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## **Exclusive Dining: Immigration and Restaurants in Chicago during the Era of Chinese Exclusion, 1893-1933**

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Exclusive Dining: Immigration and Restaurants in Chicago during the Era of Chinese  
Exclusion, 1893-1933

by

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## Abstract

The central aim of this project is to describe and explicate the process by which the status of Chinese restaurants in the United States underwent a dramatic and complete reversal in American consumer culture between the 1890s and the 1930s. In pursuit of this aim, this research demonstrates the connection that historically existed between restaurants, race, immigration, and foreign affairs during the Chinese Exclusion era. The movement of Chinese American restaurants and cuisine from the fringes to the center of white consumer culture was not a process dictated exclusively by the tastes of non-Chinese Americans or by the ability of Chinese immigrants to craft new cuisines to cater to a Western palate. Rather, these sites of cultural exchange and contest between immigrants and the native society were also spaces in which forces from deep within the historical American psyche and from far beyond the country's borders came to bear upon the consumption patterns of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Chicagoans.

Instead of attributing principal causal significance for the sudden popularity of Chinese American cuisine in the 1890s and beyond to the celebrity status of a particular Chinese minister, the palatability of chop suey, or the culture of empire ascendant in this period, I argue that the American desire to consume Chinese restaurant fare emanated from a larger, deeper, and resurgent enthusiasm for China and Chinese cultural products more broadly. I term this enthusiasm, grounded in the particular image that Americans held of China as an economic and political entity, *Sinophilia*. “*Sinophilia*” here does not

refer simply to a superficial affection for China as part of a larger exotic “Orient,” but instead describes a long-standing aspect of American culture, which attached a unique emotional significance to China, reflecting a belief in a special relationship between the United States and the Middle Kingdom. Assigning historical significance to this facet of American consumer culture shifts the analytical focus in the literature on Chinese restaurant history away from the contents of restaurant menus and towards the broader, more unique position that restaurants as sites of cultural consumption held in the American psyche.

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## Introduction

Chinese restaurants occupy a peculiar position in American culture. On the one hand, they are an almost universal feature of American life. As Heather 8. Lee has documented, there are today more than 40,000 of the eateries in the United States, “more than the number of McDonald’s, Burger Kings, and KFC combined.”<sup>1</sup> There is hardly a city or town in the United States or Canada that does not feature at least one Chinese restaurant, even if it is one that barely seats a dozen customers. From the Pacific Northwest to the southernmost tip of the Florida peninsula, there are very few areas where Americans are unable to acquire Chinese food whenever they crave it.

By the same token, it is difficult to find an American today, especially in major cities like New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles, who has not eaten Chinese food at least once. The cuisine is a hallmark of American traditions like Jewish American Christmas dinners, popular culture, and even pseudoscience. Americans recognize jokes about Chinese food (that it does not satisfy hunger for more than an hour, that it includes cat meat, etc.), worry about the health concerns surrounding Chinese food (that it is alarmingly high in sodium, that one can suffer “Chinese Restaurant Syndrome” from eating it, etc.), and continually ponder if there is more “authentic” Chinese food to be had in some little-known restaurant that only cultural insiders are aware of. Although the

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer 8 Lee, *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles: Adventures in the World of Chinese Food*, Reprint edition (New York: Twelve, 2009), 9.

common culinary means of describing something's culturally American status is to compare it to apple pie, when one considers the relative frequency with which the two foods are consumed, it can seem more apropos to say that something is as American as Chinese food rather than as American as apple pie.

On the other hand, few other mainstays of American culture are saddled with the baggage and stereotypes that Chinese restaurants suffer. Racially tinged characterizations of the eateries describe them as inevitably unclean, unsavory, and unhealthy. One need look no further than the controversy that erupted in April of 2019 at a New York restaurant called Lucky Lee's, wherein the owner made a point of marketing her restaurant's Chinese food as "clean" and insinuated that other Chinese food leaves diners feeling "bloated and icky." Only two years prior to this incident, a Canadian video game developer was set to release a new title unfortunately named "Dirty Chinese Restaurant." Although both Lucky Lee's and the video game developer were met with significant pushback and outrage when word of their actions broke, that they found grounds to undertake these actions at all speaks to the pervasive, if not always visible, stereotypes leveled against Chinese American eateries.

These stereotypes reflect nearly two centuries of racism and xenophobia targeting Chinese Americans and the restaurants they created. As far back as 1850, newspapers in San Francisco accused the city's Chinese restaurants of serving dog meat, dealing in narcotics, and enslaving white women. Such depictions did not diminish throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but instead spread out to other American cities, following the paths of Chinese restaurants as they moved across the country.

