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SHEHONG CHEN

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Reconstructing the Chinese American Experience in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1870s–1970s

SHEHONG CHEN

This is a study of the Chinese American experience in Lowell, Massachusetts, over the century from the 1870s through the 1970s.¹ I have selected this period for study because the 1870s witnessed the first appearance of Chinese laundries in Lowell, and the 1970s, the disappearance of Chinese laundries in Lowell. Notably, this study attempts to fill in two existing gaps in historical scholarship. First, the experiences of many of Lowell's ethnic groups have been documented or studied, but the experience of the Chinese has been ignored.² Secondly, the history of Chinese Americans in New England cities and towns has generally received little attention from scholars.³

It is also important that between 1870 and 1970, Lowell witnessed its rise and fall as an industrial city in the period. Its total population rose from 40,928 in 1870 to a peak of

112,759 in 1920, and then fell to 94,239 in 1970. Regarded as the birthplace of American industrialization, throughout this period, Lowell was renowned for absorbing large numbers of immigrants, particularly Irish and French Canadians.

Chinese immigrants also first appeared in Lowell in the mid-1870s. In July 1876, Lowell newspapers reported that two Chinese laundry men had been stoned by two “hoodlums” while having supper inside their own laundry shop. Apparently, the Chinese men “showed no resistance” and police arrested the two assailants on assault charges. The local newspapers also displayed much sympathy towards the Chinese, observing that “since their arrival in our city they have made no disturbance; but have conducted themselves in such a manner as to be worthy the respect and protection of our citizens.” The newspapers referred to

their offenders as “worse than barbarians” and also noted that “the Chinese have to endure the constant stares of the gaping throng that hovers around their establishment at all hours of the day.”⁴

The appearance of Chinese men in Lowell, however, was hardly a coincidence. The Chinese in Lowell was a historical development, part of a larger migration of Chinese to the eastern part of the United States after the Civil War. When the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, Chinese immigrants who had helped build the vital national transportation link suddenly lost their means of making a living. This, coupled with a rising tide of anti-Chinese violence on the West Coast, drove harried Chinese immigrants eastward. Concurrently in the post-Civil War era, Eastern capitalists began experimenting with contract Chinese labor to work as strike breakers or to provide a ready pool of cheap labor. Initially, there was interest in recruiting Chinese laborers because it was widely presumed that the Chinese were not only cheap to employ but also docile on the job. With the Chinese eventually proving to be neither cheap nor docile, Eastern employers ended these experiments. The Chinese workers who were originally brought over by contracts then became the pioneers of Chinese settlement in the East.⁵

In the period under investigation, the Chinese population in Lowell never exceeded one hundred. This study takes a close look at the overall experience of this small group of Chinese in a New England industrial city. How did Lowell react to the debate over the so-called “Chinese question” in the nineteenth century? How did Chinese make a living in Lowell? What was the interaction like between Chinese and mainstream people?

Lowell and the “Chinese Question”

When the Chinese arrived in Lowell in the late 1870s, the “Lowell Experiment”—which used young women as its main labor force—had ended. Lowell was now rapidly becoming a city of new immigrants. For example, Irish workers who had dug the canals that brought water to power the cotton mills in the 1820s stayed on and occupied “The Acre,” the first “slum” in Lowell. The potato famine in Ireland in the 1840s brought more Irishmen to Lowell in search of job opportunities. After the Civil War, labor recruiters toured the eastern part of Canada and brought French Canadians to Lowell. By 1900, more than forty-three percent of Lowell’s population of 94,969 was foreign-born, with the Irish and French Canadians making up the majority.⁶

Arriving at the latter half of the nineteenth century, this rapid increase of both the Irish and French Canadian populations helped shape the political landscape in Lowell. Backed by mill owners and Yankee Protestants, the Republican Party dominated the scene in Lowell from the 1850s until the end of the 1870s. However, in 1882, Benjamin Butler, a native from Lowell, was elected governor of Massachusetts—as a Democrat. Supported by Irish voters and Yankee “reformers,” the Democrats also won the mayoral race in Lowell in 1882. French Canadians, though, developed problems with Irish control in local Catholic affairs; they generally gave their political allegiance to the Republican Party. However, the anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant political platform of Republican Party also tended to leave the Catholic French Canadians feeling alienated. Not surprisingly in this context, it was the French Canadians around the turn of the last

century who “held the balance of power in municipal elections” in Lowell.⁷

Political tensions between the different groups, however, did not hinder them from taking a united stand against Chinese immigration. When Calvin Sampson in 1870 contracted seventy-five Chinese workers to work in his North Adams shoe factory, Benjamin Butler, a Congressman in the U.S. House of Representatives at the time “called upon the workingmen of the United States to resist the Mongolian invasion.”⁸ Charles Cowley, also a resident of Lowell and candidate for Attorney General of Massachusetts in 1870, linked the Woman’s Suffrage Movement with a political agenda to stop Chinese immigration. In a letter he wrote to the Woman Suffrage State Central Committee he outlined his support for women’s right to vote. But he also hastened to add that “if the degraded hordes of China are to be imported hither to supplant extensively the Caucasian laborers ... the ballot for which you strive will cease to be worth the struggle.”⁹

The Chinese made their first entrance into Lowell against this heated political backdrop. In 1878, two years after the first Chinese laundry men appeared in Lowell, Denis Kearney of the Workingmen’s Party paid his first visit to Massachusetts. As party leader and champion of Chinese exclusion, Kearney was in New England on a national tour, hoping to rally support for his newly established party. But he also arrived to help Benjamin Butler’s gubernatorial campaign in Massachusetts. At a widely reported meeting between the two men, Butler responded to Kearney’s concerns over Chinese immigration by openly advocating discriminatory measures at the state level against Chinese immigrants. Butler believed that state actions against aliens

were not in conflict with the Fourteenth Amendment. At the same time, Butler signaled his intention to campaign for a national law that would bar Chinese from coming into the country.¹⁰

Chinese immigrants, however, could hardly be considered an immediate threat to white laborers in Lowell in the 1870s. Nonetheless, white working people in Lowell demonstrated inordinate fear of Chinese “cheap labor” and they sympathized with the California movement against Chinese immigration. Denis Kearney’s speech in Huntington Hall in Lowell on August 13, 1878 was attended by several thousand workingmen. When Kearney asked if “laboring white people” in Lowell would allow Chinese immigrants to drive them out, the audience replied with “cries of ‘No’.” The meeting in Huntington Hall ended with a resolution, adding the chorus of Lowell voices “to the stentorian strain now rolling over the United States, ‘The Chinese must go.’”¹¹

Through the organ of the *Lowell Daily Courier*, mill owners in Lowell advocated similar measures against Chinese immigration. When the news of 1,550 Chinese being brought to work for the Chicago shoemakers “proved to be a ‘sand-lot’ yarn,” a *Courier* editorial expressed great relief. It said, “for whatever may be thought of the Chinese where they already are, no one can wish them swarming further in this direction. When it is difficult to find work for our own race, the importation of Mongolians to fill our workshops would be sure to create a dangerous commotion.” Trying to smooth relationships between mill owners and workingmen, the editorial praised workers as “excellent men” who were making “the best of the hard times.” The editorial concluded “hoping that business

may soon be able to afford them [workers] the increased compensation their industry so well deserves.”¹² Mill owners thus expressed a desire to overcome the economic hard times with the existing workforce. By now they had clearly decided against the idea of resorting to Chinese immigrants as “cheap labor source,” the method tried by Calvin Sampson in North Adams in 1870. As one scholar who studied Sampson’s experiment with Chinese workers concluded, by 1876 capitalists had found “the competition of Chinese manufacturing firms as unpleasant as the competition of coolie labor had become to the American workingmen.” Both the Republican and Democratic parties cried for Chinese exclusion in the 1876 presidential election.¹³

