of Chinese people in the nineteenth and twentieth century. It also suggests what aspects of their lives were missing or supplemented by belonging to a community organization. Many people joined these organizations so they could reap membership benefits, find solutions to their problems, and otherwise improve their lives. For many individuals, being an organization member did elevate their lives in some aspect.
The organizations hosted extracurricular and social events, like CACA’s oral competitions or the Six Companies’ holiday banquets. Many of these events were largely accessible to the greater Chinese community, and the existence of these activities deepens our understanding of the social life, hobbies, and leisure opportunities available to Chinese people. These organizations also created community spaces for their members and instilled a sense of camaraderie among members. Official organizations also document their events, membership rosters, and meeting minutes, which creates ample source material. There are archives of these organizations’ histories, which preserves institutional memory for its former members. The origins of the Six Companies and tongs date back to China, demonstrating how these community models transcended borders. The Six Companies frequently interacted with the Chinese government and participated in transnational initiatives. On the other hand, CACA is firmly a U.S.-based, Chinese American organization. Following the intricate stories of the three different organizations allows us to better understand the changing experience and identities of the Chinese community over time.

The thesis is organized into three chapters, each of which follows one organization. The chapters are arranged broadly chronologically, moving through time with each chapter. That leads to overlapping periods across chapters, since these organizations were all active at the time, just operating with varying degrees of community influence. Each chapter loosely covers the organization’s origin, growth, and the reasons for its decline. The organizations’ backgrounds, circumstances around their creation, and their membership logistics are all discussed, along with an exploration of organization-specific issues and events.

The first chapter describes the Chinese Six Companies, or the CCBA. It focuses heavily on the U.S. government’s changing attitudes towards Chinese immigrants and how the Six
Companies adapted their tactics to solve immigration problems. The second chapter centers around tongs, the Massacre of 1871, and how tongs negotiated power from U.S. authorities. It explains the allure of tongs and how their criminal reputation was warranted, but an oversimplification of their activities. Tongs wielded their brutality not simply for insidious purposes, but to fiercely protect their fellow tong members. The third chapter analyzes CACA and how its intense focus on assimilation was effective in some regards but wholly ineffectual and exclusionary in other ways. There is also mention of the growing generational and cultural differences felt by Chinese Americans.

In terms of existing scholarship, there is a rich Asian American Historiography. Many essay collections include analyses of specific organizations, like the To Save China, To Save Ourselves: The Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance of New York by Renqiu Yu or Sue Fawn Chung’s essays about the Chinese American Citizens Alliance. For the Six Companies, there was a plethora of primary source material, including newspaper articles and headlines, politician speeches, and court cases. In particular, William Hoy wrote about the history of the Six Companies, work which was published by the Six Companies themselves to disseminate the information. For tongs, which is a flashier topic, more extensive scholarship is available. Additionally, because tongs are not one single organization like the Six Companies or CACA, plenty of their history is still uncovered. Tongs were active all across the United States, which

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means each individual tong has their own story. Scott D. Seligman’s *Tong Wars* and Richard H. Dillon’s *The Hatchet Men* both provide an excellent history of tong activity.\(^7\) Seligman focuses on the New York tong wars and Dillon on the San Francisco tong wars.

There has not been considerable scholarship explicitly dedicated to the role of community organizations and how they served Chinese interests. By exploring the three different organizations, the differences and similarities between their membership, their political activities, and their professed duties emerge. And through their intersections and divergences, one can understand the diversity among Chinese populations in the United States. No one has put the three organizations together and commented on the implications in their discrepancies. CACA, in particular, was not as illustrious in early Chinese/Chinese American history, so there is little discussion about its legacy. For this reason, the inclusion of CACA along with the Six Companies and tongs provides much needed and untapped commentary about the differences between the three organizations. Adding CACA is important because it points out the tensions between the first generation of Chinese immigrants and second generation native-born Chinese Americans.

The integral role Chinese community organizations played in fighting for civil rights, helping Chinese people emigrate, and surviving in the United States is essential to understanding the infrastructure and landscape of the Chinese immigrant and Chinese American community in the United States. An enormous part of finding one’s way in the United States was navigating racism and discriminatory legislation, and one can see the realities of battling immigration or government officials through these organizations’ tireless efforts. All of these Chinese people

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attempted to build a life in the United States, however temporary. Especially for the ones who
prepared to settle permanently or were living alone, finding other Chinese people and a larger
community helped them adjust to this new and foreign experience.

The way these organizations catered to their constituents and the values they set for their
community reveals the nuances between different groups of Chinese people. The moral
ambiguity of tong members and the CACA members’ obsession with assimilation was one
example of their contrasting visions and ideas. The research demonstrates how there are
overlapping interests and membership between the three organizations, but they still exhibit vast
differences in behavior, morals, and objectives. This thesis argues that there is an incredible
diversity within the Chinese immigrant and Chinese American community, and these three
organizations display how Chinese people engaged with their ancestral culture and navigated the
United States in varying ways. Following these three organizations, it becomes clear that though
these three organizations operated independently, they were connected through both their
contributions and detractions to the Chinese community in the United States. They were essential
in the success of Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans, with each organization serving as
a nuanced, resilient pillar of the Chinese community in the United States.
I. PATHWAYS OF PERSISTENCE AND ADAPTATION: The Chinese Six Companies

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) – known to Americans as the “Chinese Six Companies” – was at the center of Chinese immigrant activity. Though the two names are used interchangeably, “the CCBA” has been the name used from the twentieth century onward. The organization is also known as the Zhonghua huiguan (中华会馆), which means “All Chinese United Association.”¹

The Mandarin name is indicative of the Six Companies’ ambassadorial and service role for the Chinese community in the United States. The Six Companies’ involvement began about a decade after the earliest group of Chinese immigrants arrived for the 1849 California Gold Rush.² Besides acting as an ambassador representing Chinese people in the United States and providing welfare services, the Six Companies also worked closely with the Qing government in China on foreign policy issues, though their primary purpose was to provide money and resources for the growing immigrant population in the United States. The CCBA’s main headquarters remain in San Francisco, and dozens of branch organizations still exist around the United States and Canada today. The society rented an office out on Sacramento Street in San Francisco, which served as their first official headquarters in the United States.³

¹ Rose Hum Lee, The Chinese in the United States of America (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), 147.
As the number of Chinese immigrants arriving across the United States increased, particularly on the West Coast, so did the intensity of anti-Chinese voices. In 1853, only 42 Chinese immigrants were admitted into the United States, with the number of Chinese immigrants entering skyrocketing to 13,100 in 1854; Specifically, there were more than 40,000 Chinese immigrants from the Guangdong Province of China already residing in California. The entry rates were not as exaggerated in the following decades, but a steady stream of three to five thousand Chinese immigrants would enter the United States for the rest of the decade. These growing numbers frightened the California legislature, since San Francisco was a convenient and popular port for Chinese immigrants arriving on steamships. There were multiple attempts by the California legislature to pass discriminatory legislation that levied taxes on Chinese people, or prevented them from enjoying recreational activities like attending theaters, prostitution houses, or gambling halls. Most of these efforts failed because they were deemed unconstitutional, but their failure did not address the enormous lack of political and legal protection of Chinese rights in the United States. Crimes against Chinese people were swept under the rug, and Chinese people were not even allowed to testify in court to defend themselves from false accusations.

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6 Ibid., 69-70.
7 This includes taxes like the Foreign Miners’ Tax Act of 1850, which originally imposed a tax of $20 per month on foreign miners. The original act was repealed a year later and lowered to charge $3 per month on foreigners. Discriminatory legislation like this tax was meant to discourage Chinese people from arriving in mining camps. David F. DuFault, “The Chinese in the Mining Camps of California: 1848-1870,” *Southern California Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (1959): 155-157.
9 In 1850, there was a statue that prohibited African Americans and Native Americans from testifying in court cases with white Americans. In 1854 the statute was extended to Chinese people as well. DuFault, “The Chinese in the Mining Camps of California,” 156.
The mounting public disapproval and aggression towards Chinese people drove Chinese people to congregate together and rely on their community for protection. In response to this need for protection, the Six Companies became an “unofficial government inside Chinatown… [that] protested against the legal impositions and social indignities heaped upon Chinese immigrants in America.”\textsuperscript{10} The Six Companies began mediating conflicts between members and advocated for immigrants’ political and civil rights, in large part because there was no other governing or protective entity that would look out for Chinese interests in the United States. In China, there was a selection of family, clan, and district associations that looked out for a small group’s interests. In the United States, the public did not see the differences among Chinese people, they targeted them all the same, so Chinese immigrants now needed a unified voice to protect them.

There are considerable books, chapters, and scholarly articles covering the Chinese American experience from the arrival of the first immigrants during the Gold Rush era to more contemporary discussions on the Chinese/Chinese American identity. The hallmarks of Asian American history literature include \textit{Strangers from a Different Shore} by Ronald Takaki, \textit{The Making of Asian America} by Erika Lee, \textit{Asian Americans: An Interpretive History} by Sucheng Chan, and \textit{Margins and Mainstreams} by Gary Y. Okihiro.\textsuperscript{11} Although these books contain sections on the Six Companies, they only provide a limited explanation of the Six Companies since, understandably, they aim to broadly narrate the history of Asians or Chinese people in the United States. Even for history books dedicated to Chinese American history like \textit{The Chinese in  


America by Iris Chang, there is not enough space for in-depth discussion over the Six Companies’ contributions when there are so many other events and organizations to cover.\textsuperscript{12}

More recently, Yucheng Qin published The Diplomacy of Nationalism: The Six Companies and China’s Policy Toward Exclusion, which is an excellent study into how the Six Companies was integral in the formation of a transnational Chinese identity and consciousness.\textsuperscript{13} Qin attempts to address a common critique of the Six Companies, which is that the organization was unable to enact major social or political change, in part due to the existence of the Chinese Exclusion Era in the United States. Although the Six Companies were not completely successful in overturning massive policies or eliminating discrimination, it still instituted enormous political action and found ways to circumvent an unfair immigration process. The Six Companies faithfully assisted newcomers, and they played an essential role in building up Chinese communities. For immigrants who arrived with no friends or relatives already in the United States, having the Six Companies’ support immediately was invaluable. However, the underlying motivations of the Six Companies’ leaders and their beginning as a merchant organization deserves more attention, as it deeply affected their behavior and title as a “benevolent” organization.

At times, the Six Companies appeared to adopt counterproductive measures, but upon closer examination, their actions were always meant to protect their members’ interests. The Six Companies’ response to the increase in discriminatory legislation, violations to the Burlingame Treaty of 1868, and their campaign to restrict Chinese immigration all paved the way for the Chinese population in the United States to gain basic rights; their behavior portrays how the Six

\textsuperscript{13} Yucheng Qin, The Diplomacy of Nationalism: The Six Companies and China’s Policy Toward Exclusion (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009).
Companies truly strived to be representatives for all the Chinese in California and the entire United States.

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The Six Companies formed during the late 1850s, evolving from various district associations. In China, there were many associations or family clans where membership was dependent on bloodlines or where one lived. People with familial ties, usually identified by possessing the same surname, joined family associations. District association membership was based on living in the same district, village, or county in China. Huiguans, or “companies” as they were called in the United States, were originally merchant companies with a broader membership. The use of “companies” alludes to its merchant origins and provides insight to the organizational model and expectations of belonging to the Six Companies. There was an all-powerful managing board of directors, and their orders dictated how the company would operate and what leadership’s expectations for its members or officers were. For each individual company, there was a presiding officer or president who was elected every year by the merchants and wealthy men in the company. The hope was that the president would be a scholar who could serve as a diplomat between the Chinese Qing government and the United States government. However, because the voting base of each company was composed of merchants and elite men, the elected presidents generally came from this class. Nevertheless, since almost

19 Yu, “‘Exercise Your Sacred Rights’,” 79.
all the Chinese immigrants hailed from one of the six districts’ jurisdictions, the Six Companies gained a powerful foothold in the United States.

Many Chinese merchants crossed the ocean and arrived in the United States to expand their business interests by offering labor contracts to Chinese people. Chinese merchants chartered ships that provided passage to the United States, effectively controlling the labor flow from China to California.\textsuperscript{20} It was in Chinese merchants’ best interest to maintain a flow of laborers as this provided them with a steady stream of revenue. Chinese merchants dealt increasingly with American businessmen, who appreciated the Chinese laborers and imported goods at the beginning of the 1850s, but whose opinions changed rapidly due to the increasing number of Chinese immigrants arriving on U.S. shores.

The first sizeable association in the United States was the San Francisco Kong Chow Company, gaining power in 1850.\textsuperscript{21} By 1854, there were four major companies, which were known as the Four Great Houses, and by the 1860s the number expanded to the final six mercantile companies.\textsuperscript{22} The Six Companies consisted of the Sam Yup Company, Yung Wo Company, Kong Chow Company, Hop Wo Company, Yan Wo/Hip Kat Association, and the Ning Yeung Association/Association of Masculine Tranquility.\textsuperscript{23} Each association was comprised of people emigrating from the same districts or territories in China, primarily from the district of Guangzhou, China. When a district association became too large, it would sometimes split off into another company, which occurred when the original Kong Chow Association split into the six recognized companies.\textsuperscript{24} For reference, the approximate population breakdown for

\textsuperscript{20} Qin, \textit{The Diplomacy of Nationalism}, 25n15.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{23} Hoy, \textit{The Chinese Six Companies}, 2-5.
\textsuperscript{24} Mullen, “The Six Companies”; Tsai, \textit{The Chinese Experience in America}, 32-33.
the associations in 1876 are as follows: Sam Yup Company – 10,100; Yung Wo Company – 10,200; Kong Chow Company – 15,000; Hop Wo Company – 34,000; Yan Wo/Hip Kat Company – 4,300; Ning Yung Company – 75,000.\textsuperscript{25} From these breakdowns, some companies had tens of thousands more members, which created a large power imbalance between the companies with larger memberships (and therefore greater affluence and influence) compared to the smaller companies.\textsuperscript{26} It was easy for the Ning Yung leaders to assert their opinions over a smaller company, like the Yan Wo or Sam Yup simply because they represented a significantly larger portion of the Six Companies’ members.

The organization offered food, money, housing accommodations, employment opportunities, and general protection to all its members. Six Companies representatives greeted ships carrying Chinese immigrants right at the harbors.\textsuperscript{27} These representatives oversaw the immigrants that would join their specific company or directed them to their corresponding company. Once the immigrants disembarked, they were taken immediately to the company offices. The immigrants were offered housing, which often included miscellaneous amenities including books and card games, until they found a job and could move out on their own.\textsuperscript{28} The Six Companies were also respectful of the dead and shipped deceased members’ remains back to China so they could receive a proper burial in their homeland.\textsuperscript{29} Voluntary membership fee payments funded these services – the Six Companies did not require fees in return for aid. Additionally, members paid the company a fee if they returned to China.\textsuperscript{30} Companies distributed funds to employ private watchmen for Chinese-run business properties and operate

\textsuperscript{25} Otis Gibson, \textit{The Chinese in America} (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden, 1877), 21.
\textsuperscript{26} Lee, \textit{The Chinese in America}, 147.
\textsuperscript{27} Tsai, \textit{The Chinese Experience in America}, 48.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 49-50.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 49; Hoy, \textit{The Chinese Six Companies}, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{30} Hoy, \textit{The Chinese Six Companies}, 24.
community hospitals and schools. Immigrants were attracted to this entity that provided welfare, assistance, and kinship, making the Six Companies an incredible, overarching governance organization.

There are criticisms against the Six Companies leaders accusing them of using their power to extort fees from their members, which were supposedly paid voluntarily. These complaints were concentrated in the 1920s when the Chinese community increasingly considered Six Companies to be ineffective at combating legislative issues. This perception of untrustworthy leadership and their waning power led to the creation of other Chinese/Chinese American community organizations. Organizations like the Chinese American Citizens Alliance and the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance were established because the Chinese community had other needs and services that the Six Companies no longer fulfilled. The original mandate of the Six Companies was less important as Chinese immigrants gradually assimilated. Younger generations forged new connections beyond their home districts and their needs were not as simplistic. Especially as the Six Companies’ membership grew more diverse, Chinese people had other needs besides housing, employment, and immigration assistance. Their eventual diminished importance notwithstanding, however, the existence of a thriving Chinese population with a multitude of necessities beyond their basic welfare, is proof that the Six Companies’ dedication towards campaigning against anti-Chinese legislation throughout the decades was effective and expanded the standard of living for the Chinese community.

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31 Hoy, The Chinese Six Companies, 20-21
33 For more information on the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance, To Save China, To Save Ourselves: The Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance of New York by Renqiu Yu is a good resource.
The Six Companies played an indispensable role in countering anti-Chinese sentiment. Its leaders tirelessly and continuously lobbied the U.S. government, hiring reputable legal counsel and representatives to advocate their perspectives when its leadership was not convincing enough. There should be greater appreciation and recognition offered to the Six Companies, whom survived in the face of dissatisfied members and racist attacks from the California State Legislature and the U.S. Congress.\(^{34}\) Their persistence resulted in several momentous victories that provided Chinese residents and Chinese American people fundamental civil rights.

During the nineteenth century, Chinese immigrants provided a robust labor source for the United States, particularly for manual labor positions like railroad-construction. Consequently, Chinese immigration was actively encouraged by the U.S. government for a period. Chinese immigration to the United States was unrestricted through the Burlingame Treaty of 1868, named after Anson Burlingame, a politician whose long-term advocacy attempted to improve Sino-American relations.

Burlingame was a Republican lawyer who served as a U.S. Representative from Massachusetts, before being appointed as the U.S. Minister to China in 1861 by President Abraham Lincoln.\(^{35}\) Burlingame earned the trust of the Qing government, and they appointed him as the Chinese envoy to the United States in 1867.\(^{36}\) This was a noteworthy feat, as he was the first American to hold this position, a testament to the trust the Chinese government placed in him. He established the Cooperative Policy as a framework for Sino-American relations, insisting that “[the United States] would give to the treaties a fair and Christian construction.”\(^{37}\)

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Burlingame left on a mission, later termed the “Burlingame Mission,” to the United States and Europe with two Chinese officials, Zhigang and Sun Jiagu.

