

Introduction

Rethinking Chinese Chicago

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

—Lyrics by Sammy Cahn, music by Jimmy van Heusen

Chicago is a city of hope and promise. Situated in the heartland of America, favored with land, water, rail, and air transportation advantages, and populated by vibrant multiethnic communities, it attracts thousands of people from all across the country who seek to realize their dreams. Barack Obama, a graduate of Columbia University in New York, came to Chicago in the summer of 1985 and worked as a community organizer on the far South Side of the city, thus starting his political journey to the presidency. His historic victory in the 2008 presidential election was a spectacular manifestation of the fulfillment of the American dream through the promise of Chicago.¹

The vast opportunities presented by Chicago were evident to newcomers even more than a century ago. The city has attracted hundreds of thousands of immigrants from around the world; since the mid-nineteenth century, Canadians, Germans, English, Irish, Scottish, Swedish, Norwegians, Poles, and Italians have poured into the city over time, making it a truly multiethnic community. For the Chinese who first arrived in the 1870s, Chicago offered a growing and attractive economic landscape. Here the Chinese initially established a small but lively community in the downtown Loop area (the downtown business district coinciding with the old cable car service area). Chinese grocery stores, laundries, restaurants, and community asso-

ciations sustained the residents of early Chinatown. Less than two decades later, the small Chinese community of nearly 2,000 was so successful that it sponsored the “Chinese Village” in the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, taking the place of the Chinese Qing government, which was boycotting the fair in protest against the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The success of the Chinese Village helped promote China, Chinese culture, and especially the financial abilities of the Chinese merchants who financed the Chinese Village at a key historic moment when American politicians were debating US expansion into the Pacific.

The anti-Chinese sentiments prevalent in the country, embodied in the Chinese exclusion acts since the 1880s, affected relations between the Chinese and the larger society even in Chicago. In the 1910s, downtown property owners raised rents, making it difficult for Chinese businesses to survive and forcing the vast majority of the Chinese to move to the city’s South Side in search of cheaper properties. On the South Side, the Chinese soon established a new Chinatown, known as South Chinatown today, which remains a major tourist attraction of the city.

Since the 1970s, the influx of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia has revitalized the Argyle Street area on the North Side, which has become known as North Chinatown. Meanwhile, the suburban Chinese communities have also been growing rapidly. Today, more than 100,000 Chinese Americans live in the Chicago area. From the gift shops, grocery stores and supermarkets, restaurants and bakeries, herb stores, medical clinics, insurance agencies, real estate agencies, and accountants in Chinatown, to the Argonne National Laboratory, Fermi Lab, Abbott Laboratories, Motorola, the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, the Illinois Institute of Technology, and many other research institutions, universities, and colleges in the suburbs and nearby, Chinese Chicagoans are making valuable contributions to the larger society.

What attracted the Chinese to Chicago? How did they integrate into this communications and commercial center? How did they survive in this multiracial and multicultural industrial “jungle”? This study attempts to address these questions by exploring the history of the Chinese in Chicago from the three Moy brothers to the present-day Chinese Chicagoans and their transnational links to the homeland.

Legacy of the "Chicago School" and Beyond

Upon joining the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago in 1914, where he teamed up with other like-minded colleagues such as Ernest Watson Burgess, Homer Hoyt, and Louis Wirth, Robert Ezra Park developed his theory of assimilation, as it pertained to immigrants in the United States, into an approach to urban sociology that became known as the "Chicago School." The sociology professors and their students at the University of Chicago were deeply interested in "the social and economic forces at work in the slums and their effect in influencing the social and personal organization of those who lived there" and were actively involved in studies on settlement houses and ethnic communities.² Coinciding with the federally funded Works Progress Administration (WPA) in place in 1935, many joint WPA–Department of Sociology projects were launched, and consequently, numerous scholarly works on Chicago's poor neighborhoods were completed, among them Nels Anderson's *The Hobo*, on homeless men in the city; Louis Wirth's study of Jews, *The Ghetto*; and Clifford Shaw's study of a young delinquent, *The Jack-Roller* (see Chapter 2 for details on these works). Some students recruited to study the "Oriental Problem" investigated the socioeconomic conditions in Chicago's Chinatown.³ Their theses and dissertations, together with publications of students and scholars in other universities of the region, provide a solid base for studies on Chinese Americans in Chicago as well as in the rest of the country (see Chapter 6 for details on these works).