When the Chinese Exclusion bill was being voted on in the U.S. Congress in March 1882, several Lowell newspapers voiced their opinions. The Republican *Lowell Daily Courier* noted, “If China were a little country, with the chance of only a few thousand of her people coming here, and they only for a temporary purpose, we might be as lofty about ‘the open hospitality of our shores’ as we pleased. . . . Self-preservation is a law precedent to hospitality. . . . When we are ready to allow the Chinaman equal privileges of citizenship with others, and can say that we are willing to abide the chances of having him come over and out-vote us and Celestialize our American government, we may give him the freedom of the country. And if we cannot afford to do that we had better let him stay where he is.”¹⁴

According to the *Courier*—which was not as concerned about the Chinese as a source of cheap labor—the Chinese were still the “other.” Racism under girded its basic assumption that Chinese could not be assimilated. So, although the same paper referred to

the two Chinese men in Lowell as well-behaved and “worthy the respect and protection of our citizens,” racial and cultural prejudice led to fears of Lowell being overrun by Chinese.¹⁵

Not surprisingly, the *Lowell Weekly Sun*, a Democratic paper representing Irish Americans in Lowell, joined the capitalists in expressing the racially prejudiced assumption that the culture of “the [white] American people” was the superior kind and that “the Chinese who have come to this country have not assimilated” with it “and show no disposition to do so.” On behalf of Lowell’s workers, the *Sun* also expressed fears of their having to compete with Chinese labor. The *Sun* asserted that “Chinese work for low wages is really a reason for rendering their coming all the more undesirable, as American civilization requires for its maintenance a high rate of wages.”¹⁶ For the preservation of “the [white] American people,” the Chinese should be excluded.

The *Saturday Vox Populi* was another Republican paper, but claiming to represent the voice of the people. It defended the Chinese Exclusion bill as “a good one” with no “injustice in it.” This paper held that, “Our nation has just as much right to say who shall come here and sojourn with us, as the owner of a farm has to decide who shall pasture it, or a city as to what branches of business shall not be carried on in its borders.”¹⁷

The only dissenting voice in Lowell came from *The Morning Mail*, which claimed not to be “the organ of any party or individual.”¹⁸ It observed that it was beyond comprehension that “any lover of equal rights can war upon the Chinamen who were the last to accept the long-standing invitation, extended to all nations to come to our shores and enjoy the

blessings of the freest government the sun shines on.” It further stated that “Honesty and justice demand that their [Chinese] rights shall be respected as those of the natives of any other foreign country that choose to come among us.”¹⁹

Nonetheless, the majority in Lowell supported the anti-Chinese measure. The Chinese Exclusion bill passed the United States Congress and was signed into law by President Chester Arthur in 1882. The law prevented Chinese laborers, both skilled and unskilled, from immigrating to the United States, and provided that “no State court or court of the United States shall admit Chinese to citizenship.”²⁰ The law allowed immigration into the United States of Chinese merchants and Chinese children of American citizens. Since China at the time was largely an agricultural nation, it produced very few merchants. By preventing Chinese in the United States from becoming American citizens, children of American Chinese born in China were barred from joining their parents in the United States. In effect, the law was a comprehensive measure excluding Chinese immigration.

Making a Living as Laundry Men, 1876-1920

According to the *Abstract of the Twelfth Census*, in 1900 there were fifty-nine “Mongolians” in Lowell.²¹ From the census manuscript, I found fifty-three Chinese. All the Chinese were adult men engaged in the laundry business. Only nine of them said that they were married. Since no female was recorded in the census manuscript, the nine Chinese probably left their wives in China. The fifty-three Chinese men managed and worked in thirty-seven laundries. Except two who claimed

California as their birthplace, the rest were immigrants from China.²²

Why were all the Chinese in Lowell laundry men? Most Chinese immigrants at the time came from the rural areas of Guangdong in South China. Laundry in this part of China was done at home and exclusively by women. The chosen occupation of the Chinese in Lowell, therefore, was “a form of accommodation” in the United States.²³

The first great wave of Chinese immigrants in the United States arrived in California as gold miners. The miners referred to the United States as “Gold Mountain.” When the shortage of women during California’s Gold Rush era led to a lack of washerwomen, a Chinese man named Wah Lee, probably having been “ejected by the white miners” from the gold mines, started the first Chinese laundry in San Francisco in 1851.²⁴ As violence and anti-Chinese legislation on the West Coast prevented Chinese from entering the general labor market, more Chinese men elected the laundry trade as a way to sustain themselves in the United States. In the 1870s, when Denis Kearney and the anti-Chinese movement in California forced Chinese to move eastward, both the Northeast and the South witnessed growths in their Chinese populations.

As they moved east, the laundry trade that Chinese immigrants learned in California proved useful. In the 1870s, Lowell was experiencing changes that made the laundry a viable commercial business. Before 1870, laundry was mostly done at home, in boarding houses, or by washerwomen. With the growth of Lowell’s population, and with immigrant men replacing “mill girls” as the city’s main labor force, demand for laundry services increased. Furthermore, as an industrial city,

Lowell was experiencing similar changes that affected other urban centers in the last few decades of the nineteenth century. “Rising standards of cleanliness, concentrations of potential customers, the creation of urban water systems,” polluted industrial air, and crowded living spaces rendered “traditional clothes-washing methods less workable” and made the commercial laundry popular.²⁵

Contrary to popular belief, the laundry trade in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was not an open economic niche for Chinese immigrants. The *Lowell City Directory* listed the city’s first commercial laundry in 1874. As Table 1 shows, between 1880 and 1970, both Chinese and non-Chinese laundries existed in Lowell. In 1902, the Massachusetts legislature debated an anti-Chinese laundry bill. The bill stated, “It shall be unlawful for any person to do public laundry work by way of trade or for gain in any room, or in any part thereof, which is used by such person or by any other person for purposes of cooking, eating or sleeping.”²⁶ The

bill was strongly supported by Frank Stearns, a Lowell representative.²⁷ Frank Stearns also happened to own Scripture’s Laundry in Lowell.²⁸ If passed, the bill would have wiped out all of Lowell’s Chinese laundries. This is because—according to the census manuscript of 1900—all of the city’s Chinese lived at addresses which were listed as business addresses in the *City Directory*. Cooking, eating or sleeping was certainly taking place at all the Chinese laundries. Fortunately for the Chinese, however, the bill was voted down in the House.²⁹

Several possible reasons explain why the Chinese elected the laundry trade to sustain their existence in Lowell. First, in the late nineteenth century, the laundry trade was in its infancy and thus still fairly open for Chinese to compete in. Second, prejudice against the Chinese—as clearly reflected in the editorial pages of Lowell’s newspapers—had walled the Chinese outside the general labor market even before they arrived. Third, starting laundry business required only a small