The Burlingame Mission was supported by the Republican party during a period of considerable political turmoil. The United States was still recovering from the Civil War, and the Republicans and Democrats were battling over Reconstruction. When Burlingame stopped in California during his mission, the California legislature already proposed several anti-Chinese laws. During the 1850s, California Democrats passed several discriminatory laws against “coolies.” The laws were deeply rooted in racism, exacerbated by the perception that Chinese laborers were outcompeting U.S. citizens for jobs. Republicans gained control of the California legislature during the Civil War, and while they were more sympathetic to Chinese Americans than the Democrats, they still did not support Chinese naturalization. Party attitudes towards the Chinese population is reflected in partisan newspapers such as the Republican Daily Alta California. Due to its partisan slant, there is an abundance of coverage on Burlingame, his mission, and the treaty in the Daily Alta California. During one editorial, the Daily Alta printed:

“… the fact that the head of the Embassy is an American citizen [Burlingame], who returns to his own native land clad with extraordinary functions and holding the confidence of the Imperial Government of a mighty and wealthy people. This is the first substantial compliment ever paid to American diplomacy, and Mr. Burlingame may well be proud that he has been the first foreigner, as well as the first American, to secure such a mark from so haughty and exclusive an imperialism as that of China.”

The paper praised Burlingame’s appointment and even noted that “the American press has spoken out in terms of gratulation and pleasure at the appointment of Mr. Burlingame… the Mission is one of the most important ever undertaken by an American, and we have confidence

38 “Coolie” is a term that signifies a laborer, usually indentured servitude. It is applied as a derogatory slur to people from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and China. Schrecker, “For the Equality of Men,” 12.
40 “The Chinese Embassy,” Daily Alta California (DAC), April 1, 1868.
in Mr. Burlingame’s ability to successfully discharge it.”\textsuperscript{41} The \textit{Daily Alta California} printed the editorials and advertisements submitted by the leaders of the Six Companies, providing an outlet for Chinese issues,\textsuperscript{42} though they still printed extensive anti-Chinese news and coverage.\textsuperscript{43}

Despite increasing anti-Chinese sentiment, Burlingame’s party affiliation and close friendships with key Republican politicians brought the treaty to fruition. Burlingame collaborated with Seward privately to compose the treaty. Meetings were kept private, and no documents detailing preliminary ideas exist today.\textsuperscript{44} Not only did Burlingame work closely with U.S. officials to support his mission’s agenda, he also laid the groundwork for the public to accept the treaty’s content. He made speeches around the nation where he continually argued that China was an equal and important trade ally.\textsuperscript{45} He took his appointment seriously, praising China’s progress and focusing on the cultural compatibility of the two nations. In a speech given in New York on June 23, 1868, he said:

“there is no spot on this earth where there has been greater progress made within the past few years than in the empire of China. She has expanded her trade, she has reformed her revenue system, she is changing her military and naval organizations… the present enlightened government of China has advanced steadily along the path of progress – sustained, it is true, by the enlightened representatives of the Western powers now at Peking… [China] is open; you may travel and trade where you like. What complaint then, have you to make of her? Show her fair play. Give her that, and you will bless the toiling millions of the world… The imagination kindles at the future which may be, and which will be, if you will be fair and just to China.”\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{41}“The Chinese Embassy,” DAC, April 1, 1868.
\textsuperscript{44} Frederick Wells Williams, \textit{Anson Burlingame and the First Chinese Mission to Foreign Powers} (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1912), 145.
\textsuperscript{45} Schrecker, “‘For the Equality of Men,’” 17-26.
He dedicated his entire tenure toward improving the perception of China to Americans. The bookend accomplishment of his mission was the drafting and ratification of the Burlingame Treaty, the first Sino-American reciprocal agreement since the Opium Wars.47

The Burlingame Treaty placed China on the same level of other nations whose residents emigrated to the United States. The treaty is composed of eight articles, and three directly reference the protection of Chinese rights in the United States. The treaty was initially signed in Washington, D.C., on July 28, 1868, after the Senate provided advice and agreement with additional amendments a few days earlier. It was ratified by President Andrew Johnson in October 1868. The Chinese government officially approved it a year later, and it was enforced beginning November 23, 1869. It is necessary to understand that both sides supported the Burlingame Treaty, and that the United States government tried desperately to maintain positive relations with China. Looking at the language of the treaty, Burlingame meant to arrange a mutually beneficial relationship where both U.S. immigrants in China and Chinese immigrants in the U.S. were guaranteed safety, religious freedom, and even education.

The Burlingame Treaty provided significant accommodations and privileges to Chinese people in the United States and U.S. citizens in China. Article III stipulated that the Emperor of China could appoint consuls at U.S. ports, who would enjoy the same privileges and immunities of Great Britain and Russian consuls.48 All Chinese subjects in the United States, the treaty noted, “shall enjoy entire liberty of conscience and shall be exempt from all disability or persecution on account of their religious faith or worship.”49 The same religious freedom would

47 Schrecker, ““For the Equality of Men,”” 11.
be extended to U.S. citizens practicing Christianity in China.\textsuperscript{50} Chinese immigrants could enroll in U.S. public education systems or establish their own schools in the United States.\textsuperscript{51}

The most important section was Article V, where both countries recognized the “inherent and inalienable right of man to change his home and allegiance” and actively encouraged immigration between the two nations.\textsuperscript{52} This article effectively supports unrestricted immigration from China to the United States, and the rest of the treaty addresses other issues that protect and promote Chinese settlement. This treaty provided the foundation for many Chinese immigrants to safely travel to and remain in the United States. Article VI is also a standout article: it ruled that California’s anti-Chinese legislation was illegal. The treaty was an assurance to Chinese immigrants that there were people in the United States who accepted and supported their arrival.

Burlingame went to enormous lengths to convince the U.S. public that a close Sino-American relationship would be beneficial, but unfortunately this treaty was not universally well-received. Republicans were generally supportive of the treaty, and Republican-leaning newspapers printed articles that reflected Burlingame’s stance.\textsuperscript{53} However, Democrats were unconvinced that unrestricted Chinese immigration was a positive development.\textsuperscript{54} Attacks and treaty violations began immediately after the treaty was ratified, which is where the Six Companies stepped in. The Six Companies was uniquely qualified to handle this problem, and at the time they were the only Chinese organization with enough resources to effectively fight discrimination. In the absence of Qing officials, the Six Companies handled problems regarding

\textsuperscript{50} Article IV, Johnson, “Additional articles to the treaty between the United States of America and the Ta-Tsing empire,” 4.
\textsuperscript{51} Article VII, Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Article V, Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} The DAC and the New York Daily Tribune were both Republican newspapers while the New York World and the Daily Examiner were Democratic publications in the 1800s. Schrecker, “‘For the Equality of Men,’” 13-17.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
the U.S. government’s immigration policies and specific laws that targeted the Chinese population in America.

The Burlingame Treaty’s ratification did not silence the anti-Chinese voices. California politicians continued complaining about the pestilence and filth that the Chinese population brought their cities. U.S. Representative James Augustus Johnson from California brought a joint resolution to Congress that would “protect themselves against a nuisance, and that Chinese immigration should be discouraged.”\(^{55}\) Representative Johnson believed that unrestricted immigration of Chinese laborers and Chinese women should be actively discouraged by the law.\(^{56}\) This occurred in January 1870, only a few months after the treaty was officially enforced. Representative Johnson’s language is outright racist – much of his reasoning revolves around preserving the purity of the superior Caucasian race – but also touched on how Chinese laborers took earnings away from white workers and how they did not improve American industries.\(^{57}\) Representative Johnson was a Republican: though Burlingame received support from his party, some Republicans certainly disagreed with him and his views. The *San Francisco Evening Tribune*, a newspaper with a Republican slant, stated its opinion on Chinese people: “Are we, for fear of being excommunicated from the Republican party, to stand mute when right in our very midst there rancors and breeds corruption that would undermine any monarchy or Government the world ever saw?”\(^{58}\) That article was published in December 1869, post-Burlingame Treaty. Party affiliation was not a deterrent for peoples’ anti-Chinese ideas, and other Republican newspapers like *The San Francisco Chronicle* printed similar sentiments for their readership.\(^{59}\)

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\(^{56}\) Ibid.

\(^{57}\) Ibid.

\(^{58}\) *San Francisco Evening Tribune*, Dec. 24, 1869.

\(^{59}\) *San Francisco Chronicle*, Dec. 5, 1869.
Representative Johnson provided a lengthy analysis for why Chinese people should be barred from immigrating. He realized that the Burlingame Treaty and the Fourteenth Amendment were an opening for Chinese people to earn more rights in the future; namely, the right to be naturalized, vote, and testify as witnesses in court. Congressional transcripts and published articles from both Republican and Democratic newspapers, show that the Burlingame Treaty clearly did not soften negative views on Chinese people. In fact, by granting unrestricted immigration and protecting Chinese immigrants, the treaty seemed to only promote the wrath and worry of anti-Chinese activists. Indeed, following the passage of the treaty Chinese immigration increased, up from 3,863 arrivals in 1867 to 5,157 arrivals in 1868, 12,874 arrivals in 1869, and 15,740 arrivals in 1870, according to the Immigration Commission. Seeing the increase in arrivals between 1867 and 1869, there is clear evidence that the Burlingame Treaty’s declarations encouraged many Chinese people to emigrate. Prior to 1867, the anti-Chinese rhetoric and legislation dissuaded people from moving despite the promises of wealth and employment.

As the Burlingame Treaty increased immigration flows, the Six Companies was active in helping smooth the transition and support immigrants as best they could. Their role in the immigration process made the organization a target for anti-Chinese activists. Accusations were made against the Six Companies, claiming that they ran opium dens and gambling halls, and they supported forced labor and prostitution. The Six Companies addressed these issues, or at least attempted to debunk these rumors, by insisting continuously that Chinese immigrants were only

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60 Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer, Anti-Chinese Movement in California (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 16. From Sandmeyer’s compiled statistics, there are submitted immigration numbers from the Immigration Commission, Bureau of Immigration, and the San Francisco Customs House. There is a slight discrepancy (and sometimes enormous discrepancy) across the three sources, so there is cause for concern there. It is likely that the U.S. immigration officials inflated immigration numbers to make the Chinese problem seem more overblown than it was. These numbers also fail to reflect the amount of people who returned to China each year, so these are not the population numbers.
interested in working legitimate jobs.\textsuperscript{61} The association was thrust into this role largely because there was no other protection for Chinese people. There were no Chinese diplomats in the United States before Burlingame, so this was a turning point for Chinese international relations. The Six Companies’ power among the Chinese community was well-known even among the American public. In a letter to Congress in 1876, Reverend S. W. Blakeslee wrote:

“They have a perfect government among themselves distinct from our own, with their laws, that secret courts of trial, and their police, executive, and other officers, the object of which is to perpetuate their race peculiarities, their clanship interests, and their religion, with terrible sanctions of law, even the death penalty, to enforce their regulations.”\textsuperscript{62}

This captures some of the perceptions about the Six Companies and how the white American public felt threatened by the Six Companies. The belief that the Chinese population had its own quasi-government in the United States and found success within their own community was clearly problematic and unsettling for the American public. The American public felt like there was no way to control the behaviors, particularly criminal behaviors, of Chinese people with the Six Companies in power. Reverend Blakeslee had a twisted interpretation of the Six Companies’ purpose, and this construal demonstrates how people did not understand what the Six Companies was and what their function in Chinese peoples’ lives was.

Articles titled “The Chinese Question,” or “The Chinese Problem,” were published by newspapers nationwide for the next decade. Senators, Representatives, and citizens who lived in proximity to Chinese people (or claimed to) all chimed in about the corrupting influence Chinese people would have on their children and society. In November 1877, California Senator Aaron A. Sargent sent a letter to then-Secretary of State, William M. Evarts, urging him to modify the

Burlingame Treaty. California Representative Horace Francis Page wrote to President Rutherford B. Hayes a month later, hoping to catch his attention about Chinese immigration. Congressman Horace Davis scheduled a meeting with President Hayes a couple days later to outline his anti-Chinese arguments. In 1878, he recited a speech in front of the House of Representatives expressing that “the Burlingame Treaty, concluded in a gush of generous sentiment, is a singularly one-sided bargain… we grant all these privileges to one hundred and fifty thousand Chinamen while Americans in China consist of only a few hundred. The bare statement of the terms of the bargain is enough to prove its absurdity and to justify us in declaring our intention to modify it.” Even if they did not respond to every complaint levelled against Chinese people, the Six Companies monitored Congressional hearings and searched for ways to get bills thrown out.

This was not always easy, as anti-Chinese supporters were widespread and hailed from both political parties and religious organizations as well. These sentiments were shared in Congregational Churches, as one resolution adopted by the General Association of the United Church of Christ on October 9, 1877 demonstrates:

“That we express it as our conviction that the Burlingame Treaty ought to be so modified and such other just measures be adopted by the General Government as shall restrict Chinese immigration, and shall especially prevent the importation of Chinese prostitutes and so relive us from impending peril to our republican and Christian institutions.”

The Burlingame Treaty did nothing to quell worries over Chinese immigration and it mobilized more Chinese organizations to prepare joint statements directed at Congress.

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65 “The President’s View on the Chinese Problem,” San Francisco Morning Call, Dec. 19, 1877; “Horace Davis and the Six Companies,” San Francisco Evening Post, Jan. 21, 1878.
The final part of the General Association of Congregational Churches in California’s resolution addressed the importance of Chinese prostitutes, which was a serious concern for Americans. Generally, there was not much distinction drawn between Chinese women and Chinese prostitutes. Laws at the city and state levels were enacted before the Burlingame Treaty, such as Ordinance No. 546, “To Suppress Houses of Ill-Fame Within the City Limits,” and the California legislature’s 1866 law, “An Act for the Suppression of Chinese Houses of Ill Fame.” Both encouraged police crackdowns on Chinese brothels, but the raids did not stop Chinese trafficking. In 1872, an issued statute required a $500 bond for every “convict, criminal, and lewd or debauched women” in addition to public charges, disabled, and poor people. This specifically targeted Chinese prostitutes, and in 1874 a group of twenty-two women were charged for “immoral purposes” after docking in San Francisco on a Pacific Mail Steamship Company ship. The Steamship Company refused to pay the bonds, so the women were detained. Judge Leander Quint represented the Chinese women in the court case, arguing that the women were allowed entry based on Article VI of the Burlingame Treaty. There was no evidence that the women were engaged in prostitution, but unfortunately the courts found the women guilty and ordered their return to China. The California Supreme Court Justice E. W. McKinstry upheld this decision since the Burlingame Treaty could not prevent criminals from entering. This was an instance – one of many – where the Burlingame Treaty failed in its purpose to promote unrestricted Chinese immigration and protect immigrant rights as Chinese.

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70 Acts Amendatory of the Codes, Passed at the 20th Session of the Legislature, 1873-1874, section 70 (Sacramento: State Printer, 1874), 39-40.
72 Ibid., 101.
people were being turned away. The U.S. judicial courts believed that they should preserve the safety of the country and that was their constitutional obligation. Still, the Six Companies continued to advocate for Chinese immigrants.

In 1873, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors proposed three ordinances that would raise the cost of living for Chinese residents. The Six Companies turned to Reverend Otis Gibson as their legal representative, and he defended the Chinese population publicly, noting:

“I believe that congress, at our request (a small part of the population of California and San Francisco), will not hastily abrogate the provisions of the existing treaty between the United States and China, which is generally admitted to be favorable to us as a nation, and which has only recently been secured, after long years of diplomacy and at great expense. It appears unreasonable for us to believe otherwise.”

After listening to the Chinese Six Companies’ viewpoint, the mayor of San Francisco, William Alvord, vetoed the ordinances because they violated the Burlingame Treaty and he felt the treaty should be upheld.

Through all the political and social attacks on Chinese people, the Six Companies remained vigilant to their cause: helping Chinese immigrants advance in the United States. Their main methods of fighting racism included challenging the constitutionality of anti-Chinese laws. But it also included, counterintuitively, discouraging Chinese people from emigrating to the United States in the 1870s. In the midst of the increasingly hostile racist environment, the Six Companies dispatched letters urging their countrymen not to travel to the United States anymore. The Six Companies sent telegrams to the Tung Wah Hospital in Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong Daily Press and Daily Alta California published these statements. One telegram

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76 Tung Wah Hospital was the Six Companies’ information center in Hong Kong.
in 1876 to Tung Wah read, “Laws passed, and measures being taken to discourage Chinese emigration. Inform the Chinese that they must not come. Danger to life and property if they come. Please advertise.”77 The newspaper reported that “there is an alarm felt in San Francisco as to the consequences of the large influx of immigrants” and that the Six Companies do not recommend further emigration to San Francisco.78 The *Daily Press* agreed with the Six Companies’ assessment, admitting that heeding the Associations’ worries was the safest solution.79 In order to best serve Chinese American interests and prospective Chinese immigrants from anti-immigrant violence and rhetoric, the Six Companies chose to come out against immigration completely.