The existing literature on the Chinese in Chicago addresses the issues of assimilation, social behavior, occupational mobility, landscape, and linguistic diversity but lacks a fuller treatment of the nature and effects of transnational interactions on Chinese Chicagoans.⁴ Historical records have indicated significant contacts with the homeland that impacted both the immigrants and the societies at home. This book will try to fill some of the gaps in our knowledge about Chinese Chicagoans. More specifically, it will address the following pertinent questions: How was the transnational migration reflected in native places, such as in land purchased; in houses, schools, and hospitals constructed with remittances from overseas Chinese; in written records of genealogies, gazetteers, and overseas Chinese magazines and in academic writings? How did the Chinese navigate a city marked with

sharp racial divisions? How did transnational migration affect the formation of family and community? Situated in a midwestern metropolis and hub of transportation, what role did Chicago Chinese communities play in the regional and national economy?

There are rich and abundant anthropological, archeological, archival, cultural, and intellectual resources in the native places of coastal China that have yet to be widely used by Western scholars. Within the field of Asian American studies, an overwhelming majority of scholarship to date still remains centered on the American coasts, with San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, and their vicinities as the dominant sites of scholarly work.⁵ Although Chicago has been a major national and international center of attention since its birth in 1833 and rapid rise as America's "Second City" in the 1890s, the Chinese Chicagoans have remained relatively understudied. Thus, constructing a Midwest-focused but transnationally comprehensive and comparative study that encompasses race, migration, and community for the nearly century-and-a-half history of Chinese Chicago will be valuable for broadening the understanding of immigration to the Midwest and of the Chinese in the Midwest in particular.

Themes of the Book:

Race, Transnational Migration, and Community

This book focuses on three crucial issues that define the Chinese in Chicago: race, transnational migration, and community. First, it examines how the Chinese have dealt with the complex mix of race and ethnicity in the city. Second, it investigates how transnational migration has penetrated all aspects of the Chinese experience in Chicago. Third, it shows how the Chinese community in Chicago has never been simple and monolithic but always culturally, geographically, linguistically, politically, and socioeconomically complex and diverse.

RACE: SURVIVING THE JUNGLE

In the ethnically complex city of Chicago, the Chinese occupy a delicate position in terms of racial relations. In the early years of the Chinese settlement, the small community was overshadowed by other, more populous

ethnic groups including the Germans, Danes, Irish, Poles, Swedes, Jews, and Italians. As a quiet and exotic people, they were initially tolerated by the local residents and welcomed by the Christian missionaries. However, Chicago was not immune to the overall climate of anti-Chinese hostility prevalent in the country as the Chinese exclusion laws were enforced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Chicago, anti-Chinese prejudice and racial tensions propelled local landlords in the 1910s to raise property rents—a form of economic sanction against the Chinese, whose population now reached nearly two thousand. The Chinese opted to relocate to avoid the tension and potential conflicts. In the new Chinatown on the South Side after 1912, they shared neighborhoods first with the Italians and later with blacks who migrated from the American South. There both racial tension and racial harmony characterized relations between the Chinese and their Italian and black neighbors. While there were incidents in which Chinese were called names and were made fun of for their physical appearance by Italians, there were also cases in which strong friendships and bonds formed between Chinese families and their Italian neighbors, and it was also not uncommon for blacks to be hired in Chinese laundries and other businesses.

In Chicago, the Chinese successfully managed to navigate the multiethnic “jungle” by consciously avoiding racial conflicts, by creating and maintaining an insulated ethnic enclave that was largely self-governed, and by cultivating friendships with local authorities.⁶ Since the 1960s, the new community leaders have made concerted efforts to bridge Chinatown communities and the larger society. Meanwhile, Chinese professionals are successfully mingling with other ethnic groups at work and in suburban residential communities. The various strategies employed by Chinese Chicagoans in different historical periods indicate their instinct for survival as well as their conscious efforts to adapt and assimilate.

TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION: A VITAL LINK

Since the 1990s, a growing number of scholars have noted that immigrants have lived their lives across geographical borders and maintained close ties to home. A number of social scientists have begun to use the term “transnational” to describe such cross-national, cross-cultural phenomena. Anthropologists Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton (1992)

have analyzed and conceptualized transnational migration in more precise language. They define “transnationalism” as “the emergence of a social process in which migrants establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. Immigrants are understood to be transmigrants when they develop and maintain multiple relations—familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political—that span borders. . . . The multiplicity of migrants’ involvements in both the home and host societies is a central element of transnationalism.”⁷ Since then, writers from various disciplines have further delineated and evaluated the theorization of transnationalism.⁸ As the concept of transnationalism has become a compelling theoretical framework for interpreting manifestations of international migration, a number of historians have also endorsed the idea in their monographs.⁹ In their view, transnationalism offers a richer interpretation of Chinese migration by focusing on both native place and host society. At the same time, scholars have also cautioned against the overuse or “abuse” of the term.¹⁰

This study finds that the Chinese in Chicago have been closely linked with the transnational migration network. Chinese ethnic businesses, from the very beginning, were closely connected to the transnational ethnic economy. In all aspects of business, including capital accumulation, procurement of inventory, business operation, and distribution of merchandise, they have depended on the transnational ethnic network. Although located in the hinterland, the Chinese in Chicago have thus been connected to the homeland and other Chinese communities across the country; and the Chinese ethnic economy in Chicago has also served as a vital socioeconomic link to other Chinese communities in the Midwest, largely thanks to the city’s transportation advantages and their transnational connections.