Table 1. Chinese and Non-Chinese Laundries in Lowell, 1870-1970

Year	Chinese laundry	Non-Chinese laundry
1870	0	0
1880	3	4
1890	20	12
1900	37	16
1910	31	17
1920	31	15
1930	18	15
1940	19	13
1950	12	10*
1960	7	10*
1970	2	7

*The Burbank Laundry is counted as non-Chinese.
Source: *Lowell City Directory*, 1870-1970.

investment. According to one observation made in the 1880s, it took “from seventy-five dollars to two hundred dollars” to start a Chinese laundry. All that was involved was the purchase of “a stove and a trough for washing, and partitions for dry-room and sleeping apartment, and a sign.”³⁰ Fourth, the laundry business allowed a degree of independence. In Lowell, sixteen of the thirty-seven Chinese laundries were individually-operated businesses. The others employed only one or two men altogether. There were usually a “head” and a “partner” or a “head” and a “boarder/lodger” in these laundries.³¹ Whether an individually-operated business, a “head-partner” or a “head-boarder” business, Chinese laundry men in Lowell either worked for themselves or pooled together their resources while also sharing profits. Fifth, if one was willing to work hard, the laundry business made a good living. A Chinese laundry man made between \$8 and \$20 a week in 1903, while a worker in Lowell made an average weekly income of only \$7.40 in 1875 and \$8.96 in 1912.³²

Lowell’s Chinese laundry men were sojourners. A comparison of the Chinese names in the 1900 census manuscript with the Chinese names in the 1920 census manuscript shows that not a single 1900 Chinese resident remained in Lowell in 1920. The sojourner mentality has a historical context. After the 1882 Exclusion Act, Congress in 1888 passed another act prohibiting Chinese laborers from returning to the United States after a visit to China. A Chinese laborer was allowed to return only if he showed that he had “a lawful wife, child, or parent in the United States, or property therein of the value of one thousand dollars, or debt of like amount due him and pending settlement.”³³ Since the 1882 act prevented a Chinese laborer from bringing his



Figure 1. Wong Kee

wife to the United States and since very few American Chinese at the turn of the last century had a parent in the United States, the only way for a Chinese laborer to visit China and re-enter the United States was to show that he had property or debt due to him. Although a hard-working Chinese laundry man made an average income of \$8 to \$20 a week, he still had to support himself and regularly send money back to his family in China. Many Chinese laundry men also borrowed money for passage to America and had to take money from his income to pay these debts.³⁴ In this light, accumulating \$1,000 was not an easy task, and not every Chinese laundry man was able to.

The case of Wong Kee (see figure 1) is instructive.³⁵ Wong was born in 1868 and married in 1890 in China. He came to the United States in 1892 and in 1900 managed a

one-person laundry business in downtown Lowell. Two years later, he left Lowell for Boston.³⁶ In 1897, Wong had a studio photo taken of him posing as a traditional Chinese gentleman, holding a book in one hand, a fan in the other, seated next to a stack of books displayed on the tea table. The photo points to an interesting phenomenon that prevailed among Chinese laundry men in the United States. Doing laundry was considered a woman's chore in China. Male Chinese immigrants did not want their families and relatives back in China to know that they were doing laundry in "Gold Mountain." Yet they did not want to lie nor would they be able to keep the truth hidden for long. In response to this dilemma, they often related that they were operating a "yishangguan," a term which, literally translated, means "a clothing store." This made the owner or manager of a clothing store a merchant or a businessman. The term "yishangguan" was used by Chinese laundry men in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the 1970s, scholars doing field research in Guangdong, China discovered that "many relatives of Chinese Americans still did not have a clear idea of what yishangguan actually was."³⁷ Wong Kee's photo conveyed to his family and relatives in China that he was a successful merchant and that his success had made him a gentleman—the social status that many Chinese men aspired to.

In reality, the life Wong Kee lived in Lowell was probably a simple one. He took in clothes and washed, dried, ironed, and packed them for local customers. He cooked his own food and ate and slept in the laundry. On some Sundays, he probably hopped on a train to visit Boston's Chinatown. Wong Kee was a married man in his early thirties, living away from his loved ones and an ocean away from

the culture he was most familiar with. When he moved to Boston in 1902, did he make the move in order to be closer to the cultural environment that a Chinatown provided? In Lowell, Wong Kee was a sojourner. Life without his family nearby, limited social and economic opportunities, and cultural isolation determined his sojourning status.

Immigration restrictions and racial discrimination played an important role in determining many Chinese immigrants' status as sojourners. Fong Kim's story is another case in point. Fong Kim was arrested in the famous 1903 Boston Chinatown raid because he did not have a resident certificate at a time when all Chinese were required to have one.³⁸ After he successfully proved that he was born in San Francisco—and therefore a citizen of the United States—he was finally discharged in December 1903.³⁹ In 1910, as he planned to visit his family in China, he applied for a return certificate as an American citizen. Despite the court decision that discharged him in December 1903, Fong Kim was still denied a return certificate. This indicated that the immigration authorities in Boston were still not willing to accept his American-born status. However, he applied for the same certificate from the same immigration office in 1916 and was then granted a return certificate based on the reason that he was an American citizen.⁴⁰ So, Chinese people, whether immigrants from China or American citizens, were completely at the mercy of American immigration authorities.

In 1917, Fong Kim returned to China where his mother, wife, and two sons lived. In 1919, he returned to Boston, but alone. In the 1930s, he made another trip back to China, but did not return to the United States and died in China. Fong Kim was a sojourner in

the United States. But after his death, one of his sons made use of his status as an American citizen to enter the United States in 1943.⁴¹ It is likely that Fong Kim wished to have his family join him in America. Did his frustrating experience with the immigration authorities restrain him from taking steps to accomplish his wish while he was alive? His sojourning status was at least partially determined by restrictions and discrimination against Chinese immigrants.

Despite their status as sojourners, the Chinese in Lowell did not live in “extreme isolation.”⁴² They demonstrated interest in becoming full-fledged members of American society. In 1879, a few years after the first Chinese immigrants appeared in Lowell, the John Street Congregational Church listed four Chinese members. One of them, Jee Gam, came from California where he had been converted to Christianity. Jee Gam was able to repeat the Lord’s Prayer in Chinese in front of the pastor and entire congregation.⁴³ In the 1890s, a church missionary school in downtown Lowell reported having fifteen Chinese men attending the school.⁴⁴

The recorded Chinese involvement in the First Baptist Church and the Fifth Street Baptist Church in Lowell confirmed these other random sightings of Chinese demonstrating interest in Christianity. In June 1888, the First Baptist Church opened a Chinese Sunday school.⁴⁵ In the next thirty-three years, the church register books recorded fifteen Chinese names, twelve of whom were baptized in the church; two joined the church with letters from the churches they belonged to before they arrived in Lowell; and one joined the church with neither a letter or date of baptism.⁴⁶ In 1909 when a local newspaper reported the baptisms of two Chinese men,

the church claimed to have twenty-three Chinese members.⁴⁷

In January 1898, the Fifth Street Baptist Church also opened a Chinese Sunday school.⁴⁸ The last few years of the 1890s witnessed a boom in the Chinese population of Lowell. In 1898, one local newspaper reported eighty-seven Chinese in Lowell.⁴⁹ In 1905, the Chinese Sunday school reported an increasing number of Chinese attending and in 1918, the school had to request more volunteer teachers because more Chinese were attending the school.⁵⁰ Between 1898 and when it celebrated its sixty-second anniversary in 1935, the Chinese Sunday school claimed a one-time high enrollment of twenty-two Chinese members.⁵¹