The warnings were initially only slightly effective, with marginal decreases in arrival rates in the early part of the decade. In 1876, the Six Companies redoubled their efforts to restrict emigration. They released “A Letter Writing Campaign to Discourage Immigration” in 1876, explaining that the influx of Chinese immigrants lowered wages for all the Chinese Americans already settled, and the competition and ire of white Americans would increase if this trend continued.80 The statement noted, “If it is hard for the Chinese who are already here, imagine how much worse it will be for the newcomers… the members of the Six Companies believe that the best course of action is to have each person in California write a letter home exhorting his clansmen not to come to America.”81 The situation was so urgent that the Six Companies did not just contact overseas organizations and newspapers; they actively encouraged residents to write letters explaining the racist environment so the message would disseminate faster. From 1873 to

77 *Daily Alta California* vol. 28, no. 9490, March 30, 1876.
78 *The Daily Press*, June 5, 1873.
79 Ibid.
1874, Chinese arrivals decreased by 6,516 people. After the Six Companies released another statement discouraging immigration in 1876, the arrival rate dropped from 22,781 in 1876 to 10,594 immigrants in 1877 and continued dropping in the following years. These campaigns to prevent further Chinese immigration were driven by the increasing pressure on the Six Companies from U.S. officials and the public. They were still fending off accusations over their coolie and prostitution trade, forcing the Six Companies to run a defensive campaign for much of the late nineteenth century to salvage their reputation.

The Six Companies were afraid that the situation would worsen for everyone involved if more Chinese immigrants arrived – the Six Companies workload would increase, Chinese immigrants would face incredible discrimination, and the treatment of the Chinese in the United States would deteriorate further. The Six Companies formed “to assist [Chinese people], and not to oppress them,” and the leaders were firmly dedicated to that purpose. With that in mind, the Six Companies discouraged Chinese immigration because they did not want people to commit to an arduous and expensive journey without the guarantee of better opportunities and a better life. Though it seems counterintuitive to the activism the Six Companies partook in, their warnings are evidence of the association’s transparency and dedication to protecting people who were unaware of the antagonism they would face if they emigrated.

One should consider why Chinese people heeded the Six Companies’ warnings, or why people emigrated regardless. The decrease in immigration rates is evidence that people respected the authority of the Six Companies beyond the borders of the United States. Furthermore, it was understood that the Six Companies had a stronger grasp on the U.S. legal system and current situation than people in China, so it was logical for people to accept their advice. The Chinese in

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83 “Local Intelligence,” *San Francisco Alta California*, June 26, 1869.
the United States held elections for the officers of the Six Companies, and although they were not necessarily trained in diplomacy or intellectuals, their occupation as merchants served them well in negotiating between the needs of their communities and the increasingly vitriolic sentiments of the American public. Unfortunately, disaster struck when the Northern Chinese Famine of 1876-1879 wiped out an estimated 9 to 13 million people in China. The famine was dire enough that the Six Companies contributed funds to compensate for the losses from crop failure in the five affected provinces. For those starving in China, the prospect of earning wages and having a new beginning was preferable to dying of hunger, despite the racism and violence that may have awaited them. White California residents came to that same conclusion, and news of the famine increased anti-Chinese public sentiment once more.

Enraged anti-Chinese protesters escalated their actions and turned toward violence over the course of the nineteenth century. On May 17, 1878, an estimated 250 Chinese immigrants arrived in San Francisco to wagons of protestors throwing stones at them. Chinese people turned towards the Six Companies for protection when attacked violently, which put more responsibility onto the association. White Americans subsequently focused their anger on the Six Companies, since they recognized it as the unofficial governing body of Chinese people in the United States. Thus, the Six Companies received extreme pressure from both their members and the American public, all while having their resources drained considerably because they were taking care of more victims of physical altercations.

In response to physical attacks and mistreatment of Chinese people, the leaders of the Six Companies wrote petitions and editorials addressed to politicians and the general public. The

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same year they wrote to Tung Wah Hospital and created the letter-writing campaign, they wrote President Ulysses S. Grant a letter outlining the Chinese perspective in 1876 and explained why there were few Chinese families, why Chinese people did not purchase real estate, and how the United States benefited from the taxes Chinese immigrants paid. In “A Memorial from Representative Chinamen in America,” they specifically referenced the Burlingame Treaty and reminded President Grant of the rights and privileges accorded to the Chinese in America. The letter respectfully rebutted all of the unflattering claims alleged against the Six Companies and the Chinese population including: Chinese prostitution, the value of Chinese workers, importation of slaves, and the suspicious actions of the Six Companies themselves. For every single allegation, they provided clarification for the supposed offenses. The letter explained that the mayor of San Francisco generated intense hostility toward the Chinese community and that his statements were misleading. Nevertheless, they concluded their petition “… let there be modification of existing treaty relations between China and the United States, either prohibiting or limiting further Chinese immigration… doubtless, it would be very acceptable to a certain class of people in this Honorable country.” This sentiment was reiterated by a representative hired by the Six Companies, Joseph C. G. Kennedy. In November 1877, he appealed to President Hayes, asking for peace and protection for the Chinese population, even at the cost of diminished entry for future newcomers. The Six Companies was willing to amend the Burlingame Treaty if that concession would quell the hostility and if the U.S. government promised to protect the rights of Chinese people already settled in the United States. The Six Companies believed

87 “To His Excellency U.S. Grant, President of the United States: A Memorial from Representative Chairmen in America,” Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, 1876.
89 Ibid., 22-23.
91 Ibid.
cooperating with the U.S. government on amending the treaty was the best way to improve the quality of life for Chinese people.

The Six Companies arranged discounted return trips for Chinese immigrants, promising to balance newly arriving Chinese immigrants by sending back as many Chinese people as possible.\footnote{Qin, \textit{The Diplomacy of Nationalism}, 82n23.} To be sure, their stance was not purely altruistic; the merchants running the Six Companies were also afraid that the growing resentment from American businessmen would hurt their profits. The lowered demand for Chinese laborers, since people were furious that Chinese laborers made the job market more competitive, hurt the immigration process that the Six Companies carefully cultivated and severely reducing their role as importing intermediaries.\footnote{Hansen, “The Chinese Six Companies of San Francisco,” 42.}

Still, although the Six Companies was prepared to sacrifice unrestricted immigration, they were committed to protecting the rights of their people. Kennedy appealed to the U.S. government after he contacted President Hayes, reemphasizing that the government must honor the Burlingame Treaty.\footnote{“By Telegraph,” \textit{Sacramento Record-Union}, Dec. 12, 1877; “A Chinese Plea,” \textit{San Francisco Evening Post}, Nov. 23, 1877.} He argued that the Chinese government upheld their agreement and respected Americans in China; therefore, the U.S. government should behave with the same integrity.\footnote{“A Chinese Plea,” \textit{San Francisco Evening Post}, Nov. 23, 1877.} His letter was a reminder of the motivations for the treaty in the first place, and U.S. citizens living in China could be hurt in the crossfire if China realized the U.S. government tolerated continued attacks on Chinese people. The Six Companies dispatched Kennedy for additional appeals, continuously citing Article IV violations from the Burlingame Treaty. China, they argued, was a major trading partner, and their relationship promoted U.S. economic
interests, which was how Kennedy lobbied against two anti-Chinese bills to Congress’s Foreign Relations Committee.

Colonel F. A. Bee, part of the Six Companies’ legal consul, and Kennedy lobbied and protested the U.S. Congress frequently over the 1870s, always stressing the treaty obligations that the U.S. Congress ratified. They would use different tactics to appeal to the politicians, including explaining how the Chinese laborers were pleasant residents and contributed a substantial amount of taxes to the country. Colonel Bee smartly published trade statistics in local newspapers so the American public could see the millions of dollars that the United States gained from a healthy trade relationship with China.96 Additionally, a positive U.S.-China relationship served to bolster exports, like in 1877 when the port of San Francisco generated $21,111,446 worth of exported goods to China.97 The continued lobbying efforts of the Six Companies and their representatives were successful in the 1870s, where most of the proposed bills limiting immigration failed to pass through the U.S. Congress. One significant victory occurred when the Fifteen Passenger Bill was vetoed by President Hayes because it violated the Burlingame Treaty.98 The Fifteen Passenger Bill prohibited ships from bringing more than fifteen Chinese passengers, and ship captains that violated this bill could be fined up to $100 and receive a prison sentence. This bill was modified to account for the Chinese government’s wishes, and in 1880 it was signed by both countries’ governments.99 The Angell Treaty of 1880 temporarily suspended laborer immigration, but still allowed professional Chinese immigrants

98 U.S. Congress, Congressional Record, 45th Cong., 3rd sess., 1879, 2275.
access. Though immigration was limited, Congress promised to honor their commitment to preserving and enforcing the rights of all Chinese residents living in the United States.

The Six Companies was undoubtedly the most powerful Chinese organization in the United States in the nineteenth century. In terms of diplomacy, protection, community, and representation, the Six Companies tried in earnest to fulfill all their members’ needs and demands. Its transformation from separate district associations into one major confederation demonstrates the adaptability of the organization. In China, there were internal conflicts between family members, but once people arrived in the United States, all their conflicts and worries multiplied. The need for a protector and provider resulted in the Six Companies developing into a unified representative governing body. Chinese people relied (and trusted) the leaders to speak on their behalf. Those are skills and responsibilities far beyond the original district association model that existed in China. The leaders of the Six Companies were elected by the membership, but they were not formally educated on diplomacy or the U.S. immigration system. For those reasons, the Six Companies frequently outsourced their problems to talented American lobbyists or legal counsels. This was a brilliant strategy because they maximized their resources by hiring the most skilled advocates for their cause, and they exposed more Americans to their message. By recruiting more Americans to support their viewpoint, the Six Companies disseminated the positive attributes and a more truthful representation of Chinese people. Using an American person as their medium made U.S. audiences more susceptible to the idea that Chinese people were not as harmful as they imagined.

The Six Companies operated as an unofficial Chinese legation in the United States, but because the organization was based in the United States, its representatives were more well-

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100 Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America*, 60.
versed in the U.S. system. Even if the Qing Government appointed officials, they were not fluent in English or American customs, and they were unlikely to learn. The Six Companies flourished because they understood that it could not operate like associations did in China. To contest the Burlingame Treaty violations, they identified that state and federal legislatures that made tangible policy changes. The angle that the Six Companies took to defend their constituents indicates that they understood the complexities of the anti-Chinese movement. People who were staunchly against Chinese people living in their state were not easily moved to see Chinese people as non-threatening, non-criminal people. The language of the Six Companies’ declarations, protests, and editorials is therefore focused on the United States government honoring a protective treaty and acting pragmatically through a foreign relations lens. The Six Companies’ tireless efforts in protecting the legal and basic human rights of its members was effective and necessary in the early nineteenth century, when respectful treatment and legal channels were unavailable for Chinese people.
II. FROM VICE TO VALIANCE: The Multifaceted Nature of Tongs

The Six Companies or the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association are not easily recognizable names for people far removed from Chinese American matters. Most influential Chinese ethnic organizations in the United States are not household names today, but the notorious Chinese tongs, secret societies, and Triad Society may be more familiar to the average American. Tongs were traditionally characterized by Western news sources as dangerous Chinese gangs. Their reputation as Chinese mafia or gangs was earned through their connection with three central vices: prostitution, gambling, and opium. The illegal proclivities of tongs made them much flashier than other Chinese ethnic organizations, resulting in sensationalized newspaper headlines in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

More than other historical actors, the Triads, secret societies, and tongs are frequently used as tropes in contemporary popular culture, mostly in Hong Kong but also in Western media. Movies about tongs produced in the twentieth century, like *The War of the Tongs* (1917) or *The Terror of Tongs* (1961), a British film, are excellent examples of how Western entities stereotyped tongs.¹ On *The Terror of Tongs* movie poster, one subheading reads: “Terror stalks the street of Opium Dreams!” A smaller heading reads: “the silken rustle of a Hong-Kong pleasure girl…”² A different promotional image describes tongs as “drug-crazed assassins

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¹ *The War of the Tongs* is a United States film that was filmed in the San Francisco Chinatown and produced by Universal Films. The basic plot is that a wealthy tong leader, Ching Ting, who falls in love with a woman, Suey Lee, but she is already in love with another man, Wong Wing. Wong Wing and Ching Ting belong to different tongs, and as they battle for Suey Lee lots of bloodshed, gambling, and murders occur. It is a romanticized version of tong wars, which were not usually motivated by true love, but gambling conflicts and debt. “The War of the Tongs (1917).” The Internet Movie Database, accessed February 8, 2020, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0008749/?ref_=stpl_pl_tt.

carrying out their hate-filled ritual murders,” and how “they were the Oldest Secret Cult in the World – and the Most Fiendish!” With the exception of the cult comment, the headings are mostly based on truth, though dramatized for the purposes of the film. Some of the assigned themes and keywords for this film include: “Yakuza,” “drug-dealer,” “gangster,” and “killing.” This seemingly trivial artifact reveals how white Europeans and Americans perceived tongs, and illuminates the image of tongs they circulated to the public. Presumably, The Terror of Tongs generated a profit and audience-goers left with the impression that tongs were simply a combination of those listed keywords. That a website assigns these broad generalizations to this movie is proof that there is a minimal understanding of the true nature and motivations of tongs. For an American public that was already wary of Chinese immigrants, fighting tongs merely sanctioned existing attitudes. Drugs, prostitution, and murders further confirmed that white Americans were right: Chinese people were a public threat, and allowing their entry was a mistake. What newspapers, media, and many history books fail to capture is the complexity of tongs and the interaction of factors that led to drug transactions and what appeared to be “senseless” killings.

The “tong” name has come to embody evil and dangerous activities, but tongs did not originate as purely criminal organizations at all. The name “tong” is a romanization of the Chinese character “堂” (táng), which means “hall.” “堂” is usually paired with other Chinese characters, for example: 人民大会堂 (rénmín dàhuìtáng) which means “great hall of the people” or 礼堂 (lǐtáng) which means “assembly hall.” These different combinations demonstrate to

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3 The Yakuza are Japanese organizations that are generally described as organized crime syndicates. The Yakuza are commonly described as gangsters or Mafia members in English. As with the tongs, the Yakuza encounter the same gross simplification. They, too, are much more than violent groups.

Chinese-speakers the type of hall, the organization or hall’s purpose, and what kinds of people gathered there (or were welcomed). The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association’s Mandarin name also includes the tánɡ character, a sign that to Chinese people, any organization is technically a “tong”; by extension, “tong” does not automatically denote violent gang-like tendencies. It was only after white Americans popularized “tongs” and associated it with criminality around the late 1880s that the word began eliciting distaste and fear from both white Americans and Chinese residents in the United States.\(^5\) To only see tongs through this lens is problematic, as such a narrow view only scratches the surface of a tong’s function in society.

Tongs were first created by Chinese people who felt discriminated by clan or district organizations: if a person had a rarer surname, the family organizations they belonged to were, therefore, smaller and less powerful, or even nonexistent if no one in their clan emigrated to the United States.\(^6\) Frequently, larger family associations vastly outnumbered smaller family associations, and as more Chinese youth were educated in the United States, they desired freedom from the larger district associations’ domination.\(^7\) After the first tong was established, it became a promising alternative to the Six Companies and other family associations. The external discrimination from white Americans, as well as also internal racism from their own Chinese district or clan associations, pushed Chinese men to join tongs instead. Similar to the Six Companies, clan, and district associations, tongs began as mutual aid and protective organizations – they functioned similarly in the first few years, too. That changed soon after their establishment though, as tongs began partaking in less legitimate activities – primarily running


\(^7\) Eng Ying Gong and Bruce Grant, *Tong War!* (New York: Nicholas L. Brown, 1930), 27.
gambling dens, opium dens, drug-trafficking rings, and prostitution houses. Tongs were also unafraid of settling conflicts with physical violence and intimidation tactics, whereas one of the Six Companies’ main roles was resolving conflicts through nonviolent mediation.

At a time when there were not many (legitimate) employment opportunities available to Chinese people, many immigrants were desperate for money and safety. Tongs promised both, and they used immigrants’ desperation to amass their wealth and accumulate power in Chinatowns across the United States. The fact that most tong members were businessmen was helpful in this power-grabbing enterprise. Tongs also employed enforcers, who originally wielded hatchets, thus earning them the name “hatchet men.” (They later obtained revolvers and machine guns, but the term “hatchet men” stayed with the public, becoming a catch-all term for any variety of tong activities.) Hatchet men were tong leaders’ bodyguards and received a generous salary, which made it a desirable position for young men with limited education or potential for social mobility. “Highbinder” was the title given to the best fighters in a tong. They were sent out whenever rival tongs issued challenges for a fight. Tongs promised to cover the legal expenses of highbinders if they were arrested; if highbinders were killed or imprisoned, tongs even offered compensation to their families.

Many of the books covering tongs in-depth or historic newspaper headlines focus heavily on “tong wars,” “hatchet men,” or “highbinders.” All address the major drawback of tongs,
emphasizing the devastating death tolls from wars and how they made Chinatowns unsafe. Chinese people understandably did not want their neighborhood to remain dangerous, or borderline uninhabitable, for prolonged periods. At the same time, Americans exaggerated these wars and used them as confirmation of the insidious nature of Chinese immigrants. The U.S. newspapers’ sensational headlines further rallied the American public against the treacherous Chinese population. The reaction from the Chinese community, however, exposed the precarious relationship between tongs and Chinese people unaffiliated with their organizations. To tongs, though, these wars were necessary to protect their organization’s reputation (the idea of saving face / 要脸 (yào liǎn) is a fundamental belief in Chinese culture) and their members’ money.¹⁴ The perception of a tong’s power determined its longevity. If a tong tolerated other people stealing their property (like taking one of their prostitutes) or cheating during one of their games, the tong would be an easy mark for others. Demonstrating physical strength and an ability to protect their assets allowed tongs to survive.

Smuggling opium and prostitutes into the United States generated more revenue than working in a restaurant or at a laundry. Working in the context of the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Chinese people found an opportunity to make a comfortable living. It was an enormous sacrifice to emigrate, not only financially but also socially and emotionally. People left their families and culture – all that they knew – for a country that did not welcome them, and often actively worked to hurt them. Considering the difficulties of immigration and the stress of assimilating into a completely foreign environment, the benefits of joining a tong become apparent. Joining did not cost much, and it immediately introduced a person to a community that would gladly avenge you, die for you, and break the law.

¹⁴ Leong Gor Yun, Chinatown Inside Out (New York: Barrows Mussey, 1936), 82.
for you, as long as you return that promise. Additionally, there was an intense level of secrecy associated with tongs. All tong information and activities were kept secret from outsiders, especially the American public.