Like Chinese businesses, the lives of Chinese families in Chicago have also been impacted by transnational migration. Money remitted to the homeland by the Chinese in Chicago sustained family members, purchased land, and constructed new houses. Continuing transnational connections with the homeland enabled immigrants to support their trans-Pacific families. To cope with marital separation caused by immigration, a special marital arrangement was invented and practiced within many early families. I conceptualize it as “transnational split marriage—Taishanese ‘widow’ and American concubine.” Under such an arrangement, the wife of an immigrant stayed

in the native village to take care of children and in-laws, while a concubine, often chosen by the wife or parents of the immigrant, accompanied the immigrant to the foreign land.

COMMUNITY: DIVERGENCE AND CONVERGENCE

Chicago Chinese communities have been a battleground where interest groups with diverse and sometimes competing and conflicting lineal, geographical, cultural, social, and political orientations have clashed, compromised, and collaborated. The earliest divisions and conflicts emerged among the major clans of the community—the Moys, the Chins, and the Wongs—for economic gain and political influence. The lineal divisions soon evolved into organizational contentions for community power structures: On Leong versus Hip Sing, and later the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) versus the newer community service organizations. While all power groups vied for attention from the major political parties in the homeland, whether it be the Emperor Protection Association (Baohuang Hui) or the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) prior to 1949, the retreat of the Nationalist Party and government to Taiwan and the founding of the People's Republic of China by the Communist Party in 1949 resulted in divided loyalty among the Chinese in Chicago, similar to what transpired in other Chinese communities across the country. The post-1949 political confrontation between Taiwan and mainland China also divided the community into pro-Taiwan, or pro-Nationalist, and pro-China groups. The influx of ethnic Chinese refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos following the fall of Saigon in 1975 further complicated the situation, contributing to the expansion of the multiethnic transnational Chinatown on the North Side. The geographical diversity was further enhanced when suburban Chinese Americans formed “cultural communities” beginning in the 1970s, and a working-class Chinese community in Bridgeport expanded South Chinatown in the 1990s. The tripartite division into South Chinatown, North Chinatown, and suburban cultural communities has made the Chinese communities in “Chicagoland” complex and conflicting. Yet in the interest of best serving each group's needs and demands, community organizations have realized the importance of cooperation and collaboration and have strived to bring Chinese Chicagoans together under a common identity as Chinese Americans.

Highlights of the Book

This book covers important historical developments in the Chinese communities of Chicago from the arrival of the three Moy brothers in the 1870s to the present day, highlighting the establishment of transnational communities between the 1870s and 1940s and their transformation in the postwar period. Chapter 1 traces the roots of the transnational community in Chicago from both macroscopic and microscopic perspectives. In a broad sense, the unique position of Guangdong Province, with its ports well developed for international trade and its residents well accustomed to a long tradition of domestic migration and overseas emigration, made it a major source of Chinese emigrants to other parts of the world. The invasion of China by Western industrialized powers and the country's natural calamities in the mid-nineteenth century pushed the local residents to the brink of economic disaster. The lure of gold and other economic opportunities in America attracted hundreds of thousands of Chinese to the new land. The Moys, one of the major clans among the early Chinese immigrants in Chicago, provide a good example of how the patrilineal network assisted and perpetuated transnational migration.

Chapter 2 examines in depth the emergence of the early Chinatown in the multiethnic industrial center of Chicago. It relates how the community gingerly navigated the racial thicket, through a combination of self-government and the maintenance of amicable relationships with local political and law enforcement authorities. It also investigates the early rivalry between the Moys and the Wongs, which cast an adverse shadow of "tong fighting" over an otherwise mostly homogeneous and harmonious community. It then discusses the root causes for the relocation of the early Chinese community from the Loop area to the South Side.

Chapter 3 examines the transnational economic activities of Chinatown. Without English-language and other skills necessary for competition in the larger labor market, the Chinese carved out niche businesses primarily including hand laundries, grocery and general merchandise stores, and restaurants and chop suey shops. Transnational ethnic networks were essential for the sustenance and success of these businesses. Consistent with Chicago's unique position as a transportation hub, the Chinatown businesses served as a center for regional socioeconomic development. Prostitution and gambling were also part of the Chinatown economy. Although considered as

vice, they were inevitable in a gender-imbalanced immigrant community, serving as substitutes for an absent family life and as recreation after a long week of toil in a laundry, grocery store, or chop suey shop.