The Chinese members also participated in church-wide activities. In June 1918, they sang together as a group at a Sunday communion service.⁵² Since the two Chinese Sunday schools both belonged to the Merrimack River Association of Baptist churches, the Chinese Sunday school class at the First Baptist Church also participated in church activities of the Fifth Street Baptist Church. This demonstrated the attention the Baptist churches gave to their Chinese members. In February 1917, the Fifth Street church welcomed a pastor. Attending the reception for the new pastor were members from the First Baptist Church. Wong Quon, a member of the Chinese Sunday school at the First Baptist Church, sang two songs at this reception.⁵³

Some Chinese members took their membership in the church very seriously. Wong Thick, who was baptized in the First Baptist Church on Christmas Day 1910, died in Lowell in August 1915. The funeral services for Wong Thick were held in the church, where the Chinese Sunday school class sang

hymns. Wong Thick was later buried in Westlawn Cemetery in Lowell, in a Christian ceremony performed by Rev. Dinsmore of the First Baptist Church.⁵⁴ Wong Quon, who started as a laundry man and moved into the restaurant business in the 1910s, was also a member of the church. When he died in Lowell in October 1921, his funeral service was also held in the First Baptist Church.⁵⁵

Besides becoming members of Christian churches and making Lowell their final resting place, another sign of Chinese willingness to become full-fledged members of local communities was interracial marriage. In 1902, George Wong, who had immigrated to the United States in 1898, married a white girl in Manchester, New Hampshire. After the marriage, the couple moved to Lowell and both became regular members of St. Peter's Catholic Church. The couple had a son in October 1903. As this was the first baby born in Lowell's Chinese community and the only baby in the community, George Francis Wong received many gifts from local Chinese men. Unfortunately, the baby only lived three weeks. His death caught the attention of a local newspaper. George Wong and his wife Flora Wong continued to live in Lowell. George Wong, perhaps with the help from his wife, ran a laundry on Cheever Street. In 1920, they appeared in the census manuscript as a married couple.⁵⁶

Diversifying Occupations, Establishing Families, and Growing up in Lowell as Chinese Americans, 1907-1960s

The 1920 Census recorded seventy-nine Chinese; I found seventy-seven of them in the census manuscript. Unlike what the 1900 census had shown, only thirty-five of Lowell's

Chinese in 1920 were in the laundry business, while twenty-seven were in restaurant business. Four were managing a tea store and the rest were women, children, a student in Lowell's textile school, a retiree, and an unemployed person. Twenty-two of Lowell's Chinese were American citizens, compared to only two in 1900. As citizens, this group sponsored members of their families to join them, which ended the all-male profile of Lowell's Chinese community. Having families on American soil, the Chinese in Lowell set down roots in the United States, proving that earlier generations of immigrants did not necessarily choose to be sojourners, especially when circumstances allowed them to become permanent residents.

The year 1907 witnessed the appearance of the first Chinese restaurant in Lowell. Like laundries, restaurants also provided a means for Chinese immigrants to make a living in the United States. While restaurants in Chinatowns provided authentic Chinese food for a Chinese clientele, Chinese restaurants outside Chinatowns altered Chinese dishes to cater to the tastes of the mainstream population. The first Chinese restaurant in Lowell was called "Chop Suey and American Restaurant." According to a menu from the early 1910s, the restaurant offered more American dishes like "sirloin steak, French fried potatoes, clam chowder, and apple pies," than Chinese dishes. Even in the menu section under the heading "Chinese Bill of Fare," dishes listed as "boiled rice with maple syrup or milk" were not really Chinese dishes.⁵⁷

The restaurant business was a riskier proposition and required a substantially larger financial investment than laundries. However, they provided Chinese immigrants an opportunity to demonstrate their entrepreneurial



Figure 2. Young China Restaurant

talents. The first Chinese restaurant in Lowell was owned by the Chin Lee Company. In 1914, the company opened two more restaurants, one in Lynn, Massachusetts and the other in Providence, Rhode Island.⁵⁸ Its success encouraged other local Chinese men to open two more restaurants in Lowell in 1913 and 1914. Wong Quon, a member of the First Baptist Church, opened the Pekin Company's Chinese and American Restaurant on Central Street in 1913. The restaurant catered to private parties and also served take-out chop suey. This restaurant, however, was listed in the *City Directory* only for one year.⁵⁹

When Wong Quon closed his Pekin Company restaurant, he joined a man named Chin Shaw Kee in 1914 and opened the Young China Restaurant on the same street where the Chin Lee Restaurant had run successfully for seven years.⁶⁰ The Young China

Restaurant featured chop suey Chinese and American foods. It boasted elaborate interior decorations, exquisite traditional Chinese furniture and tropical plants in decorative pots. The owners were so proud of their business establishment that they commissioned a postcard photo of the interior of the restaurant (figure 2).⁶¹ But the restaurant did not survive long. In 1917, it also disappeared from the *City Directory*. Meanwhile, the Chin Lee Restaurant moved from its original obscure location to the address that the Young China Restaurant had once occupied. Wong Quon himself then joined the Chin Lee Company. He was treasurer of Chin Lee Restaurant when he died in 1921.⁶²

Chinese restaurants in Lowell had to survive in the midst of ongoing racial discrimination and hostility. In 1911, the Massachusetts House of Representatives proposed a law

making it “a criminal offense for any woman under the age of 21 years to enter a hotel or a restaurant conducted by Chinese.” Although the Supreme Judicial Court eventually declared the proposed law unconstitutional, its initial consideration demonstrated a general attitude that Chinese restaurants were evil and corrupt places and especially dangerous to young women.⁶³

In such an atmosphere, the survival of the Chin Lee Restaurant depended on the resilience and ingenuity of its proprietors. Chin Lee “can compete with any other restaurant in the city,” reported a Lowell newspaper in 1926. It managed by adapting to the local mainstream taste. As a matter of fact, the newspaper concluded that the restaurant had become the place where many local residents would go “when all else fails to stimulate a jaded appetite.”⁶⁴ The restaurant was “the ideal place on sad red Sundays” for a young Jack Kerouac, who grew up in Lowell in a French Canadian family. Kerouac, who also liberally used the racist slur “chink” in his references to Chinese women and men, wrote that Chin Lee’s had “rich heartbreaking family booths” and “nice smiling Chinese men” who would serve him and his family food with a “smell so savory [that it] hung in the linoleum carpet hall downstairs.”⁶⁵

The Chin Lee Restaurant owners’ ingenuity manifested itself not only in their ability to cater to the tastes of the local clientele, but also in their success in managing their business through the Great Depression. Keenly, they understood that the impact of the depression was not simply economic but also psychological. Therefore, in 1932, the restaurant started to provide live music and dancing every evening except Sundays. This attracted customers who appreciated a few hours’ escape from the nation’s economic woes. The

restaurant featured private booths, which made dining there a pleasant experience. It offered large quantities of food at reasonable prices with fast, efficient service. By 1937, the restaurant completed its transformation to an extensive business establishment capable of accommodating 300 diners at a single sitting.⁶⁶