As a whole, tongs functioned rather democratically, with tong members electing their leaders.\(^{15}\) They were also involved in the tong wars, which were a series of battles and stand-offs between different tongs in multiple Chinatowns across the nation.\(^{16}\) Sometimes the wars would extend for years, occurring intermittently throughout the nineteenth century and into the beginning of the twentieth century.\(^{17}\)

Tongs were pluralistic organizations whose members varied in occupation and background. Though newspapers and media emphasized the violence and immorality of tongs in their coverage of the Chinese American experience, many Chinese Americans were uninvolved in tongs and maintained peaceful lives. Nonetheless, tongs were an essential part of Chinatowns, and they supported their members in their own way. Though the methods seem different from the Six Companies and other welfare associations, the core motivations of tongs are remarkably similar to the motivations of other associations. They were also more accepting than other organizations, unconcerned with the socioeconomic background or ancestral roots of members. Their existence is more dynamic than the rudimentary understanding Chinese American history offers. Most of the language describing tongs involves calling them a “Chinese gangs” or “mafia-like” organizations, but they cannot be understood only in comparison to other organizations; tongs were their own entity. They were a product of the nineteenth and twentieth

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\(^{15}\) Wong, Chinese American Oral History Project (Collection 1688).

\(^{16}\) The first documented tong war was between the Hip Sing Tong and the On Leong Tong (1899-1907). This and other tong wars between the two in the New York Chinatown is the subject of Scott D. Seligman’s book *Tong War: The Untold Story of Vice, Money and Murder in New York’s Chinatown.*

\(^{17}\) Sowell, *Ethnic America*, 140.
centuries, offering resources and activities that their members needed. Tong behavior adapted to
the changing needs of the Chinese community over time; additionally, they provided members
with a loyal brotherhood. Tong activity triggered many transformative incidents around the
country, and those events profoundly shaped the reputation and lifestyle of Chinese people living
in the United States.

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There is consensus amongst historians like Richard H. Dillon and Scott D. Seligman that
tongs date back to seventeenth-century China. There was a brotherhood of outlaws, known as the
Hongmen, that attempted to overthrow the Manchu reign and restore the Chinese-ruled Ming
Dynasty. The Hongmen then arrived in the United States with the first wave of Chinese
immigrants, sometimes going by the name “Chee Kung Tong” (Chamber of Universal Justice). On the other hand, Roger Daniels’s Asian America traces the San Francisco tongs back to the
politically and criminally motivated anti-government movements in the Guangdong province
around the 1800s. Daniels’s claim likely stems from the common conflation between tongs,
secret societies, and the Triads.

All three organizations are frequently grouped together and are often placed in
classification with one another, but they are distinct entities. Membership between the three was
fluid, especially between the Triads and tongs, which explains their similarities. The main
difference is that Triads were primarily active in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan,

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18 Richard H. Dillon, The Hatchet Men: The Story of the Tong Wars in San Francisco’s Chinatown (New
19 Seligman, Tong Wars, 13.
20 Roger Daniels, Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850 (Seattle:
while the tongs were prominent in the United States, especially in New York City and California.

Scott Zesch associates the Triad Society with the Hongmen who attempted to overthrow the Manchu dynasty, stating that many Hong refugees fled to California after the Taiping Rebellion was crushed in the 1860s.\textsuperscript{21} Those secret societies lost their political slant and became increasingly focused on welfare and protection, but also became interested in extortion and illegal practices, which leads us to the recognizable fighting tongs.\textsuperscript{22} After transplanting to the United States, though, the tongs quickly morphed into their own distinct organization with functions that served the Chinese immigrant and Chinese American population.

Still, there were plenty of non-violent organizations that were technically tongs as well, usually differentiated as “non-fighting tongs.”\textsuperscript{23} Reverend Otis Gibson described tongs as a labor union around the end of the nineteenth century, which is a far cry from its negative reputation beginning in the 1900s.\textsuperscript{24} Gibson’s commentary offers insight into the origins of tongs, when the leaders were focused on finding economic and social opportunities for their fellow brothers. If they functioned as a labor union, then tongs organized on behalf of their members, fighting for their rights and finding solutions to their grievances. With that purpose in mind, tongs acted with their members’ best interests in mind, even if their methods for achieving justice were not always completely legal.

\textsuperscript{21} Zesch, \textit{The Chinatown War}, 42.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} Dillon, \textit{The Hatchet Men}, 53.
The first fighting tong, the Kwong Duck Tong, came into existence in San Francisco during the late-nineteenth century. Each tong was named after the meeting hall where the organization was headquartered. Unlike clan or district associations, tongs were associations that allow membership to anyone, regardless of a person’s surname, background, or geographic location. As long as members paid dues and underwent initiation, they were accepted. Tongs were even known to accept Americans, Japanese, and Filipino people, which worked to their advantage since they could recruit the best fighters to join. They also provided loan programs, offered political assistance, and built religious shrines in their headquarters. By providing these services and accepting people of all backgrounds through open enrollment, tongs created a comfortable, non-exclusive, diverse community atmosphere. An organization that offered social advancement to any member that pledged allegiance appealed to many, particularly uneducated or unskilled workers with scarce employment prospects. They catered to all members of the Chinese community and fiercely protected every person in their tong. Considering the cold-blooded, drugged-up reputation of tong members, it is perhaps surprising to see that they provided numerous welfare services. The CCBA and other civic organizations usually received all the credit for helping people with their immigration troubles, but tongs had the monetary

25 Multiple historians recognize the Kwong Duck Tong as the first tong in the United States, but its creation year varies. Hoy claims it existed by 1852, while Leong Gor Yun dates it around 1870. Hoy, The Chinese Six Companies, 8; Yun, Chinatown Inside Out, 69.
27 These initiations were very secretive and taken seriously because complete loyalty was a core value for tongs. Some involved pricking an initiate’s finger and having all the members drink liquid that contained his blood (representing a literal blood brotherhood), holding a sword over an initiate’s head as he recited his allegiance to the tong. Seligman, Tong Wars, 8, 13-14. The Oregonian noted that “the members are bound together by the most solemn oaths… to do unquestioningly and unhesitatingly what the society orders.”
28 Gong and Grant, Tong War! 48.
30 Rose Hum Lee, The Chinese in the United States of America (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), 162.
resources, skills, and community connections to help their members just as much, if not more than the CCBA. From their welfare services to their smaller acts like decorating the tong headquarters according to the preferences of their members, all of this was evidence that tongs were genuinely dedicated to improving the lives of their members. More than that, they were considerate of their beliefs, and that produced a community with a genuinely strong brotherhood.

As anti-Chinese sentiment and violence increased across the United States, the role of the tongs expanded. Many anti-Chinese riots occurred during the late nineteenth century, and after the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act passed, the violence intensified. The Exclusion Act denied Chinese laborers entry but still allowed merchants, students, and other professionals into the country if they could provide credentials. It became extremely difficult for Chinese people to obtain the proper immigration documentation, since the government insisted that no unskilled or skilled laborers enter. Under the Exclusion Act, there were strict regulations on Chinese businessmen and the work they could conduct. If a businessman was not working in the specific industry he claimed when he arrived, he was not authorized to work. There were also restrictions on Chinese people involved in the restaurant, hotel, tobacco, and clothing industries. Both Chinese laborers and businessmen were affected by the Exclusion Act, and these restrictions were in place initially for ten years, then extended for another ten years and finally made permanent in 1902. After all this legislation passed, tongs were active participants in smuggling Chinese people into the United States. Smuggled immigrants were generally inclined to join the tong that helped them, which increased tong membership even after immigration was restricted.

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31 U.S. Congress, Congressional Record, 47th Cong., 1st sess., May 6, 1882, 61.
32 Ibid.
34 Armentrout-Ma, “Urban Chinese at the Sinitic Frontier,” 122.
Chinese immigrants constantly feared for their safety since police officers and the judicial system did not prevent anti-Chinese riots, let alone prosecute racist crimes against Chinese people. Continual failure to find justice in the police system created a feedback loop where Chinese people were forced to turn ever more inward to their community. Tongs offered self-preservation to their members, along with the promise of economic opportunities and a way for men to support their families. With their open membership, tongs were more like clubs than family associations. This meant that families were not bound to the same tong, and one anecdote describes how a father and son joined different tongs. When the tongs fought one another, the father and son would hide so they would not participate in the fight for fear of injuring their family member. This is a true testament to the blood brotherhood mentality and strict expectations of tongs.

In the event of a fight, allegiance to a tong was the ultimate priority even if a member’s father, brother, or son opposed said member. Eng Ying Gong, a co-author of Tong War! was a dedicated Hip Sing Tong member for decades while his brother served as the Ong Leong Tong leader. These two examples indicate that individuals joined tongs for different reasons. And based on Gong’s firsthand account, he was accepting of other tongs. Even if there was animosity or previous bad blood between two tongs, there was still respect or at least tolerance for one another. Fights and tong wars only broke out when there were legitimate inciting factors, not due to frivolous reasons. It was not good enough that a friend or brother joined; each tong had its own attractive qualities or unique benefits. Often described as a fraternal organization, the

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36 Gong and Grant, Tong War! viii.
process of selecting is reminiscent of how students choose fraternity houses today, finding one that fits their needs or values the same things, despite what their family or friends might choose.

The San Francisco Chinatown had the largest number of tongs, with two of the most powerful being the Kwong Duck Tong and the Hip Yee Tong. Tongs expanded their networks by establishing additional “branches.” New branches were only set up with the prior approval of rival tongs since most lands were already under the jurisdiction of other tongs. Gaining consent from other tongs was not a civil conversation. It usually required a shoot-to-kill gunfight between rivals. Tongs employed on-hand fighters, so they were always well-prepared for combat. The need for excellent fighters was not driven by bloodlust; rather, a strong frontline signaled that a tong was powerful and could handle attacks from other tongs or outside forces. As a tong gained more land and won more shootouts, their reputation grew – and so did their roster. It was not that tongs sought out murder and hired assassins; it was a means of expansion. Expansion brought in more revenue, which could then be used to aid their members in any of their endeavors. In a twisted way, taking the lives of rivals meant better opportunities for their own members. Perhaps this “ends justifying the means” is the mentality tongs adopted when battling rival tongs, which demonstrates that the casualties still had value, but the individual tongs were committed to providing for their own members at all costs.

Kwong Dock Tong was created by the merchant Mock Wah, who convinced his friends to move away from the strict family or clan mentality and towards a tong brotherhood instead. Kwong Dock’s existence was a direct challenge to the Six Companies’ authority since it opened the door to other avenues for companionship and protection. Tongs’ willingness to operate in

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37 Gong and Grant, *Tong War!* 24-28.
40 Ibid., 28.
grey areas and open use of force created more opportunities for them. People soon emulated Mock Wah’s ideas and spread tongs throughout California, and the second tong, the Hip Sing Tong, traveled across the country to New York. Not all tongs opened branches or left San Francisco, and even if they did not expand regionally, they could still amass power.\textsuperscript{41} By the 1890s, nearly all profitable criminal operations in San Francisco’s Chinatown were attributed to the fighting tongs.\textsuperscript{42} Tongs would start up in other cities independently, as long as there was membership interest. Their growth speaks to the strength of Mock Wah’s vision and the demand for greater economic and social opportunities for Chinese people. Family and district associations proved unwilling to or incapable of providing the options for which men desperately searched. Mock Wah saw the areas in which other community organizations were lacking, and he created tongs to fill those voids. For this reason, many tongs formed out of internal dissent within a family association, when one member would rally with his friends and oppose the Wong, Chin, Yee, or Four Brothers Associations.\textsuperscript{43} Tongs flourished, far beyond what Mock Wah could have predicted, and each gained their own individual identity, with factions splitting if they felt dissatisfied with the majority voices.\textsuperscript{44} Tong leadership’s management style varied between tongs, like with the On Leong and Hip Sing. The Hip Sing allowed its gunmen to share their opinions, but the On Leong’s gunmen worked strictly under the orders of their leaders (the president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and councilors, which were all elected by members).\textsuperscript{45} These differences in management style affected how the tong operated, but also proves that each tong was distinct

\textsuperscript{41} Gong and Grant, \textit{Tong War!} 29.  
\textsuperscript{42} Dillon, \textit{The Hatchet Men}, 171.  
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 170.  
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 33.  
\textsuperscript{45} Yun, \textit{Chinatown Inside Out}, 81.
from the others. They can be categorized as “tongs,” but the tong’s individual mission statement, priorities, and expectations of its members all differed. For example, based on the treatment of Hip Sing hatchet men, the Hip Sing leaders saw that these hatchet men were valuable not just for their physical prowess, but also for their fighting expertise and opinions. The tong allowed them to strategize and fight using their own ideas, signifying the tong’s trust in its fighters.\textsuperscript{46}

Conversely, based on the emphasis on the authoritarian “gentlemen” leadership by the On Leong, their tong was principally driven by profit and the whims of its leaders, and not the wishes of its members.\textsuperscript{47}

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Tongs provided something very desirable: protection. The police did not protect Chinese rights, nor did they even respect Chinese American citizens as proper U.S. citizens. The tongs’ ability to negotiate and evade the police meant Chinese people could survive without local law enforcement. Many anti-Chinese riots erupted across the countries in the late-nineteenth century, like the Los Angeles Massacre of 1871, with similar incidents occurring in San Francisco and Denver.\textsuperscript{48} Often, nativist mobs would burn down Chinese-owned establishments out of anger because they believed that Chinese people were taking their jobs and taking away resources from Caucasian workers.\textsuperscript{49} Elected officials often supported these anti-Chinese sentiments, resulting in local and federal government officials neglecting the safety of Chinese people. Tongs offered security to its members and businesses that paid for their protection.

\textsuperscript{46} Yun, \textit{Chinatown Inside Out}, 81.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 82.
\textsuperscript{49} Laurie, “‘The Chinese Must Go,’” 23.
One of the worst (and largely forgotten) massacres in U.S. history was the Massacre of 1871, which was incited by angry Los Angeles residents. Building up to the actual massacre, a fight broke out between two tong organizations – the Hong Chow Company and the Nin Yung Company. Yo Hing was the leader of the Hong Chow Company, and Sam Yeun was the leader of the Nin Yung Company. They fought over a Chinese prostitute, Ya Hit, who ran away from Yo Hing’s company and was subsequently claimed by Nin Yung.\textsuperscript{50} Yo Hing’s company took the issue to court and issued a warrant for Ya Hit’s arrest, but she was bailed out by Sam Yeum, and he gained legal possession over her.\textsuperscript{51} Not to be outdone, Yo Hing regained possession over Ya Hit by convincing her to marry him. This angered the Nin Yung, who took out a bounty of $1,000 for Yo Hing. The day before the massacre, Nin Yung members shot at but missed Yo Hing. Many tong members from San Francisco escaped to safer parts of California in preparation for the tong war; the Chinatown community readied themselves for battle at the same time.\textsuperscript{52}

On October 24, 1871, Ah Choy (from the Nin Yung Company) was shot and killed by a Hong Chow. Members from both tongs fled the scene after Policeman Jesus Bilderrain arrived. The members exited to Coronel Block, a structure that housed multiple Chinese businesses and apartments.\textsuperscript{53} Bilderrain and an American witness, Adolph Celis, chased after them, and when Bilderrain went after Yuen, the Chinese members opened fire on them. Officer Esteva Sanchez and Robert Thompson (a rancher who volunteered to help) tried later to arrest the Chinese people

\textsuperscript{52} Chan, “The Chinese in Los Angeles.”
hiding in Coronel Block. A shootout began between everyone, including Chinese people. Thompson stepped in and fired, and was consequently killed by the return fire.54

Rumors that Chinese people were killing white people spread rapidly throughout the city. The Massacre swiftly followed.55 Citizens armed themselves with pistols and various weapons, circling around the building. Fifteen Chinese people died by lynching, and three more were shot to death by the mob of thousands of people.56 Rioters looted Chinatown and searched for all the Chinese people they could find. Almost all the buildings and stores in the area were destroyed by the riot, which estimated damages of $40,000 in cash and merchandise. This Massacre still ranks as one of the worst riots in Los Angeles, only the beginning of a series of devastating race riots that would plague the city across centuries.

As devastating as the Massacre was, it helped reform Chinatown and the greater Los Angeles community. The violence was so horrifying that tong activity calmed down significantly, and there were no tong wars in Los Angeles for many years after. This event demonstrates how even though Chinese people, tongs, and the police likely preferred all Chinese activities to remain contained in Chinatown, that was not a realistic arrangement. Before the Massacre, the tongs acted according to their own protocol, properly alerting Chinatown residents so the whole community prepared for their own civil war. Unfortunately, as soon as a white person was affected, all the simmering rage and racism from Los Angeles residents exploded, resulting in a catastrophic slaughtering of Chinese people and their property. Although the tongs did not completely stop their illegal activities, they were likely more deliberate about their choices to prevent further catastrophes. Their reaction proves that tongs could shift their behavior

55 Zesch, The Chinatown War, 132.
56 Ibid., 150.
depending on the current political climate. Especially if the safety of their members was at stake, tong leaders were flexible about changing their tactics.