Chapter 4 discusses the marriage patterns and family structures of the community. Three patterns emerged among the Chinese families: (1) the transnational split marriage already mentioned; (2) traditional Chinese marriage; and (3) American-style urban marriages: love unions, interracial marriages, and widow remarriages. The first was a practical arrangement devised by the Chinese to cope with the marital separation due to transnational migration. The second was common among Chinese restaurateurs, grocers, and lottery house keepers, all of whom were merchants exempted from the Chinese exclusion acts and consequently permitted to bring their families with them or send for their wives later. The marriages in the third category were natural products of American life. The chapter also argues that a large gap in age between husband and wife and large family size both characterized the families of the first two types. Life in America also elevated the position of most Chinese women to that of family head, co-provider, and joint decision maker.

Chapter 5 examines the social organizations of the transnational community and their significance in bridging Chinatown, the homeland, and American society. Self-government was a predominant feature of Chinatown prior to the 1960s. On Leong, Hip Sing, the CCBA, and family associations were transplantations of traditional Chinese social organizations. They constituted the early social landscape of the community and endeavored to maintain transnational ties between the immigrant communities on American soil and the native places in the homeland. At the same time, the community also adopted or hybridized American values and established progressive trade and social organizations, Christian churches, Chinese-language schools, and newspapers, connecting Chinatown communities with the larger American society as well as the homeland.

The rich intellectual legacy of the Chinese in Chicago is the focus of Chapter 6. It first provides a collective portrait of Chinese students and intellectuals and then explores the intellectual contributions made by students and scholars in Chicago and nearby regions. It divides the literature on Chinese Chicago into three periods, analyzing the large body of literature produced by the pioneer scholars from the 1920s and 1930s, wartime and postwar scholars from the 1940s to the 1960s, and the more diverse scholars of the city in the years following the 1960s.

Chapter 7 traces and analyzes the emergence and evolution of the newer Chinatown on the North Side, the Chinese cultural communities in the suburbs, and the expansion of South Chinatown, along with the development in Bridgeport that has become part of South Chinatown in recent decades. The tripartite division of Chinese Chicago poses serious challenges. To secure the communities' existence and to promote their further development, various cross-ethnic and cross-cultural community organizations have been formed and are diligently working toward a common goal—celebrating a multiethnic Chicago.

Finally, the Epilogue looks at the “hollow center” phenomenon in the homeland.

Significance of This Study

This book is significant for a number of reasons. Most notably, it is the first comprehensive study of the Chinese in Chicago. While earlier studies have provided valuable information on the subject—see, for example, Tin-Chiu Fan's thesis “Chinese Residents in Chicago” (1926), Paul C. P. Siu's dissertation “The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Isolation” and its publication in 1987 edited by John Kuo Wei Tchen, and Adam McKeown's *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900–1936*—none so far has encompassed the complete history of the Chinese communities of Chicago from the beginning to the present in a single volume. Building on previous work and utilizing primary sources in both English and Chinese—in particular the Immigration and Naturalization Service's Chicago Chinese Case Files (CCCCF) at the National Archives Records Administration—Great Lakes Region (Chicago); the Ernest Watson Burgess Papers at the University of Chicago; local newspapers; oral history interviews; sources from the Chicago History Museum and the Chinese-American Museum of Chicago; and Chinese genealogies, gazetteers, and local and regional overseas Chinese magazines—this book reconstructs Chinese Chicago's history over nearly a century and a half. The book's extensive use of Chinese sources in addition to English sources is intended to provide a more transnationalistic, global view of Chinese emigration to America, from not only a Western but also a Chinese perspective. The incorporation of Chinese scholarship on overseas Chinese

expands the field of Asian American studies, while making these primary sources available to readers who are unable to access sources in the Chinese language.

This book is also the first comparative study of the Chinese in Chicago. It places the Chinese in the broader contexts of transnational migration and multiethnic Chicago and compares and contrasts the Chinese in Chicago with Chinese immigrants in other areas of the United States. It also compares Chinatown with other poor ethnic neighborhoods in Chicago as presented in Nels Anderson's study of the homeless, Louis Wirth's study of Jews, and Clifford Shaw's work on a young delinquent.

Additionally, this book contributes to the continuing theoretical discourse on transnationalism and migration. Centered on the theme of transnational migration, it examines elements that connect Chicago with coastal China. It also looks closely at the role Chicago has played as a vital link within transnational networks of migration and the translocal migration movement and converses with other significant works on Chinese transnational migration.¹¹ Finally, this book contributes significantly to ethnic urban studies on the American Midwest. Its data and interpretations provide refreshing and invaluable resources on this region for scholarly research, for public understanding, and for both governmental and private policy making for urban planning and development.