The 1920 census manuscript enumerated three Chinese American families in Lowell. While George Wong and Flora Wong were an interracial couple, the other two Chinese American families consisted of husbands born in the United States and wives who had come from China to join their spouses. To reiterate, because of the Chinese exclusion laws, only merchants and American citizens could sponsor their families for admission. Fong Lee, a laundry man in Lowell, was born in California and his wife came to the United States in 1914. They had a daughter who was born in China and who entered the United States with the mother. The couple lived in New York for a time, where another daughter and a son were born to them. The 1920 census indicated that Fong Lee’s widowed father-in-law also lived with him, making this a complete household of three generations. Dongsen Chin, head of the other Chinese American family in Lowell, was in the restaurant business. Also born in California, he sponsored his wife and daughter to join him from China in 1917. The couple had a second daughter when the 1920 census was taken.⁶⁷

Possession of U.S. citizenship was the primary means by which Chinese could manage to establish families in Lowell. However, as the Fong Kim story illustrated, proving their status as natural-born Americans was hardly an easy task for Chinese in the early twentieth century. Nor was it a simple matter for a Chinese man to sponsor his wife and children



Figure 3. Wong Fook Quong



Figure 4. Lee Shee



Figure 5. Oi Gem

for admission into the United States on the basis of his natural-born American status. Wong Fook Quong's story is a case in point. Wong was born in California in 1886. He returned to China, then married and fathered a daughter there. In 1920, while a resident in Boston, Massachusetts, Wong requested a pre-investigation of his status as an American citizen in order to facilitate the admission of his wife and daughter into the United States. When the Immigration Service's Boston Office confirmed his status, he sent for his wife and daughter. They arrived in Boston in December 1920. Immigration officers, however, interrogated Wong Fook Quong, his wife Lew Shee, and his daughter Oi Gem, who was only ten years old at the time (see figures 3, 4, and 5). Wong and his wife were peppered with questions like "What was the weather like on your wedding day?" and "What present did you give or receive at the time of your wedding?" All three were asked questions about the size of their home village, the exact location of their house in the village, and even the location of their bedroom in the house.

When the immigration officers compared notes and concluded that answers given by the three were "in close agreement," Lew Shee and Oi Gem were finally officially admitted as wife and daughter of a citizen of the United States.⁶⁸ Wong Fook Quong and his family later moved to Lowell and opened a laundry on Coral Street.

Fong Lee, Dongsen Chin, and Fook Quong Wong were extremely fortunate to have had their families enter the United States before 1924. This was because the 1924 Immigration Act barred entry of Chinese wives of American citizens of Chinese ancestry. This law reflected an abiding negative national attitude towards the Chinese establishing families in the United States.⁶⁹

This backdrop necessarily informs a 1925 police incident involving the Wong family in Lowell. In 1925, Wong made arrangements to have his 15-year-old daughter Mamie (Oi Gem) marry Lee Ah Jim, a Chinese laundry man who lived and worked in Providence, Rhode Island.⁷⁰ When news of the arranged marriage broke, the Lowell police reacted

quickly and took Mamie away from her classroom at the Morey School, placing her in an unidentified home to protect her from “being sold” into marriage.⁷¹

The heavy handed police action not only shocked the Wong family, but it also outraged a local lawyer named J. Joseph Hennessy, who the Wong family had hired to represent them. Hennessy referred to the police officer’s action of taking Mamie out of her school classroom in the middle of the day as “autocratic” and “ruthless.” He accused the police department of “meddling in a civil matter.”⁷² He demanded that Mamie be returned to her parents. The court finally ruled that so long as Mamie’s parents were “fit persons to have her in their custody,” it was not interested in whether Mamie was to be married or not.⁷³ The petition of the Lowell police for guardianship of Mamie was therefore dismissed and Mamie was returned to her parents.

Despite such an unwelcome, adverse environment, it appears that the Wong family was determined to make Lowell its home. Wong Fook Quong and his wife Lew Shee eventually adopted English names, and went by Charles and Bertha. They joined the Calvary Baptist Church in the neighborhood. After Mamie, they had four children who were born in Lowell. Lillian, their first daughter who was born in Lowell, remembered that her mother made a pretty yellow dress for her which she wore to church services every Sunday.⁷⁴

Growing up Chinese and American in Lowell was a struggle. Lillian remembered having to combat racial slurs as well as dealing with the complications of having to straddle two different cultures—the mainstream American and traditional Chinese culture. After school, white boys liked to hang around

her father’s laundry (which also served as the family’s living quarters), taunting the family with shouts of “chink! chink!” Lillian, for her part, devised a response. Planning ahead on one occasion, she ambushed the white boys from behind and threatened to really hurt them if they did it again. This effectively deterred the racial taunts. On another occasion, when she and a white girl friend went to see a play, two boys called her “chink.” With her friend’s help, Lillian grabbed the boys and knocked their heads together. This shut the boys up.

Being an elder child in the family, Lillian had to start helping in the laundry when she was very young. In 1934, when she was only 12 years old, Lillian’s mother died. After that, Lillian had to figure everything out herself about growing up to be a woman. At the age of 17, her father arranged for her to marry a China-born laundry man, George Tong. She went through the wedding ceremony and the news of her marriage was reported in a Lowell newspaper. But on the wedding night, she refused to go to George Tong’s apartment. She realized that she was “too Americanized for the China-born man.” Later on, Lillian obtained a divorce from George Tong.⁷⁵

Afterwards, Lillian continued to live at home and help in the laundry. Washing and ironing laundry was work that generated a lot of heat. During the summer, laundry work was particularly gruesome. To avoid the heat of the day, Lillian worked at night. She would welcome the first morning light as she sat outside the laundry and took in some fresh air in the company of her dog. The summer morning light was also greeted by a young man delivering newspapers. He always had his faithful dog with him as well. As the newspaper deliveryman passed by, Lillian’s dog

would go and greet his dog. After many such encounters, Lillian and the deliveryman, Edgar Burbank, became acquainted. In September 1943, Edgar, who was in the United States Navy at the time, and Lillian married. When I interviewed Lillian in 2001, she related proudly that the marriage was a success and that she and Edgar raised a wonderful family in Lowell.⁷⁶

Lillian's refusal to submit to her father's marriage arrangement and her determination to make her own choice for a husband reflected the sharp contrast between American-born Chinese who grew up in Chinatowns and those who were forced to grow up in American cities and towns without Chinatowns. A small Chinese population—such as the one which sprouted in Lowell—could not support a Chinatown or even a Chinese-language school. Immigrant parents provided the only source of Chinese culture. Competing with this limited source of Chinese culture was the larger world of American culture. In their socialization process, the cultural impact of church, school, and friends far outweighed that of their immigrant parents.

The experience of another Chinese family in Lowell provides additional evidence that the influence of immigrant parents simply could not compete with the impact of the larger society. Chuck Quan and his wife ran a laundry in Lowell in the 1950s and early 1960s. They were both immigrants from China, but their four children—two sons and two daughters—were all born in Lowell. Chuck and his wife were both educated in China and they put great emphasis on raising their children properly and with a good education. To supply the children with Chinese language and cultural education, the entire



Figure 6. Charlie Woo, Laundry man, 370 Central Street, Lowell, MA, March 1957.
Courtesy of Photographer George of Lowell.

family spent Sundays in Boston's Chinatown, where the children attended Chinese school. In Lowell, Chuck and his wife sent the children to a Catholic school. They were strict parents and allowed the children to have only selected white friends. A friend of the family remembered that the two Quan daughters were usually required to finish both their Catholic school homework and Chinese school homework before they could play. By restricting their children's social life, by enrolling them in Chinese and Catholic schools and requiring them to give priority to their school work, these immigrant parents showed they wanted their children to get the better of two cultures, Chinese and American.