The Massacre limited tong activity in Los Angeles, but the famous tong wars continued raging in other parts of the country for many more decades. The white American public grew increasingly upset that the police were ineffective at shutting down tongs. Numerous factors caused the tong wars to continue disrupting daily activity for up to two years at a time. On the Chinese side, tongs operated on their own terms; Chinese people unaffiliated with tongs were still distrustful of authorities. If the police apprehended individuals and searched for witnesses, Chinese people refused to cooperate or corroborate their findings.\(^{57}\) Being uncooperative was not merely about loyalty to their Chinese community, but also about self-protection: tong members would retaliate if they found out a Chinese person informed the police about their crimes. It was safer to remain quiet than to get involved in a police investigation where the police could not guarantee a person or their family’s safety. In one instance, Low Sing, from the Suey Sing Tong, was attacked by a highbinder from the Kwong Dock Tong, but he refused to tell the police the name of his assailant.\(^{58}\) Instead, he whispered the name to his fellow tong members.\(^{59}\) What these behaviors explain is that tong matters stayed contained within the Chinese community. They were also handled according to the tong code, not the U.S. legal system. War councils from both tongs were called when there was a tong attack – one prepared to avenge their fallen or victimized comrade, while the other prepared for an assault.\(^{60}\) If any move was made on a tong member, that was considered a provocation of the entire tong. Challenges and battles were often public knowledge, but Chinese people did not report the location or existence of these fights to

\(^{57}\) Lee, The Chinese in the United States of America, 164.
\(^{58}\) Gong and Grant, Tong War! 15.
\(^{59}\) Ibid.
\(^{60}\) Ibid., 16.
Violence was a way of life for tongs, but these challenges were not undertaken lightly. There was a detailed procedure for waging these mini-wars, and there is always an actual instigator. Tongs were not acting capriciously, but with forethought and honorable intentions in many cases.

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As with the Six Companies, there was public concern over Chinese people not listening to U.S. authorities. The Six Companies were known as the supreme governing body for Chinese residents in the United States. Tongs acted independently and with little regard for the law. They resolved conflicts using brute force or guns, and the governing force of tongs was the tong leader. People were drawn to tongs because they offered protection that the police refused to offer them, but over time the strength of tongs meant that the police could not intervene even if they tried. Police certainly tried stopping tong wars and arresting culprits, but they failed miserably at quelling the wars in Chinatown. This was the case in New York, when Tom Lee, the leader of the Loon Yee Tong, was appointed as a deputy sheriff of New York County. Lee used his position to extort Chinatown gambling houses, collecting money each week and guaranteeing that no police officers would come knocking. He shared his earnings with the police, so both parties gained from this shake-down. If certain gambling houses refused to pay extra, they would be shut down by the police. Meanwhile, Lee’s own gambling houses were never targeted. Police and city officials frequented tong gambling dens around the country, not just in New York. In Portland, Evelyn Low Ching recalled her father slipping money to the police officers

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61 Gong and Grant, *Tong War!* 19.
63 Ibid., 20
64 Ibid., 21. For more information on Tom Lee and his illustrious life, Scott D. Seligman’s *Tong Wars* is an excellent historically accurate narrative of Lee’s life and the New York tong wars.
who gambled in his store, guaranteeing that he would receive advance notice of police raids on gambling dens.66 This leaves historians with two potential realities: either the police were working with some tongs and earning a profit on the side, or they were completely overpowered by the tongs’ brutality. Either reality validates the idea that Chinese people developed and operated their own governing system, one that the Six Companies first oversaw.

Lee was initially appointed by the Six Companies to establish offices on the East Coast and left San Francisco in the 1870s.67 The growing New York Chinatown requested the Six Companies send an emissary to help establish a Chinese community like the one in California, so Lee went to New York with the Six Companies’ support. He would later become a significant player in the New York tong wars, with his power and wealth earning him the nickname “Mayor of Chinatown.” His success stemmed from his connections with the white elite in New York, an alliance the Six Companies first forged in San Francisco when they organized against the exclusion legislation.68 Lee’s beginning as a representative of the Six Companies and transition to the most powerful New York tong leader reflects the fluidity of Chinese organizations. Chinese people did not belong to one single organization, but often held memberships in many groups that addressed their varying interests.69 It also speaks to the shared purposes of the Six Companies and tongs. Lee carried many of the ideas of the Six Companies – protection, governance, and representation – across the country and built up a new Chinese enclave. Lee’s life is a reminder that these organizations are best understood in conversation with one another.

67 Seligman, Tong Wars, 9.
68 Ibid., 9.
69 Apart from tongs, where a person could only belong to one tong and it was almost impossible to leave the organization. Yun, Chinatown Inside Out, 80.
Undoubtedly, the Six Companies did not want an intense tong war to break out or for Lee to support and actively participate in criminal activities. In their own way, though, Lee and the tongs created leverage against white Americans. Lee and the tongs collaborated, and together they produced more economical and social opportunities for the New York Chinese population. The Six Companies did not condone the behavior of the New York tongs, and they requested that the official Chinese legation in Washington D.C. intervene, resulting in the New York Chinese Counsel posting that both sides should reach a ceasefire. The relationship between the Six Companies and the tongs was contentious, as they held diverging views on how to advance Chinese interests. There was even an unwritten law that no member of a tong could become president of the Six Companies or serve on its board of presidents. The law was broken in the 1880s when the tongs strategized to gain power over the leadership of the Six Companies, but in the early-twentieth century the board was tong-free once again. Tensions between the two organizations continued as the Six Companies created multiple extradition treaties so they could remove highbinders, but, fortunately for tongs, the treaties failed three times.

One major problem the white American public had with tongs was police leniency. The police preferred to stay on the periphery, so long as tong violence was concentrated in Chinatown. This attitude, however, further isolated Chinatown, marking it as an area under the exclusive jurisdiction of tongs and other Chinese community organizations, not part of a majority-white, greater urban area. By not enforcing local laws early on, the police tacitly tolerated tong wars and the many illicit activities that took place around Chinatown.

70 “Rival Chinese in Deadly Feud”; “Warnings for Highbinders,” New York Sun, December 1, 1904.
72 Ibid., 11.
73 Dillon, The Hatchet Men, 197-198.
74 Ibid.
Additionally, law enforcement officials ceded power by permitting tong leaders and the Six Companies leaders to supervise the activities of Chinese people. This loose governance only added to the widespread discriminatory belief that the Chinese followed their own regulations and did not see themselves as beholden to American law. A longtime Los Angeles resident, Suey Yen Wong, recalled seeing police pretend they did not see fighting between Chinese and white people. Another resident mentioned how policemen turned their backs on the tong wars, and the quote, “One less Chinaman is enough,” came to mind when thinking about tong wars and police ambivalence. The police were not complete bystanders, though, and they occasionally employed moderately effective mediation methods. They negotiated treaties between rival tongs, like the On Leongs and the Hip Sings in New York. But even when a formal English agreement was signed, it was understood that the war was only over temporarily.

There was also a language barrier between the tongs and the police. Even if Chinese people wanted to abide by the rules, it was not easy for them to understand what was expected of them. In the nineteenth century, court interpreters represented the Chinese in court, but they would often be paid off by different sources to disadvantage many penniless, innocent Chinese people. This augmented mistrust of the judicial system since Chinese people could not adequately represent themselves. Additionally, many immigrants had never encountered a legal system like the one in the United States. In China, matters were resolved by a patriarch or leader, not in a courtroom. This difference is perhaps another explanation for the Chinese people’s

75 Wong, Chinese Historical Society of Southern California Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project (Collection 1688).
76 Ung, Chinese Historical Society of Southern California Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project (Collection 1688).
78 Gong and Grant, Tong War! 26.
disregard for U.S. rules. Chinese people preferred to settle conflicts between one another (tong wars) or through their own governance (the Six Companies).  

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The negative reputation that tongs gained after the tong wars discouraged many people from joining, particularly American-born Chinese people. Chinese people wanted acceptance from American society, and associating with organizations whose reputations were less than desirable only reinforced negative stereotypes about Chinese people. The American public was unlikely to distinguish between Chinese people in tongs and those living ordinary, law-abiding lives. Yet Chinese people faced a catch-22: avoiding tong activities was viewed as a betrayal by tongs and Chinese people. Whether or not a person participated in the tongs, they were affected by the warfare if they lived in Chinatown. Shootings would occur on the streets, day or night, forcing people to stay barricaded indoors while battles raged outside. One Los Angeles Chinatown resident’s mother warned her children to “never join any tongs” and to stay clear of associations altogether because she was afraid of the consequences. When challenges were issued, elders would warn younger people to stay indoors lest they get caught up in the fighting. For immigrants who hoped to make an honest living in Chinatown, the tongs were incredibly disruptive.

The destruction of the tong wars led to the tongs rebranding as “merchant associations,” hoping to minimize outrage from the American public. But a simple rebranding was not

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79 Seligman, *Tong Wars*, 135.
82 George Tom (1979 April 21), Chinese Historical Society of Southern California Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project (Collection 1688). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.
83 Gong and Grant, *Tong War!* 18.
enough to convince people that the tongs had turned over a new leaf, especially if their actions did not change with the characters in their name. A legitimate merchant would have greater opportunities with an association like a local Chinese Chamber of Commerce. When tongs first gained traction, another organization also formed – the Yang Mon Jing Moo Soo, which was The Committee of Foreign Affairs. It was a collective of interpreters and Western-educated Chinese people who informed the police about the illegal actions of Chinese people. From the timing of its emergence, this organization served as a necessary foil for tongs. The Committee would locate gambling halls and prostitute whereabouts and inform the American police. All the interpreters from the Hip Sings, On Yicks, San Suey Ying, Bing Kung, and the Hop Sing combined their political network and reformed Chinatown for a few years.

By closing gambling houses and freeing prostitutes, the Committee seemed like an ideal solution to tongs. However, the Committee quickly transformed and reopened the illegal businesses after the police closed them down. They preyed upon the tong model, using their police connections advantageously. While tongs inspired organizations where people could further their careers and interests in legitimate ways, they still encouraged the continuation of organizations complicit in unlawful activity. Tong leaders faced a difficult problem because they could not easily dispose of Committee members since multiple Committee members also served as tong interpreters. Interpreters were essential to tongs since the entire organization relied heavily on their expertise in negotiating contracts and resolving law enforcement problems. When the San Francisco tong leaders attempted to disband the Committee, the Committee retaliated by getting the leaders indicted.

85 Gong and Grant, *Tong War!* 35
86 Ibid., 94.
87 Ibid., 35.
88 Ibid., 95.
The rise of the Committee (though short-lived) was only one example of tong fallibility. Their domination was fleeting due to the unsustainable tong war model, the shifting Chinese demographics, and the world around them. Tong wars were extremely expensive and cost tongs money, supplies, and manpower. Running low on funds was a large reason tongs ended their involvement in specific wars. Sometimes one tong lost most of its highbinders; other times, they could not keep up with the gun and weapon supply (or decided it was not worth it), so wars were resolved, and peace treaties negotiated, often for cost-effectiveness.\(^8^9\) Though the actions and descriptions of tongs painted them as incredibly durable, tong membership was vulnerable – a tong could be wiped out in a single night. A devastating battle could mean the loss of all their highbinders and most of the membership. Or, as tongs became weaker, members would begin deserting the organization. The population also changed each year, as more people of Chinese descent were born in the United States. American-born Chinese people were wary of the dangerous tongs and discouraged from joining by their relatives. But their lifestyle was also different from their parents who emigrated – they attended American schools, ventured outside of Chinatown, and accepted American culture as their culture. They did not have the same need for kinship as new immigrants did, because they could build a community not only with other Chinese Americans, but also with white Americans outside of Chinatown. Many Chinese people moved out of Chinatown and into the suburbs, which meant members were not readily available for fighting. The changing landscape of Chinatown, the United States, and the tongs proved that tongs were a product of their time. The Chinese community needed the tongs for protection, brotherhood, and resistance against law enforcement, but as U.S. politics changed, so did the Chinese community’s needs.

\(^8^9\) Yun, *Chinatown Inside Out*, 79.
From the perspective of a lifelong tong member, Eng Gong, he admitted that it saddened him to write about the destruction tong wars inflicted, but he believed that tongs were necessary and the ultimate protectors of Chinese welfare. Gong published this account in 1930, stating that tong wars were a thing of the past and that there was a prosperous future ahead of tongs due to an impending collaboration between tong members and the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association.\textsuperscript{90} He writes in the final chapter:

“Always the question is being put to me: ‘Will the tong survive?’ Always I answer: ‘Yes.’”\textsuperscript{91}

Though his account contains hundreds of pages of fighting and deceit, Gong sees the value of tongs and was enormously hopeful. Gong was uniquely qualified to evaluate and critique tongs since he had clarity about what tong membership entailed. He wrote with affection for these organizations, proving that even someone fully aware of the organization’s immoral behavior could see their positive potential and staying power. Still, despite his appreciation for tongs, he claimed that he celebrated the ending of tong was just “as every other Chinese feels.”\textsuperscript{92} By revealing tong secrets publicly, Gong pushed tongs towards a brighter future, one that was closer to the original intentions of the first San Francisco tong creators.\textsuperscript{93} He also explained the intentions behind tong wars and the deliberate choices tongs made, which complicated the world’s understanding of tongs.

As predicted, tongs did transform as the 1930s arrived, but not quite as Gong hoped: instead, the ranks dwindled as original members aged and passed away. A robust collaboration

\textsuperscript{90} Eng Gong wrote Tong War! along with Bruce Grant, and it was marketed as an insider account to the mechanisms of tongs, details of tong wars and why they were initiated, as well as the achievements and objectives of tongs.

\textsuperscript{91} Gong and Grant, Tong War! 280.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 287.

\textsuperscript{93} Dillon, The Hatchet Men, 170.
developed between the General Peace Association (on the West Coast) and the CCBA (on the East Coast). The Chinese Peace Association (sometimes referred to as the Chinese Peace Society) was created in 1912 to resolve the conflict between rival Chinese organizations.\footnote{C.N. Reynolds, “The Chinese Tongs,” 623.} As tongs declined in the 1930s, the CCBA took this opportunity to gain back some of the power they ceded to tongs decades ago. It helped that the CCBA possessed a broader reach and membership (every Chinese person was pretty much a member) than the tongs, and it did not participate in activities where members died frequently.\footnote{Gong and Grant, \textit{Tong War!} 230.} Against the backdrop of the Great Depression, gambling and drug-trafficking were no longer lucrative enterprises for tongs. Many highbinders retired and searched for regular jobs.\footnote{Yun, \textit{Chinatown Inside Out}, 82.} By freeing their agenda of constant warfare, tongs found new ways to occupy their time. Tongs subsequently became more charitable in both their time and money, donating to support China during their wartime effort and contributing to the construction of Chinese language schools across the country.\footnote{Ibid., 82.}

Looking only at tong wars or hatchet men constructs an inadequate, one-dimensional understanding of tongs. Their role in the community was much more than running prostitution, gambling, and opium dens. The news coverage of tongs throughout the centuries was unfair and exaggerated Chinese peoples’ involvement in illicit activities; most Chinese people were uninvolved in tongs. That type of sensational reporting overlooked the other reasons Chinese people joined tongs, one of which was because many Chinese men could find a better future for themselves and their families if they risked joining tongs. These people were limited by the U.S. government, by the local governments and law enforcement, and worst of all, by their own district associations and \textit{huiguans}. Even members of district associations who worked as
laundrymen or laborers purchased firearms and prepared for battle if their association was challenged. What bound the CCBA and tongs together was their sense of loyalty. They were committed to one another, regardless of the cost, at a time and in places where most of society did not welcome their presence. Certainly, there were blurred moral lines crossed by tongs, but they must have regarded these operations as a means to an end. With few legitimate employment opportunities for Chinese immigrants at that time, tongs paid handsome salaries and rewarded its members with generous rewards. Additionally, tongs wielded considerable power for a minority group. They proved that Chinese people had the ability to demand money and power for themselves if they were willing to circumvent the law at times.

Tongs were truly a product of its time, especially during the tong war era, but tongs were not completely static, as seen by Gong’s narrative. They constantly evolved, adapted, and adjusted their operations and tactics to satisfy the needs of their members. Furthermore, their leaders understood when it was time for the organization to change its trajectory. That fluidity and willingness to change and ignore the laws and restrictions placed upon U.S. citizens, particularly immigrants, made tongs a truly magnetic force in the Chinese community.
III. BETWEEN INTEGRATION AND ISOLATION: The Chinese American Citizens Alliance

As the Six Companies and the tongs became less influential at the beginning of the twentieth century, Chinese American associations gained traction. The most popular Chinese American organization was the Chinese American Citizens Alliance (CACA). CACA was initially founded as the United Parlor of the Native Sons of the Golden State (NSGS) on May 4, 1895. It became incorporated as the “Chinese American Citizens Alliance” in 1915. After it was renamed, CACA implemented programs, measures, and activities that benefitted the Chinese American community until the mid-twentieth century. The children of first-generation Chinese immigrants would become the core of CACA constituents, hence the organization’s growth during the early twentieth century.

CACA’s purpose was to expand the role of Chinese Americans politically in the United States and help all Chinese Americans receive the full privileges of their U.S. citizenship. This can be contrasted with the CCBA, which designated itself as the spokesperson for all the Chinese residing in the United States, and tongs, which focused on protecting their brotherhood and their livelihoods. Many Chinese immigrants congregated together in ethnic enclaves around the country, and their organizations primarily operated within those parameters. The CCBA and tongs were active nationwide but primarily centered their practices around Chinatowns. For

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1 Chinese Americans refers to people who are either a) of Chinese descent and born in the United States or b) Chinese immigrants who have been naturalized to receive U.S. citizenship. This is different from American-born Chinese people who are U.S. native-born individuals of Chinese descent.
CACA, their reach went far beyond local Chinese communities and Chinatowns, mainly because many Chinese Americans had dispersed from Chinatowns as they grew older. CACA had a broader goal to gain greater respect and recognition for Chinese Americans nationally, though their main headquarters remained in San Francisco’s Chinatown.

CACA represented a shift in Chinese American-identifying people finding their own communities within the Chinese diaspora. Although CACA focused heavily on political participation and representation, it also worked broadly to help all Chinese Americans find success economically, politically, and socially mainly through assimilation into U.S. society. The organization’s emphasis on assimilation encouraged members to adopt mainstream American values and behaviors, even if it came at the expense of their ancestral Chinese values and customs. For an organization that prided itself on amplifying the voices of its marginalized members, their stringent demands on acting to CACA-prescribed notions of being “American” or “Chinese American” silenced many Chinese and Chinese American people. For those uninterested in subscribing or unable to assimilate completely – or properly by CACA standards—they might even feel discriminated against by CACA. As CACA members immersed themselves into American culture, they practiced Chinese traditions and values less. Despite its flawed method, CACA was still a valuable organization that provided welfare and enormous support and for the Chinese American community in the twentieth century.

CACA separated itself from other Chinese organizations by associating itself with Americans instead of celebrating or preserving their Chinese roots. Whereas the CCBA and tongs had overlapping functions with CACA, their perceptions of identity and their motivations were different. The CCBA was heavily rooted in China, involving itself frequently in mainland Chinese politics and serving as a liaison between the Chinese and U.S. governments. CACA was
recognized for its role in helping citizens’ rights as opposed to immigrant rights. The CCBA focused more on the latter, which encompassed the needs of a much broader Chinese population in the United States and not just a subset of U.S. citizens of Chinese descent. The CCBA helped recent immigrants settle, and most of the political activity they monitored was in mainland China, not the United States.

CACA was created partially because its founding members felt the CCBA was inadequately handling the fight against exclusionary legislation. CACA only cared about Chinese American citizens’ rights, so all their resources were devoted to advancing that agenda. Understandably, the CCBA represented the entire Chinese population, making it unrealistic for them to devote sufficient resources and energy towards the betterment of Chinese Americans considering their intensive duties. For already settled Chinese Americans, they desired an organization that could devote time to improving their economic and political standing.

Meanwhile, the tongs were filled with Chinese immigrants looking for brotherhood and a lucrative way to survive in the United States. Not to mention, tongs were unafraid of breaking the law and engaging in violence to protect their interests. Neither the CCBA nor CACA condoned tong activities or participated in violence to achieve their goals. Tong members found money and prosperity by working hard and participating in illicit activities, but they never subscribed to the belief that assimilation was the only way to succeed. On the contrary, tong members profited while indulging in their vices without worrying about assimilating. Tongs were not accepted by mainstream society, though they were tolerated. To that end, as Chinese Americans matured, they were warned away from the dangers of fighting tongs. The violence of tongs was unappealing, and many Chinese Americans found respectable job prospects.
CACA members were not looking for their own niche survival tactic. Survival was not enough – CACA members longed for acceptance and to be perceived as “ordinary” Americans. CACA went a step further than the objectives of the Six Companies and tongs in that they craved better treatment. They were not simply looking for wealth or simply to enter the United States. Many members were already settled and on a path to financial and professional success. CACA members built off the successes and efforts of prior community organizations, setting more ambitious goals for its members. The evolution from the Six Companies and tongs to CACA was a measure of the Chinese community’s shifting attitudes from survival and navigating immigration to identity formation and immersion into U.S. society.

For CACA, assimilation was the means to which all members and Chinese Americans could find acceptance and happiness. CACA spent resources and time rehabilitating the negative reputation of Chinese people to the American public. Specifically, they worked on distancing their organization and Chinese Americans from the seedy underground of Chinatowns.\(^4\) A large part of Chinese people gaining a reputation for owning brothels and opium dens came from tong activities. So, CACA deliberately tried distancing their image from the tongs, hoping that Americans would recognize that Chinese people could be upstanding citizens as well. By the early twentieth century, the CCBA and tongs were fading from relevancy, and CACA became the entity that represented the Chinese American population.

CACA has been credited for its help in promoting the political, educational, social, and economic status of its members. The organization was especially active between the 1920s through the 1940s, expanding rapidly due to the increasing amount of second- and third-generation Chinese Americans in the United States. They worked on abolishing Chinese

exclusion legislation, supporting the enfranchisement of Chinese Americans, and rebranding the image of Chinese people in the eyes of Americans. The organization’s central purpose was for its members to assimilate into U.S. society properly. That purpose directed CACA’s actions and interactions with both the greater Chinese community and the rest of the United States. While that mission was beneficial in many ways, ultimately, CACA’s single-minded focus on assimilation pushed non-conforming Chinese Americans to the margins of their community. Consequentially, this prevented CACA from positively affecting a more significant percentage of the Chinese population in the United States.

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In 1892, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act was renewed for an additional ten years through the Geary Act. The CCBA and Chinese officials stationed in the United States protested the Geary Act, which culminated in the Supreme Court case *Fong Yue Ting v. United States* (1892), where they argued that the Geary Act violated the Fourteenth Amendment.\(^5\) The Geary Act required Chinese people to carry a Certification of Residence\(^6\) with them at all times. If Chinese people were caught without identification, officers could detain or deport them without a formal judicial trial. The judge ruled in favor of the United States and the Geary Act in *Fong Yue Ting v. United States*. This was an unfavorable result for Chinese people, and the efforts and disappointing results of the CCBA and other Chinese organizations were increasingly insufficient for many Chinese people.

Some San Francisco Chinese Americans realized that if they were unsatisfied with the current organizations, then they should take the initiative themselves and fight for their own

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\(^6\) Proof that this person entered the United States legally.
futures. Their feelings were corroborated by other Chinese people who were ready to organize and fight for their political and civil liberties, generating a great and urgent demand for CACA’s creation. CACA’s formation was accelerated by frustration over the U.S. government, ignoring the CCBA’s protests and the Chinese community’s perception that the CCBA was ineffective.8

In 1895, a fraternal order was formed by a group of frustrated native-born Chinese men in San Francisco. They initially called themselves the “Rising Sun Parlor No. 1” and they first attempted to join the Native Sons of the Golden West (NSGW), a preeminent fraternal organization in California.9 The NSGW was created in 1876, composed of California residents interested in preserving California’s history and records, but they soon turned into a nativist organization.10 The NSGW only admitted white Americans, and when the Rising Sun founders submitted a petition to amend the NSGW bylaws, the members denied their petition.11 This resulted in the Rising Sun founders beginning their own separate organization. Though the NSGW decided against accepting the Chinese men – an unsurprising result considering their history of anti-Asian rhetoric – some NSGW members were willing to help the Chinese men.12 NSGW members C.C. Higgins and Doc Richards helped the men set up their San Francisco branch, helped them write bylaws, and even taught them initiation rituals that NSGW employed.13 Thus, the Native Sons of the Golden State was born, with the name an obvious tribute to the NSGW. Not only were they inspired by the NSGW, the NSGS essentially tried to

8 Chung, “Fighting,” 98.
10 They originally planned on preserving the history of the “Golden West” and not just California, but that petered out. Charles E. Chapman, “The Native Sons’ Fellowships,” The Southwestern Historical Quarterly 21, no. 4 (1918): 389; Liu and Austin, Asian American History and Culture, 445.
12 Ngai, The Lucky Ones, 90-91.
emulate their organization model. It seems counterintuitive that an organization that was
dedicated to uplifting Chinese Americans was modeled after a racist fraternal organization. The
NSGW publicly supported exclusionary legislation and only accepted white people, literally
denying the founding NSGS members the right to participate in their society. The fledging
NSGS leadership’s desire to join the NSGW was an indication that they conflated being
“American” with “whiteness.” Not to mention, the NSGS’s desire to join an organization
composed of young men perhaps explains why women were excluded from membership status
for more than seventy years. CACA’s historic roots in the NSGW noticeably impacted the
ideology of its first founders. The founders strived to be NSGW members, and that lingering
attachment was reflected in CACA forcing, or strongly encouraging, Chinese American men to
conform to the western behaviors, rituals, and cultures of their white role models.

NSGS began as a California-based organization, with membership given to California
(Golden State) residents. As the organization gained more popularity and different branches
emerged across the country, “Golden State” no longer encompassed the entire membership. The
NSGS also merged with similar groups in Oakland and Los Angeles, leading to the name change
to the “Chinese American Citizens Alliance” officially in 1915.14 Lodges, or local chapters,
opened in large cities like Oakland, Los Angeles, San Diego, Portland, and Boston in the
following years and continued into the 1920s. All lodges operated with an individually elected
board of directors. The Grand Lodge, which was the national governing body, remained in San
Francisco. There are still twenty active branches – seven of the twenty are in California –
presently in many major U.S. cities or areas with a large concentration of Chinese people.15

14 Liu and Austin, Asian American History and Culture, 153.
15 “Local Lodges Landing,” Chinese American Citizens Alliance, accessed April 22, 2020
NSGS’s founding purpose in 1895 was “to fully enjoy and defend our American citizenship; to cultivate the mind through the exchange of knowledge; to effect a higher character among the members; to fully observe and practice the principles of Brotherly Love and mutual help.”

From NSGS’s formation, the leadership set ambitious goals for its organization and what its members should achieve. They specifically referenced “Brotherly Love” and “mutual help,” signaling their desire to develop a supportive Chinese American community, similar to the mutual aid and brotherhood aspects offered by the CCBA and the tongs.

After the NSGS’s establishment, it operated for a few years under its original constitution. However, the organization slowly dwindled under middling leadership until 1904 when the U.S. Congress extended the Chinese Exclusion Acts indefinitely. Walter U. Lum, Joseph K. Lum, and Ng Gunn brought new life into the organization with more concrete plans and a renewed purpose to fight for Chinese American rights. One of their first decisions was to purchase property for an official headquarters in San Francisco’s Chinatown.

In 1915, CACA ratified a new set of Articles of Incorporation, where its purpose was edited slightly to read:

“to unite citizens of the United States of Chinese descent into close bonds, to elevate the moral standard among its members, to disseminate among them the true ideas of personal and public morality as well as principles of political rights and liberties and the duties of true citizenship…to quicken the spirit of American patriotism… to secure equal economic and political opportunities for them; to promote social intercourse and friendly feeling among the members.”

20 Articles of Incorporation of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance, December 1928.
The purpose from the NSGS’s original preamble was carried over into CACA’s Articles of Incorporation. With the additional principles, CACA included much more about defending American citizenship and patriotism, but also included specifics about how they might achieve these lofty goals. In particular, they suggested gaining control of an existing, or creating their own, newspaper and similar media platforms to disseminate their message.21 This is an example of Lum, Lum, and Gunn being more meticulous in their planning for CACA than for their leadership of the NSGS. They carried over the foundations of the NSGS, but this iteration of CACA had more direction about the methods and activities they would participate in.

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CACA fought desperately for the proper treatment and recognition of Chinese American rights. The U.S. government was so reluctant to grant people of Chinese descent basic rights that they offered noncitizen Chinese residents more privileges through the Supreme Court Case *Cheung Sum Shee v. Nagle* (1925). This decision occurred during a prolonged political fight between CACA and the U.S. government caused by the Immigration Act of 1924. The Immigration Act created a quota system that proportionally accepted a percentage of immigrants based on that country’s immigrant population in the United States, according to the United States’1890 Census data.22 It was meant to be especially restrictive for people originating from Eastern Europe, Southern Europe, and Asia. The Immigration Act was enacted because many Americans felt threatened by the influx of immigrants and demanded immigration restriction. Their perspective was supported by President Calvin Coolidge, who remarked: “America must remain American.” For President Coolidge and many Americans, the Immigration Act was the

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21 Ibid.
22 This quota system meant that if there was only a small number of Slavic immigrants living in the United States in 1890, then this Act made it difficult for an increasing amount of Slavic people to enter the country.
solution. The Exclusion Act of 1882 already prevented Chinese immigrants from naturalizing, but the Immigration Act was especially damaging to Chinese people because it prevented wives of Chinese men with U.S. citizenships from entering the United States.

The main argument the U.S. government used against Chinese immigrants was that they were uninterested in settling down in the United States permanently. For context, in the 1910s, the Americanization movement gained traction across the country. Immigrants were encouraged to assimilate into American society through mastery of the English language, American culture, values, and customs.\(^{23}\) There was a perception of Chinese sojourners that they were only looking for a steady income from the United States so they could support their family back in China. Their loyalties and interest remained in China, and they were unconcerned with adapting to American society. This attitude was used against Chinese people because they were not Americanizing at the rates white Americans demanded, and they were not raising the next generation of U.S. citizens as their families were back in China. However, the banning of wives of citizens negated the viability of this criticism. As such, CACA came out harshly against the Immigration Act, arguing that it undermined the Americanization movement. The exclusion of Chinese wives completely disrupted Chinese American family formation and reunification. Chinese American men, they argued, could not embrace normative ideas of family or home if their wives and children were left on a separate continent. CACA pointed out the hypocrisy from U.S. Congress – they could not criticize Chinese immigrants for not leaving their roots if they were taking away their chance at creating a lasting future in the United States.

Despite the series of Chinese exclusion immigration acts passed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there was a sizeable Chinese population in the United States in the nineteenth century. Immigrants arrived for various reasons, including the California gold rushes, railroad labor, or education, which led to an estimated Chinese American population of around 4,000 in 1850, 34,933 in 1860, and 63,199 in 1870. Even after the passage of the Exclusion Act of 1882, which denied Chinese laborers entry, the Chinese American population increased from previous decades to reach 107,488 in 1890. The immigration legislation significantly curtailed Chinese immigration, but there was still a growing generation of Chinese American citizens already in the United States who demanded rights, using CACA as their vehicle.

In a fascinating turn, the U.S. government passed legislation that favored noncitizen Chinese residents and offered them greater rights than Chinese American citizens. This is seen in a comparison between two supreme court cases: *Chang Chan v. Nagle* (1925) and *Cheung Sum Shee v. Nagle* (1925). Both petitioners were wives aboard the *Lincoln* ship, which arrived at Angel Island on July 11, 1924. Chang Chan was the wife of a U.S. citizen while Cheung Sum Shee was married to a Chinese merchant (a noncitizen) who lived legally in the United States. The court grappled with whether the Immigration Act allowed these wives and children permanent entry. The decision ultimately came out differently for the two petitioners. The court granted entry for the wives of noncitizen Chinese aliens (*Cheung Sum Shee v. Nagle*) while barring entry to Chinese wives of U.S. citizens (*Chang Chan v. Nagle*). The Supreme Court

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26 Ibid.
case results were extremely frustrating for Chinese Americans, who were now literally receiving fewer rights than noncitizen Chinese people. More concerning, it was clear that the U.S. government was sabotaging Chinese American family formation and insistent on denying fundamental rights to Chinese Americans. The U.S. government was willing to go to extreme lengths just to offer better treatment to any other group. For the U.S. government to devalue Chinese American citizens was an indication of the severity of the public’s feelings towards Chinese people. The government did not want Chinese Americans to become a permanent fixture in society, and this severe perspective was a critical reason the future CACA envisioned would never exist.

CACA saw the devastating effect the exclusion of wives would have on its members, so they worked to organize against the Immigration Act. CACA sent a petition, “A Plea for Relief, together with a Supplement Containing Some Arguments in Support Thereof,” in 1926 to Congress. In the petition, they state:

“It is from Congress that the relief must come, and it is to Congress that the American citizen of the Chinese race confidently looks for an amendment to section 13 which will give him that legal right to the companionship of his wife which is in consonance both with natural law and with the customs and usages of civilized society.”

In the original Section 13, alien Chinese wives and children of American citizens were denied admission into the United States. The petition proposed an amendment to Section 13 of the Immigration Act, arguing that the imbalance between the Chinese male versus female populations constrained the futures of Chinese American men. In addition to the amendment and bill logistics, there is an “Assimilability” section of the petition. This section addresses the issue of whether the next generation of Chinese Americans can assimilate and become ideal American

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citizens. Instead of merely claiming that Chinese Americans would be model citizens, they included case studies of American-born Chinese children and their families as proof that the second-generation of Chinese Americans were integrated and upstanding citizens. 29

Their plea for relief was submitted to both the House and Senate, in addition to notarized affidavits from Chinese American citizens whose lives were irreparably affected by the Immigration Act. 30 In 1928, the committee sent representatives to Washington D.C. to speak with the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization in the House. Kenneth Y. Fung, Y.C. Hong, and Walter U. Lum, part of CACA leadership, all submitted statements. Their lawyer, L.C. Dyer, also presented CACA’s case. Dyer and Hong emphasize the position that they are seeking a revision to a previously given right. 31 Additionally, Hong argued that “it is the matter of Chinese merchants having a right to bring in wives. Under the present law, not only Chinese merchants may bring in wives but Chinese ministers, [and] professors.” 32 Acting Secretary of Labor, Robe Carl White wrote in his 1927 Secretary of Labor report that, “I am sure it was never intended by the Congress that an alien should be entitled to more rights under the immigration laws than an American citizen.” 33 Throughout the hearing, CACA representatives were well-prepared with census statistics and sophisticated responses to the Committee members’ questions. Hong, the then-president of CACA, was especially useful in explaining the legal and emotional plight of Chinese Americans. He argued that it was unfair to expect celibacy from

32 Ibid., 8.
33 Ibid., 12.
Chinese men and that Chinese immigration “no longer disturbed” the United States. Fung, the executive secretary of CACA, also testified and submitted an affidavit detailing the work of CACA and the hardships the Immigration Act placed on Chinese American citizens. He outlined four specific hardships: that Chinese American citizens were unable to reunite with their wives in China; Chinese American citizens who cannot get married because there were so few Chinese females in the United States; Chinese American men with alien wives that were in the United States but would be deported unless the U.S. Congress amended the Immigration Act; and Chinese wives of citizens that returned to China with a Form 430 return certificate but did not return in the allotted time.

Regarding the first hardship, Fung claimed that there were around 1,000 Chinese American men in San Francisco alone that had wives in China. Based on those numbers, it made sense for CACA to advocate so aggressively for this cause. CACA membership was 4,704 in 1927, 4,799 in 1928, and 4,856 in 1931. If they could succeed in helping Chinese American men bring their wives over, they would likely gain many members or at least supporters for their organization. Reuniting families together would also guarantee the production of the next generation of Chinese Americans and CACA members.