Ironically, the Quans' strenuous efforts were often sabotaged. On the surface, the children usually abided by their parents' instructions, but behind their backs, the children often acted in contrary fashion. Many American-born Chinese could not see any practical value in learning the Chinese language. Even those who lived in Chinatowns questioned the utility of learning the language.⁷⁷ Having to learn to write Chinese characters—a standard piece of homework from a Chinese-language school—in Lowell, where the written Chinese language was never otherwise used, must have been quite burdensome. A white friend of the Quan family remembered helping the Quan girls copy their daily quota of Chinese characters so they could come out to play.⁷⁸ Consciously or not, the Quan girls frustrated their parents' desire to have them imbibe the discipline associated with Chinese culture that the Chinese-language school was supposed to teach them.

The Quans, like many other Chinese immigrant parents, did not want their children to marry non-Chinese Americans. Chinese immigrant parents regarded non-Chinese Americans as too individualistic, not family oriented enough, and more prone to divorce. The Quans sent the eldest son to Hong Kong, where he married a Chinese wife. Their two daughters, however, appeared more rebellious: both married white men. One daughter did not even tell her parents about her marriage until after she and her fiancé had been legally married.⁷⁹

Disappearance of the Chinese Laundry and Continuing Existence of the Chinese Restaurant, 1940-1975

As a city, Lowell began experiencing decline in the 1920s. In this period, many Lowell mills moved to the South, where labor was



Figure 7. Unidentified laundry couple, Lowell, MA, 1950s. *Courtesy of Photographer George of Lowell.*

cheaper and profits bigger. By 1930, two-thirds of Lowell's labor force was idle.⁸⁰ Government intervention—via New Deal programs in the 1930s and the war economy in the first part of the 1940s—helped sustain employment in the city for a time. After World War II, however, Lowell suffered severe and continuous economic decline. Within two decades, the city lost twenty percent of its population. In 1976, Lowell still reeled from a 10.1 percent unemployment rate.⁸¹

The Chinese laundry business declined as Lowell's economy declined. The number of Chinese laundries shrank from nineteen in 1940 to twelve in 1950. These small hand laundries survived only because their owners were willing to work long hours and mobilize



Figure 8. Anna Lee, daughter of laundry man, Lee Jim Hong, 31 Paige Street, Lowell, MA, 1950s. *Courtesy of Photographer George of Lowell.*

all the labor resources of their families (see figures 6, 7 and 8). The Quan daughters, for example, helped ironing and folding washed laundry.⁸² As mentioned, Lillian Wong often worked in the hot and steamy laundry straight through the night.

The last few Chinese laundries in Lowell began to disappear in the 1950s and 1960s. Wong Fook Quong died in 1957 and his laundry on Broadway Street closed its doors.⁸³ In 1966, the Quan family moved away from Lowell and their laundry also disappeared. The Burbank Laundry, owned and operated by Lillian and Edgar Burbank after World War II, closed its doors in 1968. By 1975, there were no Chinese laundries in Lowell.⁸⁴ Self-service laundries, dry cleaners, and affordable home washing machines took their

place supplying the laundering requirements of American cities.

Unlike the Chinese laundries, however, Chinese restaurants continued to sustain themselves in Lowell. Nationally, according to one study, the number of Chinese restaurants increased from 4,304 in 1949 to about 10,000 by the end of the 1960s.⁸⁵ China's alliance with the United States in World War II changed American attitudes toward Chinese people. In the deliberations to repeal the Chinese exclusion acts, one Congressman from Missouri said, "All at once we discovered the saintly qualities of the Chinese people. If it had not been for December 7, I do not know if we would have ever found out how good they were."⁸⁶ The success of the Communist revolution in China in 1949, however, was considered a "loss" by many Americans. As a result of its Cold War foreign policy, the United States refused to recognize the People's Republic of China. With direct access to mainland China cut off, many Americans found an outlet for their newly discovered curiosity about Chinese culture in the Chinese American restaurant. Correspondingly, as the United States assumed a position of global dominance and leadership in the aftermath of World War II, average Americans became more cosmopolitan, with broadened tastes for more "exotic" foods.

In 1956, the long-established Chin Lee Restaurant was joined by another Chinese restaurant in Lowell, the Cathay Garden.⁸⁷ Unlike the Chin Lee Restaurant's menu from the 1910s—the one which had proffered more American dishes than Chinese ones—the Cathay Garden's menu featured only one page of American dishes (including desserts and

beverages), against five pages listing Chinese dishes. Aware of the developing penchant among Americans for unusual food, the Cathay Garden specifically advertised its “exotic drinks in our Polynesian Cocktail Lounge.” The restaurant also offered “spacious parking area,” an “air conditioned” interior, dining capacity to accommodate large parties, and take-out service.⁸⁸

The Cathay Garden was owned and managed by Frank Chin and his son Jack Chin. Frank Chin arrived in the United States as a son of an American-born Chinese in 1925. Like many American Chinese restaurant owners, Frank Chin started out as a partner in a Chinese restaurant before opening his own business in Lowell in 1956. Neither he nor the rest of his family became residents of Lowell, however, probably because the city was suffering from its continuous economic depression well into the 1950s and 1960s. In addition, Frank Chin had two other sons who opened restaurants in Fitchburg, Massachusetts and Nashua and Manchester, New Hampshire in 1964, 1969 and 1971, respectively. Opting to make Boston their home instead of Lowell or other New England towns enabled the entire family—Frank Chin, his wife, his sons and their wives, and eight grandchildren—to be close to the cultural life offered by New England’s biggest Chinatown.⁸⁹

That all the men in the Frank Chin family continued to run Chinese restaurants in the 1950s and 1960s, even after decades in the United States, still points to existing barriers in the general job market in New England directed against Chinese. But this also underscores the persistent economic attractiveness of the restaurant business for the Chinese. Chin Lun Sing, who grew up in Lowell and served in the U. S. army during World War

II, “worked as a waiter in various Chinese restaurants in the Boston area” for the balance of his life after the war.⁹⁰ Lillian’s sister, born, bred and educated in Lowell, also worked in Chinese restaurants in the Boston area.⁹¹ For the owner, the restaurant business offered outlets for Chinese American entrepreneurship in a still racially prejudiced society that restricted the professional and business opportunities of people of color. One Chinese restaurant owner in Providence, Rhode Island said that he returned to restaurant work after serving in World War II as an electronics technician “in order to save money to open his own restaurant.”⁹² One of Frank Chin’s sons had a Master’s degree from Boston University, but he opened a restaurant in Nashua, New Hampshire in 1969. His successful business in Nashua led him to open a second restaurant in Manchester, New Hampshire two years later.⁹³

In the 1950s and through the 1970s, Chinese restaurants remained popular spots for Lowell’s residents. One man remembered that as a teenager, he and his best friend “spent a considerable amount of time dining at this [Cathay Garden] restaurant.”⁹⁴ One woman said that when she was a little girl, her mother would take her out to Chin Lee’s if she did well in school and helped with chores around the house. This was enough to motivate her to do her best in school and at home. When she dined at Chin Lee’s, she remembered wishing that service would be slow so that she could take her time admiring the exotic decorations inside. Several other residents told me that they celebrated birthdays and gathered on special occasions with family and friends at the Chin Lee Restaurant.⁹⁵

After sixty years as a going business in Lowell, the Chin Lee restaurant finally disap-

peared from the *City Directory* in 1968. In the same year at the same location, however, the Jade Pagoda Chinese restaurant appeared. In 1975, the Jade Pagoda and the Cathay Garden were the two major Chinese restaurants in Lowell.⁹⁶ Today there are at least eighteen Chinese restaurants in Lowell, with many others dotting the surrounding towns.⁹⁷

Conclusion

The Chinese American experience in Lowell illustrates that historically, most people in the city feared large-scale Chinese immigration into United States and into Lowell. This fear was rooted in the racial prejudice that held that Chinese immigrants would never assimilate and become American. Even though Chinese never arrived in Lowell in very large numbers, they still had to combat the effects of racial discrimination.

Perhaps due to the small number of Chinese people living in the city at any one time, Lowell, like many other New England cities and towns, did not give rise to a Chinatown. Lack of a Chinatown—and of other Chinese cultural institutions such as a temple, family or clan association—probably led Lowell's Chinese to gravitate towards the Christian churches which provided spaces where Chinese immigrants could find not only spiritual solace but social outlets as well. In addition, the fortunate absence of anti-miscegenation laws in Massachusetts in the period under investigation allowed George Wong, Lillian Wong, and the Quan daughters to intermarry into the mainstream population. Persistent, resilient, creative, determined to set down roots in the United States, the Chinese in Lowell were not as isolated and unassimilable as Chinese Americans have been usually portrayed.

Since this is the first in-depth study of Chinese American experiences in a New England city or town, I hope it will trigger more scholarly attention to other towns and cities in the Northeast. In the 1990s, Him Mark Lai, a leading scholar in Chinese American history, said that scholars needed to begin shifting the focus away from San Francisco, to pay more attention to other communities instead in order “to get a more balanced interpretation of the course of development of the Chinese in America.”⁹⁸ Knowledge of Chinese American experiences in New England will definitely add to such a balanced interpretation.

NOTES

1. I thank the following people for sharing with me information regarding Chinese Americans in Lowell. Martha Mayo, Gray Fitzsimons, Pat Rowe, Janet Pohl, Janine Whitcomb, Shirley Rathbun, Mehmed Ali, Barbara Reed, Lewis Karabatsos, Silvia Contover, Pauline Conlon, Marjorie Ryder, Rosanna Kowalewski, Jean Doubleday, Deborah Friedman, Ronald Karr, Helen Jones, James Donohoe, Martha McGowan, Al Gregoire, Tom Langan, Lillian Burbank, Dolores Chin, and Susan Fortier. I also thank the Institute for Asian American Studies at University of Massachusetts Boston for the Research Fellowship and University of Massachusetts Lowell for the Healey Grant.

2. Here are some examples. Brigitte Marie Lane, *Franco-American Folk Traditions and Popular Culture in a Former Milltown: Aspects of Ethnic Urban Folklore and the Dynamics of Folklore Change in Lowell, Massachusetts* (New York: Garland Publisher, 1990); Albert G. Mitchell, "Irish Family Patterns in Nineteenth Century Ireland and Lowell, Massachusetts," (Boston University Dissertation, 1975); Stella M. Mazur, *Roots and Heritage of Polish People of Lowell* (Lowell: Stella M. Mazur, 1976); Shirley Kolack, *A New Beginning: The Jews of Historic Lowell, Massachusetts* (New York: P. Lang, 1996).

3. The most recent scholarly study of Chinese American experiences in New England is K. Scott Wong's in-depth look into the 1903 Boston Chinatown raid. "'The Eagle Seeks a Helpless Quarry': Chinatown, the Police, and the Press, the 1903 Boston Chinatown Raid Revisited," *Amerasia Journal* 22:3 (1996): 81-103. The Chinese experience in the shoe factory of North Adams,

Massachusetts has received scholarly attention. Frederick Rudolph, "Chinamen in Yankeedom: Anti—Unionism in Massachusetts in 1870," *American Historical Review*, 53:1 (1947): 1-29. Doris Chu's book *Chinese in Massachusetts: Their Experiences and Contributions*, (Boston, Mass.: Chinese Culture Institute, 1987) has only 48 pages, with large pictures, on the entire history of Chinese in Massachusetts. The book paid no attention to Chinese experiences in cities and towns such as Lowell.

4. *Lowell Morning Times*, July 29, 1876; *Lowell Daily Courier*, July 29 and 31, 1876; *Saturday Vox Populi*, August 5, 1876.

5. For details of the so-called experiments, see Frederick Rudolph, "Chinamen in Yankeedom" and Edward J. M. Rhoads, "Asian Pioneers in the Eastern United States: Chinese Cutlery Workers in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, in the 1870s," *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 2:2 (1999): 119-155.

6. Bureau of the Census, *Abstract of the Twelfth Census, 1900* (Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1976), 104, Table 81.

7. Mary Blewett, "The Mills and the Multitudes: A Political History," in Arthur L. Eno, Jr., ed., *Cotton Was King: A History of Lowell, Massachusetts* (Lowell Historical Society, 1976), 175.

8. Frederick Rudolph, "Chinamen in Yankeedom," 25-26.

9. *Saturday Vox Populi*, October 29, 1870.

10. *Lowell Daily Courier*, August 3 and August 13, 1878.

11. *Lowell Daily Courier*, August 14, 1878; *Lowell Weekly Sun*, August 17, 1878; *Saturday Vox Populi*, August, 17, 1878.

12. *Lowell Daily Courier*, August 21, 1878.

13. Frederick Rudolph, "Chinamen in Yankeedom," 28.

14. *Lowell Daily Courier*, March 7, 1882.
15. *Lowell Daily Courier*, July 31, 1876.
16. *Lowell Weekly Sun*, March 18, 1882.
17. *Saturday Vox Populi*, March 18, 1882.
18. The first issue of *The Morning Mail*, July 1, 1879.
19. *The Morning Mail*, March 4 and 10, 1882.
20. *United States Statutes at Large*, vol. 22 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 58-61.
21. *Abstract of the Twelfth Census, 1900* (Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1976), 104, Table 19.
22. 1900 Census Manuscript.
23. Paul C. P. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation* (New York: New York University Press, 1987), 2.
24. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman*, 46.
25. Arwen Mohun, *Steam Laundries: Gender, Technology, and Work in the United States and Great Britain, 1880-1940* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 15-16.
26. House Bill 304, in *Documents of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1901 and 1902* (Boston: Wright and Potter Printing Co., 1902).
27. *The Lowell Sun*, April 19, 1902; *Worcester Daily Telegram*, April 19, 1902; *Lowell Morning Call*, April 21, 1902.
28. *Lowell City Directory*, 1901.
29. *The Lowell Sun*, April 19, 1902.
30. Wong Chin Foo, "The Chinese in New York," *Cosmopolitan* (New York: Cosmopolitan Magazine Co.) 5 (March-October 1888): 298. Quoted in Renqiu Yu, *To Save China, To Save Ourselves: The Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance of New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 10.
31. 1900 Census Manuscript.
32. Liang Qichao, "Xindalu youji" (*Travel Notes on the New Continent*) (Reprint, Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1981), 130; Frances Early, "The French Canadian Family Economy and Standard of Living in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1870" and Peter Richards, "A Study in Community Power: Lowell, 1912," in Robert Weible, ed., *The Continuing Revolution: A History of Lowell, Massachusetts* (Lowell, Mass.: Lowell Historical Society, 1991), 239-240 and 270.
33. *United States Statutes at Large*, vol. 25 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), 476-479.
34. For instance, in an interview, one laundry man in Chicago in the 1930s said, "My brother has spent several thousands of dollars for my trip. I have to work for years in order to help him pay back the debt." Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman*, 117.
35. The photo is found in Lewis Karabatsos and Robert McLeod, Jr., eds., *In Fixed in Time: Photographs of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1860-1940* (Lowell Historical Society, 1983), 40.
36. 1900 Census Manuscript and *Lowell City Directory*, 1902.
37. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman*, 113; Yu, *To Save China, To Save Ourselves*, 28.
38. For details concerning this raid, see K. Scott Wong, "'The Eagle Seeks a Helpless Quarry': Chinatown, the Police, and the Press, the 1903 Boston Chinatown Raid Revisited," *Amerasia Journal* 22:3 (1996):81-103.
39. Chinese could claim American-born status by going through the court system and producing witnesses of their birth. In addition to showing property ownership, this was another way to obtain return certificates to