After sustained efforts by CACA, they succeeded on their third petition attempt in 1930. An amendment to Section 13(c) of the Immigration Act was added on June 13, 1930, allowing

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35 This is the celibacy argument. Since there was a 1 to 3 ratio between Chinese men and women in the United States, it was unlikely for a Chinese man to find a partner in the United States. Additionally, interracial marriage was discouraged by the Chinese community and the Caucasian community. Not to mention, there were miscegenation laws in many states at the time. For these reasons, that left Chinese men with supposedly only the option of celibacy.
37 Ibid.
Chinese wives of U.S. citizens who married before May 26, 1924, the original Immigration Act’s passage date, entry into the United States. This was a conditional victory though because spouses married after that date were still not allowed. Nonetheless, this was an enormous victory for CACA and, arguably, the best result they could have hoped for at that time.

Battling the Immigration Act was a significant undertaking and a lengthy legislative battle. CACA worked with fifteen other community organizations to combat the exclusionary language. CACA also set up a Committee for Protecting Citizenship Rights (weichi jichuan weiyuanhui).\(^{39}\) The purpose of the committee was to fight for the legal entry of wives of U.S. citizens and unite Chinese Americans to fight for their rights. To accomplish their goals, the committee studied the U.S. legal system, fundraised, and published a newsletter briefing the public on CACA’s activities and updates (it was published in both Chinese and English).\(^{40}\) Even after their 1930 victory, CACA did not move on entirely from the Immigrant Act’s injustices. The Protecting Citizenship Rights Committee continued raising money in support of further amending the Immigration Act for greater Chinese American privileges.\(^{41}\) Their successes, however limited, demonstrated the organizing strength and influence that CACA amassed throughout the years. The intelligence of CACA officers and their ability to appear before Congress and have their comments taken seriously by Congressmen signaled that CACA was a national organization that had the resources to make life-altering changes for their constituents.

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CACA and Chinese Americans, in general, developed differences in behavior, outlook, and political attitude compared to the older generation. The new generation of American-born

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\(^{40}\) Chen, *Being Chinese, Becoming Chinese American*, 151.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 152.
Chinese (ABC) people was referred to by the derogatory term “jook-sing” (竹升) or “tusheng” by older Chinese immigrants. “Jook-sing” was a Cantonese term for a bamboo shoot. The term came to represent a Chinese person born overseas who became detached from their Chinese ancestry. The reasoning is that bamboo shoots are hollow on the inside, implying that ABCs are hollow, stupid, or devoid of their substance (culture). There is some truth to that comparison, as with each generation, Chinese culture and customs were forgotten with time. Each generation became more disconnected from their ancestral home, and many of CACA’s members were either second or third-generation immigrants who were funneled through the U.S. public education system. This slur succinctly summarizes how ABCs held a strong sense of American culture and identity, but at the cost of losing their connections to the older Chinese community.

The bonds to China faded for Chinese Americans, especially if their family did not reside within Chinatown. They were more loyal and knowledgeable about their birthplace, the United States, but unfortunately, they were exposed to the same amount of racial discrimination. Even if there was logic behind “jook-sing,” it was still a hurtful and insulting term used for decades. That only made Chinese Americans feel more isolated from the older generation and frustrated towards the Chinese community. One Chinese daughter reflected on her experience:

“The gap between my parents and myself has become wider since I have gone to high school. I could not discuss my problems with them. I could not go to them for advice either. They are more Chinese and I am more American. They insisted that the American environment is not good for me, … except that some of the Americans do not like the Chinese. The more contact I make with the Americans in school and elsewhere the more I incline to the American ways. I adjust myself better among Americans than among the Chinese. [My parents’] interest is China and my interest is America; so how would you expect us to understand each other?”

Conversely, one Chinese father said:

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43 Hong, Chinese Historical Society of Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project.
“The young people of nowadays are different from those of old times, and they are getting worse and worse. They do not care for the future. They have too much of a good time, and do not care to work hard as the older generation. They want to be like the Americans having a good time all the time, but they never stop to think that the Americans have a large amount of money for their children to spend, and I am only a poor worker.”

The conflicting feelings and perspectives articulated between the two highlights the generational differences between younger Chinese Americans and the older immigrant generation. They both touched upon the desire for young Chinese Americans to be American and be accepted by their peers, which aligned well with CACA’s purpose.

This generational rift increased demand for CACA. Many disgruntled Chinese Americans were likely looking for a non-judgmental support system with people who had similar experiences and beliefs. One of the original motivations for creating CACA was not just to gain respect from white Americans but also from foreign-born Chinese people in the United States. The derogatory names left a deep impression on Chinese Americans. It drove them away from the Chinese community and pushed them to improve the perceptions both Chinese people and white Americans had of them.

One of the first instances of judgment came when CACA members encouraged Chinese Americans to register to vote. Older Chinese immigrants believed voting was a fruitless endeavor, largely because there were not enough Chinese voters to make any real impact. This attitude reflects the general disillusionment and disbelief Chinese people had in the U.S. political system. Their mindset was understandable considering the significant racial discrimination Chinese immigrants faced from the moment they arrived on America’s shores to their daily tribulations. Chinese disenfranchisement jaded them, but the younger generation – specifically

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CACA members – were convinced they could change their futures using activism. They frequently reminded Chinese Americans that “the most important thing is to register and vote… it is the ballot that will win the political rights – and economic opportunities – for the future of American citizens of Chinese ancestry in the United States.”\footnote{Lim P. Lee, “The Chinese Citizens Alliance: Its Activities and History,” \textit{Chinese Digest}, October 30, 1936, 15.} Before CACA’s existence, very few Chinese people were registered to vote since they, like their parents’ generation, originally viewed voting as a useless endeavor.\footnote{Chung, “Fighting,” 99.} Many people were uninterested because they did not think any elected politicians would serve the interests of Chinese people. However, through CACA’s persistence, they made voter registration and candidate information more accessible to Chinese American voters.

Besides voter registration, CACA also endorsed candidates who pledged to support Chinese people once elected. Other methods included hosting letter writing campaigns for Chinese Americans to appeal to their Congressional representatives. When the organization gained more funding, CACA sent lobbyists to Washington D.C. to speak on behalf of Chinese American issues. Walter U. Lum also established the \textit{Chinese Times} in 1924, which was sponsored by CACA.\footnote{“Chinese Times,” Chinese American Citizens Alliance, http://www.cacanational.org/htmlPages/history.html.} The \textit{Chinese Times} was the first Chinese American news publication. It became the only daily newspaper that was owned, published, written for and by Chinese American citizens. The \textit{Chinese Times} became the most popular Chinese language newspaper in the United States, circulating beyond California to gain a national following.\footnote{Jack Chen, \textit{The Chinese of America} (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 201.} This was another sign of CACA’s power and also an invaluable tool CACA utilized to disseminate its mandate.
CACA used its members’ citizenship as leverage for their demands against the U.S. government. One initiative was for immigration officials to treat Chinese immigrants with greater respect. In 1910, the then-NSGS contacted the U.S. Secretary of Commerce and Labor, Charles Nagel, with a list of their complaints. Chinese people felt discriminated against due to the intensive questioning they received upon their arrival on Angel Island, in San Francisco, California. A popular tactic for Chinese immigrants in the early twentieth century was forging documents or adopting “paper sons or daughters.” This was the practice in which Chinese people looking to emigrate would purchase documents and claim to have a blood relationship with a person already in the United States. As Ng Ah Ben, a man who attempted to bring over his son, noted, “I swear that I never tell a lie. This boy is really my own son. It is different from other cases.” As his language suggests, he struggles to distinguish his own case from the hundreds of fraudulent or suspicious cases immigration officials combed through. Many other Chinese people struggled with immigration issues. Lester Tom Lee briefly described his experience being detained on Angel Island:

“The main reason I was detained so long was that my father and I gave the inspectors different dates about when I departed China. The Chinese lunar calendar is about a month off from the American calendar! Ay! So my father hired a lawyer to get me out. Sometimes I cried because I missed my family and my friends.”

Louis Kat King’s research found that Chinese Americans did not feel like real American citizens due to the discrimination and restrictions placed upon Chinese residents. Chinese Americans were similarly discriminated against not only politically, but also professionally and socially. It was not easy for Chinese Americans to gain employment or tap into a social network.

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51 Clark Davis and David Igler, eds., The Human Tradition in California (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2002), 75.
for career prospects, or even form friendships with white Americans at times. The only major citizenship rights they received were the right to vote and the right to attend public school. They paid taxes and were subject to the obligations attached to citizenship but did not receive the same benefits in terms of recreation, professional, and political life. Many Chinese Americans were frustrated with their treatment, and their experiences explain why CACA was such a desirable organization to join. Their complete focus on assimilation is an understandable rationalization of the situation. Chinese Americans reasoned that if simply exercised greater effort in embracing American culture, they would be accepted, and discrimination would cease. This is a complete oversimplification of the situation, and it was a foolish belief. As the decades continued and Chinese Americans did successfully assimilate, people realized that discrimination did not end just because Chinese Americans spoke English fluently or practiced American customs. By following this line of thought, CACA advocated tirelessly for the transformation of its members. It sold their members a message where assimilation was the only means of ending discrimination. This tactic not only damaged many Chinese Americans’ relationship with their Chinese culture, but also did not yield the desired or predicted results.

Reading through the experiences of Chinese Americans living in California during the twentieth century, there is palpable frustration over the prejudice against Chinese people.

“I speak fluent English, and have the American mind. I feel that I am more American than Chinese. I am an American citizen by birth, having the title for all rights, but they treat me as if I were a foreigner. They have so many restrictions against us. I cannot help it that I was born a Chinese.”

Another young man commented:

“I thought I was American, but America would not have me. In many respects she would not recognize me as American. Moreover, I find racial prejudice against us everywhere. We are American citizens in name but not in fact.”

\[55\] Ibid.
The themes of these observations were observed across numerous young Chinese Americans, and their inability to gain acceptance into mainstream society was a quality CACA exploited. Many people struggled over being both Chinese and American, but CACA did not address their identity struggles. Instead, they insisted that the solution to being recognized as American was to assimilate. From the earliest forms of CACA, when its leadership strived to become NSGW members, that already offers insight into the aspirations of early CACA/NSGS leadership. They wanted to be on the same level as white men, and they did so by emulating everything about American culture. CACA firmly believed that the complete adoption of American values, cultures, and customs would lead Chinese Americans to the best outcomes. It was not that assimilation was a frivolous or incorrect process, but CACA’s heavy-handed approach did not truly address Chinese American needs. The quotes above illustrate how CACA’s methodology is ineffective. These Chinese American people speak fluent English and have a firm grasp on American culture. They considered themselves American and acted American on all accounts, but they still experienced racism. From this perspective, although CACA did fight political battles and help its members, they were not spending time on a working solution. It seems that the problems lay with the outside society’s behaviors and not Chinese Americans’ level of assimilation. CACA should have expended more energy in studying how to change society’s attitudes towards Chinese people, and not placed the entire onus on Chinese Americans.

Part of the adoption of American values included CACA requiring members to pledge loyalty to not only their fellow CACA brothers, but to the United States. The CCBA and tongs did not require allegiance to the United States, simply because the two groups were not loyal to the United States – they were dedicated to the interests of their constituents and most of the time

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the United States’ position attacked those interests. The CCBA and the tongs were also more loyal to China, as many members’ families still lived in China. CACA’s focus on American loyalty was another distinguishing factor between itself and other Chinese community organizations. For the future that CACA founders envisioned, it was natural that they would pledge loyalty to their homeland. Having this loyalty pledge included in their preamble was a statement to the U.S. public that their members were fully devoted and proud to be American.

CACA membership was also more exclusive than the CCBA and the tongs, which were both open to willing participants who paid membership dues. Tongs also hosted rigorous initiations, but their application process was nothing like that of CACA. The CACA preamble even included a specific clause that prevented members with tong or clan affiliations from joining. This set CACA apart from the other two organizations and actually distanced its members from the existing power dynamics and relationships prevalent in the greater Chinese community. The motivation of the clause was because when Walter U. Lum served as the vice president of the China Mail Steamship Line, he received death threats from one fighting tong because his company was struggling financially and they likely missed tong payments.57 Although Lum included the clause thinking of the safety of CACA members from the intimidation and fear that tong members inspired, the implication was that tong members were unwelcome in CACA and this amplified the distinctions between CACA and other Chinese organizations.

Before the 1970s, CACA’s primary qualifications included being a man of Chinese descent, holding U.S. citizenship, and being at least 21 years old.58 They remained a male-only organization for decades. Even when American women received the right to vote in 1920, CACA

did not extend membership to Chinese American women at that time. Instead, they created a Women’s Auxiliary group. It seems that the residual effects from the male-only NSGW left an impression and CACA leaders were unwilling to include women in the official activities and operations of CACA. By creating this auxiliary group, they acknowledged the existence of Chinese American women; but this offshoot organization only served to insinuate that female voter participation was not on the same level or as important as the Chinese American male vote. CACA finally accepted females into the organization in 1977, an extremely overdue decision that occurred well past CACA’s prime as an organization. The fact that it denied female membership for more than fifty years after women’s suffrage was another indication that CACA was an inflexible organization that was ill-equipped to acclimate to changing political climates. CACA was not merely looking for Chinese American citizens, but men that were financially self-sufficient and those of “good character.” The judgment of a candidate’s “good character” was entirely up to the discretion of CACA leadership as that is a vague and subjective condition. The moral code and values CACA adhered to were much more Western than other Chinese organizations. Entry into CACA was also network-dependent, that is, how well-connected a person was to active CACA members. Two members of good standing had to sponsor a prospective member’s application for it to be considered. Then, applications were reviewed by a screening committee that gave recommendations on applications. If three members of good standing denied an applicant, that person would be excluded from any CACA lodge for two years.

This whole process seemed unnecessarily intensive for a non-profit, civil rights organization. Multiple barriers to entry existed for those looking to get involved in CACA who

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60 Ibid.
did not have the resources or connections to members. The sponsorship aspect was interesting because it would have seemingly made more sense to garner higher membership numbers instead of creating an exclusive roster that limited membership. For an organization that touted civil rights and representation, they went to significant trouble to limit the number of people who were in their immediate ranks. Moreover, banning an applicant when members oppose seems reasonable, but a two-year ban across all lodges seems excessive. If there was a simple grudge or dislike for an applicant, that does not mean the same resentments or problems would arise at a different geographic location. It seems CACA’s leadership wanted to be more discriminating in their organization, which is an indication of how CACA operated and called into question their principles – did the organization genuinely serve all Chinese Americans as they claim? Who were they realistically serving with this application process? The answer becomes resoundingly clear that they are only completely servicing Chinese American men (at least until 1977) who achieve a threshold of employment, social status, and behavior that the members set.

The elitist undertones were apparent from the language in their official constitution when CACA pledged to “effect a higher character” for its members. The composition of the NSGS’s and CACA’s early leadership further reinforced the discriminatory nature of the organization. Most lodge leaders were white-collar workers who possessed a college degree (or at least completion of some years). Chun Dick was the first president of NSGS, and he was from a wealthy mercantile family. Afterward, the presidency passed onto Robert Leon Park, a University of California, Berkeley graduate who worked at the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. Other national lodge presidents worked as attorneys, as editors of

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62 Ibid.
Chinese newspapers, or as bankers.\textsuperscript{63} It was not just the leadership that was composed of mostly professionals – most CACA members were white-collar workers as well.\textsuperscript{64} They worked in law, medicine, newspaper, and business sectors, and they were eager to assimilate into American society. Many Chinese professional men likely found it difficult to gain recognition in the workplace, which was a motivating factor for improving the image and status of Chinese Americans. But, for Chinese American men who were not white-collar workers, there was a disparity between them and many CACA members. CACA was generally considered to have a more well-educated membership than other community organizations. Perhaps a reason for this perception was due to the selection process and CACA attempting to accept members that would contribute to the organization’s prestige, and social or financial capital. CACA’s goals and the goals of working professionals were aligned closely, but for other classes of Chinese people, they did not necessarily need to assimilate to be successful. As such, CACA’s assimilation tactics were tempting for many, but just as likely alienated people who were uninterested in becoming completely American.

For CACA members though, finding acceptance in the United States was an essential goal for them and that was appealing to many Chinese Americans. Often, what CACA promoted was trading one’s Chinese culture, community, and even language in favor of American ideals. From CACA’s preamble and mission statement, the organization placed American culture on a pedestal well above Chinese culture. It came from an intense desire for acceptance, which is understandable, but CACA ultimately spread the questionable message that the ideal, or only, way to become American was through the rejection of Chinese culture and community. CACA’s strategy was accepted by many constituents, resulting in changes in dress, grooming, and

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 159.
hairstyle. This is witnessed when comparing the photographs over time of young CACA members who gradually transitioned from traditional Chinese clothing into wearing suits with cropped hair.\(^{65}\) Chinese men internalized CACA’s message, wholeheartedly believing that being a true American gentleman could only be achieved through adopting American customs.

The urge to “westernize” is potentially linked with the immigrant mentality of fighting for the American dream. CACA subscribed to the same notion that the American dream and “making” it in the United States was made possible by behaving within society’s parameters. The “American” in “Chinese American Citizens Alliance” cannot be understated, and the organization had no qualms over dictating how Chinese people should act and dress. CACA did help its members with legal difficulties, employment, and navigating social settings. Nevertheless, at the same time, CACA created an extremely narrow definition of what being “Chinese American” looked like and how a Chinese person could mold themselves to fit that image. Though “Chinese” is the qualifier in “Chinese American,” the organization participated in a fair amount of Chinese erasure in their quest for assimilation.

CACA also participated heavily in hosting social events for their community. CACA hosted all sorts of social activities like assembling bands and orchestras, sporting events, the annual Miss Chinatown scholarship pageant\(^ {66}\), picnics, and dances. They also hosted holiday banquets similar to the CCBA’s celebration, but they celebrated U.S. holidays instead of Chinese holidays. For example, the San Francisco lodge would host a New Year’s Eve dance, and the Los


\(^{66}\) Miss Chinatown pageants were hosted by local lodges around the United States. The pageant was available to all unmarried young women who were older than 18 years old. The first three places received Savings Bond of $200, $100, and $50, respectively. This is a tradition that the Houston CACA Lodge has maintained to the present day. “Letter to Houston Lodge Chinese American Citizens Alliance” (1955) Chinese American Citizens Alliance Records (Houston Chapter) (MS 606): https://hdl.handle.net/1911/75808.
Angeles lodge held a Valentine’s Day dance. One Chinese American college student commented that “In order to live in harmony, we should strive to be congenial. Young Chinese of American certainly do not approve of practicing the old habits… I don’t think that we could get along in America with the Americans if we continue doing un-American things.” During formal CACA anniversary banquets, they completely modeled mainstream U.S. events where they sang the national anthem and “God Bless America.” By hosting these quintessential American activities, CACA had its members model American behavior because, in their eyes, this was the only path to acceptance by mainstream society. These social events resembled U.S. social events that most Chinese Americans were not invited to or felt uncomfortable attending. Once again, CACA supported its members and community with an entirely American experience filled with Chinese people instead of only white Americans.

To that end, CACA also helped create both English and Chinese language schools. English language classes helped Chinese speakers in the community navigate the United States better and gave them better prospects in school and work life. CACA also promoted learning English through hosting speech competitions in the 1950s. This was part of their campaign to accelerate the “Americanization” of Chinese Americans. Still, they helped many Chinese Americans in the community learn Chinese afterschool. Many Chinese children attended these lessons after finishing their regular school day. These Chinese lessons helped the second generation communicate with older members of the Chinese community and remain connected to their heritage. Lum, Tom Chan, Joe Shoong, and Hong all collaborated from different CACA

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lodges to craft a Chinese curriculum that taught students thousands of Chinese characters.\textsuperscript{71} It should be noted, like all of CACA’s tactics, that their curriculum was taught with a Western lens, going against the traditional Chinese teaching methods.\textsuperscript{72} And when CACA funds declined, the Chinese language programs were among the first cut by the organization. There were other Chinese schools available in Chinatowns across the country, so CACA likely reasoned that they did not need to open their own schools. This illustrated how Chinese language mastery was of low priority for CACA, and it was a disposable skill. It was great if Chinese Americans could communicate with their elders, but in the grand scheme of CACA’s vision, Chinese Americans need only speak English fluently for success in the United States.

Their disregard for Chinese fluency was further reflected in CACA’s meeting procedures. Initially, CACA’s meeting minutes were written in Chinese, but in 1953, the Grand Lodge passed a resolution to record minutes in both English and Chinese. After a few years of bilingual recording, all bookkeeping and minutes were changed to English.\textsuperscript{73} The organization itself phased out the Chinese language, removing one of the only reasons for members to retain Chinese. Inadvertently, CACA shifted the skillset and cultural relevancy of its members. That only contributed to expanding the rift between the younger and older generations. Failing Chinese mastery made it more difficult for Chinese Americans to communicate with their parents and relatives who spoke either only Chinese or possessed limited English skills. This is another example of how CACA pushed its members to shed their ancestral roots in favor of their acceptance into mainstream U.S. society.

\textsuperscript{71} Chung, “The Chinese American Citizens Alliance,” 168.
Sociologist Rose Hum Lee advised at the end of *The Chinese in the United States of America* that “the American-born, especially, must resist the pressure of the older Chinese who try to impose Chinese norms, values and attitudes on them…acculturation, assimilation and integration form a two-way process.”\(^7^4\) Her conclusion after decades of field research on Chinese people across the United States reinforced the central ideology of CACA members. The members wanted a seat at the table of U.S. society, and they, like Lee, determined that assimilation and acculturation were the best (perhaps only) pathway to gaining a respectable status in the United States. However, Lee’s research was published in 1960, when CACA had already pushed assimilation onto its members for decades. This suggests that CACA’s assimilation was not noticeable enough, that their efforts might not have reached a substantial number of Chinese Americans, but also that assimilation was likely not the guaranteed method Lee or CACA thought it was.

For decades, CACA taught lessons, hosted parties, and supported its members in any variety of ways so long as it prepared them to be better suited for acceptance. And to a certain extent, CACA members and other Chinese people did assimilate into U.S. society. Chinese people spoke fluent English, attended U.S. public schools, and proudly lived like Americans. Thus, Lee and CACA’s proposed solution of assimilation did not work. The problems Chinese Americans faced did not end just because they adapted to U.S. customs. Even if they fully dedicated themselves to acting in CACA’s definition of “American,” Chinese Americans still lived in a country with serious prejudices and discriminatory legislation leveraged against their community regularly.

Additionally, many sociologists argue that certain types of assimilation, like structural assimilation where people are accepted into the clubs, institutions, and social groups of the host society, are not dependent on the immigrant or racial minority group’s ability to change their behavior and values, but is contingent on the host society accepting those behaviors.\(^7\) That is, if U.S. society is unreceptive to the Chinese American’s acculturation, Chinese Americans will still encounter prejudice and discrimination. Though many Chinese Americans achieved acculturation, facilitated greatly by CACA, the more advanced degrees of assimilation like marital assimilation (large-scale intermarriage), attitude receptional assimilation (the absence of prejudice), and behavior receptional assimilation (the absence of discrimination) were not stages they reached.\(^8\) Even in the twenty-first century, many stages of assimilation still elude Chinese Americans. For Chinese Americans in the early twentieth century, some of these assimilation processes seemed entirely unreachable and it was not for lack of effort on their part. For the Chinese Americans, noncitizen Chinese residents, and older Chinese immigrants that already understood the impossibility of assimilation, CACA’s insistence on assimilation would naturally seem problematic but also disheartening. Changing oneself to fit in with the majority behaviors could potentially ease tensions and improve the opinions of some white Americans, but the interactions between Chinese communities and the broader society were still tenuous.

After World War II, CACA experienced declining membership numbers. Their decline was associated with the Civil Rights Movement and the successful integration of CACA members into U.S. society. CACA members were increasingly accepted in different sectors of life, and that meant there was no longer a need for CACA’s services. Its members could

participate in regular social activities, and they did not need to fight so desperately against immigration and discriminatory laws. The passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was likely another contributor to the decline of CACA. There was no longer a struggle for family reunification or entry into the United States. The influx of new Chinese immigrants who arrived in the United States once again changed the attitudes and needs of the Chinese population. Chinese immigrants arriving post-1965 were first-generation immigrants with strong ties to China. Their arrival transformed many spaces where large numbers of Chinese immigrants congregated. One such example is the San Gabriel Valley, a suburb of Los Angeles. Post-1965, thousands of Chinese immigrants repopulated the area create an ethnic suburb that integrated elements of Chinese culture and tradition (especially food) into the area. For these new immigrants, they adjusted to American life without forgetting their cultural background, which was not what occurred with CACA members. Around this time, new Chinese community organizations formed, including the Chinese for Affirmative Action (established in 1969) and the Chinese Progressive Association (established in 1973), both of which represented the diversity of political and social issues that Chinese people were actively organizing for in the latter half of the twentieth century. 

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For the second generation of Chinese Americans, the messaging of CACA was potent. With the dwindling CCBA and tong membership, CACA became the dominant organization because second-generation of Chinese Americans desired a champion for their ideas. Young Chinese Americans in the early twentieth century felt misunderstood by the rest of society, even

their first-generation immigrant parents. CACA did an incredible job organizing their members and growing the organization nationwide throughout the years. This can be attributed to both the need for a Chinese American oriented organization and the compelling vision of CACA’s early leadership. Walter U. Lum, Y. C. Hong and Kenneth Fung were extraordinarily influential in creating a sustainable model for CACA and helping it last for decades and into the present century. CACA grew to hold significant political authority since it controlled a large voting bloc of Chinese Americans. Many candidates were pushed to include pro-Chinese American issues on their campaigns in hopes of securing CACA’s endorsement. For those reasons, CACA did amplify the voices of Chinese Americans and helped Chinese Americans find a community that accelerated their Americanization if that was an individual’s desire.

CACA made substantial contributions to the betterment of Chinese American lives in the United States, which should be acknowledged. CACA members petitioned, protested, testified, and worked tirelessly to give Chinese people basic civil rights and liberties. CACA members blocked legislation meant to disenfranchise Chinese Americans78, helped Chinese American citizens with their immigration issues79, and continuously submitted petitions and recommendations to the general public whenever there was legislation that concerned Chinese peoples’ rights.80 For a racial group that still struggles with voter turnout during elections, CACA was a persuasive force in bringing their members to voting booths.81 CACA made politics more accessible to Chinese Americans, and a few CACA members went on to hold local offices. To write and distribute their pamphlets required extensive research. It also took resources to send and hire lobbyists to Washington D.C. and time to survey politicians and make recommendations

80 Liu and Austin, Asian American History and Culture, 153-154.
for their members. All of this proves that CACA was a group that hosted programs that were immensely beneficial and informative for its members. However, the major flaw of CACA was that their single-minded focus on Chinese American citizens meant that they were not inclusive of the majority Chinese population in the United States.

Although CACA was a constant presence in the lives of Chinese Americans, they neglected the needs of a large proportion of the population. Any benefits to noncitizen Chinese people were incidental, a periphery advantage that CACA was unconcerned with. Promoting this assimilation agenda and buying into the Americanization project hindered CACA in its long-term viability as a progressive organization. CACA’s insistence on assimilation was forceful and made a generation of Chinese Americans believe in a singular, hypermasculine definition of “American.” It was dangerous to dictate what being “American” should look like and for many Chinese Americans and it came at the cost of connecting with their heritage. Producing a sense of the behaviors and values Chinese Americans should adhere to marginalized a substantial part of the broader Chinese community. Creating such a limiting example of what Chinese American men should dress, act, and speak like alienated Chinese Americans who were not willing or able to assimilate in this specific way. It was irresponsible of CACA to carve out these contours within the Chinese community, since it only served to isolate both CACA members from the larger cohort but also other Chinese people from participating fully in CACA’s programs.

CACA provided a briefly unified majority voice for Chinese Americans in a political moment during the twentieth century, but once other issues emerged and anti-Chinese sentiment decreased slightly, members turned elsewhere for their needs. As with many Chinese community organizations, CACA filled a necessary void for its members, but, ironically, it was not able to adapt to the evolving U.S. society and Chinese Americans’ demands. For all the faults of other
Chinese community organizations, they never encouraged their constituents to change themselves like CACA did; the Six Companies and tongs only provided their members with methods of survival, not a deeply flawed solution to their problems.
Conclusion

The Six Companies, tongs, and CACA were established during the nineteenth century, but these community organizations continually influence and shape their contemporary counterparts. These entities grew from shared backgrounds, immigration stories, and socioeconomic interests. From the earliest district and family associations where only residential and family ties mattered, to occupational and financial goals, and finally to the social and political organizations fighting for Chinese and Chinese American rights, the evolution and diversity of the Chinese/Chinese American experience becomes clear. Within each chapter, a narrative arc follows each organization in its endeavors, but their actions do not exist in a vacuum. The Six Companies and tongs continually challenge one another, and CACA trails behind them. They see the aspects of Chinese American life that these organizations fail to address and build a new generation of Chinese American community organizations. Chinese community organizations interacted with one another throughout the centuries, clashing and collaborating. Still, they were all organizations whose members used a shared ethnicity or cultural background to cope with their individual and collective difficulties in the United States.

The social, educational, and cultural activities these organizations hosted for their members strengthened local Chinese networks. They provided a source of comfort and the chance for Chinese immigrants to be part of a larger associated Chinese body in the United States. This was mainly due to the modeling of U.S.-based Chinese organizations on the family, merchant, and district associations in China. What is notable about these organizations is how they started locally or regionally, but grew nationally and remained functioning, albeit on a much
smaller scale, in the present moment. In these community organizations, the progression of how Chinese people adapted and situated themselves into U.S. society is apparent. The injustices, immigration obstacles, and legal battles they faced, as well as their daily struggles were reflected in the actions and behaviors of Chinese community organizations. The group identities and reputations each organization developed are further markers of how people separated themselves, self-selecting into organizations that best matched their ideals and beliefs. These organizations give insight into the identity formation of Chinese immigrants, but especially for young Chinese Americans growing up in the twentieth century. The legal tribulations that the Six Companies and CACA faced offer information about notions of U.S. citizenship and how the U.S. public and judicial system was responding to the influx of U.S. citizens of Chinese descent.

Situating these organizations contemporaneously, the Six Companies and tongs were among the first established and thriving community organizations. This makes them the first generation of Chinese community organizations, while CACA and its fellow Chinese American peer organizations were part of the second generation, twentieth century coalition. With CACA’s rise, there was a conscious shift to civil rights and political mobilization. This was likely due to the growing amount of U.S.-born Chinese Americans and naturalized citizens who were interested in claiming their full citizenship rights. CACA and similar organizations, like the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance in New York, were both progressive groups in the twentieth century that fought for Chinese civil rights. Moving into the present day, the histories of Chinese community organizations is relevant because their existence and framework have allowed contemporary Chinese American and Asian American organizations to flourish.

These three organizations demonstrated that these were some of the few places where Chinese people could receive resources or a sense of belonging. These groups coalesced into
organizations with national memberships because they were effective at addressing the needs of their constituents and advancing their individual agendas in some form. The organization’s purposes and mission statements largely contributed to the improvement of Chinese employment prospects, social statuses, and daily lives. In researching how and why these organizations formed, and how they maintained relevance, much is revealed about why Chinese people sought to create organizations and what a community meant to them. Exploring the histories of these organizations offers valuable insight into the Chinese population’s social, political, and cultural evolution throughout the centuries. As the perspectives and attitudes of Chinese people change, so too did the functions and messages of Chinese community organizations.

Studying community organizations is especially meaningful because their behavior is often unexpected. The formal mission statements and constitutions appear binding, but a group’s actions in practice can be completely different. The Six Companies, tongs, and CACA all acted in counterintuitive or questionable manners, all supposedly in the name of protecting and serving their members’ interests. The Six Companies actively discouraged Chinese immigration into the United States, while simultaneously servicing newly arrived immigrants. Tongs valued brotherhood, but their dangerous behaviors resulted in countless member deaths. And CACA, in its determination to help their Chinese American constituents assimilate, created limiting definitions of citizenship and “Americanness” that were detrimental to peoples’ cultural heritage. CACA’s infatuation with assimilation has left a damaging legacy for the current generation of Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants.

In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, racism against the Chinese populations in the United States is on display once again. The public health fears over the Chinese-originating COVID-19 have translated into anger and hysteria against Chinese and Asian American
individuals. Across the country, hate crimes and casual microaggressions have been targeted against Asian people. Public health crises and Chinese people being labeled as disease-ridden or disease carriers is eerily reminiscent of the themes discussed in-depth in Natalie Molina’s *Fit to Be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939.*\(^1\) Molina discusses the social, political, and economic consequences of racializing disease and outbreaks to marginalized communities. Her analysis was pertinent for the SARS epidemic, and it is just as timely with the COVID-19 epidemic.

Similarly, Nayan Shah’s *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown*\(^2\) is also about the dehumanizing nature of U.S. public health campaigns against Chinese populations. Both books illuminate how public health narratives have shaped and reinforced the U.S. racial hierarchy. Molina and Shah have painted a detailed history of how disease and epidemics adversely affect racial minorities and immigrants but based on the treatment of Chinese and Asian people during the COVID-19 pandemic, these injustices are continuously perpetuated.

There has been greater visibility of active Chinese and Asian American community organizations due to the increasing amount of covert racism against Chinese and Asian Americans. These can be considered as the new generation of community organizations, an extension of the welfare and protective associations discussed in this thesis. In the twenty-first century, organizations have multiplied and narrowed their scopes, focusing on specific industries, like journalism, arts, political activism, or legal issues. One of the most critical services the Six Companies and CACA hosted were Chinese language schools, which still exist

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around the country today, operated individually or through the sponsorship of larger Chinese organizations. In Massachusetts, the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center offers after school care, summer programs, and teaches English to adults in the greater Boston area. It was formed in 1969 by families and community leaders in Quincy, Massachusetts. It has grown tremendously to provide a variety of education, art, family services, and professional opportunities to Chinese families. Other organizations like the Asian American Arts Alliance, Asian American Writers’ Workshop, and the Asian American Federation are all available to the Asian American community in the United States.

Amid the anti-Chinese rhetoric, more Chinese Americans and Asian Americans are becoming vocal about fighting for safety and acceptance of their community. Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAJC) and even organizations on college campuses like Wellesley’s Asian Alliance (WAA) are dedicated to empowering Wellesley’s Asian/Asian American community. The organizing, protection, and resistance offered by the historic Chinese community organizations have given rise to a diverse array of contemporary Chinese American and Asian American organization counterparts. Even for organizations whose purpose is not explicitly tied to politics, their programming provides cultural awareness and is inherently a political act. For every celebration of a traditional Chinese holiday or workshop supporting young Chinese American journalists, these are all organizations that provide cultural ties as well as social, political, and economic opportunities.

The Six Companies, tongs, and CACA set precedence for successful community organizing and engagement. Sorting through their archives and reflecting on their histories is the groundwork for Chinese American and Asian American organizations today. The Chinese

American community and the broader Asian American Pacific Islander community are both continuing their legacy. In the same way, as those three organizations served as vessels for the hopes and futures for Chinese people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, their contemporary descendants are continuing to fight for the rights and dreams of Chinese Americans. Due to the success and limitations of these first few Chinese community organizations, Chinese Americans have found a place for themselves in U.S. society. But the existence of third-generation Chinese activism groups is an indicator that although time has passed, the same themes of racism and citizenship struggles prevail. The cyclical nature of history seems discouraging in many moments, but the lessons and tragedies of this thesis are a reminder that there are ways for communities to gather together, find solace, and even experience progress. Chinese community organizations were imperfect, but they were necessary insular networks that fostered trust and reliance on one another. They exist as symbols of Chinese/Chinese American resistance, persistence, and agency, and their lessons are heeded and are motivation for the new generation of Chinese community organizations and activists.
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