the United States after a visit to China.

40. United States Department of Commerce and Labor, Immigration Service, Immigration File 2500/705-C.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman*, 1.

43. *Records of John Street Congregational Church, Lowell, Massachusetts*, vol. 3 (University of Massachusetts Lowell, Center for Lowell History), 94.

44. *Manual of the Kirk Street Church, Lowell, Massachusetts*, 3rd ed., 1899 (Kirk Street Church, Lowell, Massachusetts), 56

45. G. W. Hunt, ed., *Historical Sketch of the First Baptist Church, Lowell, Massachusetts: Centennial Anniversary* (Lowell, Mass.: Courier-Citizen Co., 1926), 71-72.

46. *Register Books, 1888-1921* (First Baptist Church, Lowell, Massachusetts).

47. *Lowell Courier-Citizen*, October 23, 1909.

48. *Golden Anniversary, 1873-1923* (Fifth Street Baptist Church School, Lowell, Massachusetts).

49. *Lowell Daily Courier*, January 23, 1898.

50. *Lowell Daily Courier*, December 28, 1905 and *Lowell Courier-Citizen*, November 9, 1918.

51. *Lowell Courier-Citizen*, March 15, 1935.

52. *Lowell Courier-Citizen*, June 7, 1918.

53. *Lowell Courier-Citizen*, February 15, 1917. Wong Quon's name appeared as Wong Quong in this newspaper report.

54. *Lowell Courier-Citizen*, August 24, 1915.

55. *Lowell Courier-Citizen*, October 8, 1921.

56. *Lowell Courier-Citizen*, November 9, 1903 and 1920 Census Manuscript.

57. Chin Lee Menu is in the Archives of

the Lowell Historical Society.

58. Advertisement in *Lowell City Directory*, 1914.

59. Advertisement in *Lowell City Directory*, 1913.

60. Advertisement in *Lowell City Directory*, 1914.

61. The postcard is in the Center for Lowell History.

62. *Lowell City Directory*, 1917 and *Lowell Courier-Citizen*, October 7, 1921.

63. *Massachusetts Decisions*, Vols. 92-96 (July 1910-January 1912) (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, and Company, 1937), 558-560.

64. *Lowell Sunday Telegram*, February 28, 1926.

65. Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax: Faust Part Three* (New York, Grove Press, Inc., 1959), 7, 103.

66. *Lowell Courier-Citizen*, March 30, 1937.

67. 1920 Census Manuscript.

68. United States Department of Labor, Immigration Service, Immigration File #2500/2325.

69. For impact of the Immigration Act of 1924 on Chinese Americans, see Chen, *Being Chinese, Becoming Chinese American*, 148-56.

70. U.S. Department of Labor, Immigration Service, Immigration File 2500/2325. In Lowell newspapers, Lee Ah Jim's name was misspelled as Lee Kin and Chin Lee. *Lowell Courier-Citizen*, January 20, 1926 and *The Lowell Sun*, November 24, 1925.

71. *The Lowell Sun*, November 24, 1925.

72. *Ibid.*

73. *The Lowell Sun*, January 20, 1926 and *Lowell Courier-Citizen*, January 20, 1926.

74. Interview with Lillian Burbank, January 22, 2001.

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Ibid.*

77. Julia I. Hsuan Chen observed that many American-born Chinese children in New York Chinatown were “anxious to get ahead of their classmate (in American schools), while their attitude toward the Chinese learning is indifferent.” Julia I. Hsuan Chen, *The Chinese Community in New York: A Study in Their Cultural Adjustment, 1920-1940*, (San Francisco: R. and E. Research Associates, 1974), 80; Thomas Chinn, who grew up in San Francisco Chinatown, said in an interview that “he went to the Chinese-language school “only halfheartedly, and generally playing truant.” Thomas W. Chinn, “A Historian’s Reflections on Chinese-American Life in San Francisco, 1919-1991.” (Oral history conducted in 1990 and 1991 by Ruth Teiser, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, 1993), 24.

78. Interview with Susan Fortier, March 8, 2002.

79. *Ibid.*

80. Laurence F. Gross, “The Game Is Played Out: The Closing Decades of the Boott Mill,” in Robert Weible, ed., *The Continuing Revolution: A History of Lowell, Massachusetts* (Lowell Historical Society, 1991), 282.

81. Marc Miller, “Who Won the War?” *Ibid.*, 314.

82. Interview with Susan Fortier, March 8, 2002.

83. *The Lowell Sun*, February 17, 1957; the business disappeared from *Lowell City Directory*, 1958.

84. *Lowell City Directory*, 1966, 1968, and 1975.

85. Him Mark Lai, Cong huaqiao dao huaren, Ershi shiji Meiguo huaren shehui

fazhan shi (*From Overseas Chinese to Chinese Americans: A Social History of the Chinese in the United States in the Twentieth Century*), (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian youxian gongsi, 1992), 393-394.

86. *Congressional Record*, 78th Congress, 1st session, 1943, vol. 89, part 6, 8594.

87. *Lowell City Directory*, 1956.

88. Cathay Garden menu, May 1956. I thank Al Gregoire for giving me a xeroxed copy of the menu. Cathay Garden advertisement in *Lowell City Directory*, 1968.

89. *The Lowell Sun*, June 18, 1972.

90. *The Lowell Sun*, January 23, 2002 and *Boston Globe*, January 27, 2002.

91. Interview with Lillian Burbank, January 22, 2001.

92. Imogene Lim and John Eng-Wong, “Chow Mein Sandwiches: Chinese American Entrepreneurship in Rhode Island,” *Origins and Destinations: 41 Essays on Chinese America* (Chinese Historical Society of Southern California and UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1994), 425.

93. *The Lowell Sun*, June 18, 1972.

94. The letter is in author’s possession.

95. Interview tapes are in author’s possession.

96. *Lowell City Directory*, 1968 and 1975.

97. *Verizon Superpages*, Lowell Area, 2001-2002.

98. Him Mark Lai, “Chinese American History: Achievement, Problems, and Prospects,” *Origins and Destinations*, 26.