Yet, despite such stereotypes, Chinese restaurants did eventually become normalized features of American society. From dens of iniquity and cultural corruption, Chinese restaurants suddenly and dramatically transformed into mainstream sites of adventurous eating at the turn of the twentieth century. From this point, they gradually coalesced into conventional sources of typical American fare by the end of the Chinese Exclusion era. By the turn of the twenty-first century, Chinese restaurants and their offerings have become entrenched in nearly every corner of American culture.

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The central aim of this project is to describe and explicate the process by which the understanding and status of Chinese restaurants in the United States underwent such a dramatic and complete reversal in American consumer culture. In pursuit of this aim, this research also demonstrates the connection that historically existed between restaurants, race, culture, Orientalism, immigration, and foreign affairs during the Chinese Exclusion era. The movement of Chinese American restaurants and cuisine from the fringes to the center of white consumer culture was not a process dictated exclusively by the taste buds of non-Chinese Americans or by the ability of Chinese immigrants to craft new cuisines to cater to a Western palate. Although these factors certainly contributed to the arching history of Chinese restaurants in America, these sites of cultural exchange and contest between Chinese immigrants and the native society were also spaces in which forces from deep within the historical American psyche and from far beyond the country's borders came to bear upon the consumption patterns of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Chicagoans. The travails of American missionaries in China, the successes and failures of American soldiers during the Boxer Uprising, the legal status of

Chinese American immigrants, and the ambiguous nature of racial identity all determined to a significant extent the status and popularity of Chinese restaurants and cuisine in the United States.

With this analytical approach, this dissertation intervenes in the relatively narrow literature on the history of Chinese restaurants and their shifting status in the early twentieth century by arguing for a different explanation for their historical rise in popularity than those put forward by other scholars. Instead of attributing principal causal significance for the sudden popularity of Chinese American cuisine in the 1890s and beyond to the celebrity status of a particular Chinese minister, the palatability of chop suey, or the culture of empire and Orientalism ascendant at the end of the nineteenth century, I argue that the American desire to consume Chinese restaurant fare emanated from a larger, deeper, and resurgent enthusiasm for China and Chinese cultural products more broadly. Put another way, the motivation Americans had for eating chop suey in the 1890s and 1900s was the same as that for drinking Chinese tea in the early nineteenth century, studying the Chinese language in the 1870s, and reading literature set in China in the 1930s. I term this general enthusiasm, grounded in the particular image that Americans held of China as an economic, political, and cultural entity, *Sinophilia*. “*Sinophilia*” here does not refer simply to a superficial affection for China as part of a larger exotic “*Orient*,” but instead describes a long-standing aspect of American culture and ideology, which has attached a unique emotional significance to China and to Chinese culture, reflecting a belief in a special relationship between the United States and the Middle Kingdom. More particular than a broadly encompassing Orientalism, *Sinophilia* in American history has been predicated on holding China in unique regard,

resulting in Chinese culture and commodities enjoying a distinct status among American consumers. Assigning historical significance to this facet of American consumer culture shifts the analytical focus in the literature on Chinese restaurant history away from the physical contents of restaurant menus and towards the broader, more unique position that restaurants as sites of cultural consumption held in the American psyche.

This framework also works to emphasize the relative uniqueness with which scholars must approach the Chinese restaurant in American history. Lumping Chinese restaurants together with other ethnic eateries of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries becomes inadequate and wanting when consideration is given to the peculiar status that Chinese culture held among Americans. The impulses that led diners to patronize Italian and German restaurants, or those eateries run by black migrants from the South, were never fully the same as the impulses that fueled the patronage of Chinese restaurants. As Chinese culture was the object of special desire among American consumers, and as Chinese restaurants amounted to consumable embodiments of Chinese culture, understanding the history of these establishments requires an analysis that places them in a category of their own.

Overall, this dissertation contributes to the broader study of Chinese restaurants across multiple disciplines principally by introducing new analytical frameworks and reinforcing the utility of others. First, my research introduces the concept of Sinophilia to the field and emphasizes the special status that Chinese culture, and Chinese restaurants in particular, held in American history. Rather than eliding the exotic, titillating, or threatening status that Chinese restaurants held for various Americans at different times in history with those of other ethnic eateries in the United States, such an approach

underscores the relative unique position that Chinese restaurants held vis-à-vis other immigrant-run restaurants. Second, this research adds further nuance to the explanations scholars frequently give for key events and changes in restaurant history. Rather than place surface-level aspects of restaurants and dining culture, such as the palatability of foodstuffs, at the center of historical interpretation, this dissertation reveals the less visible dynamics at work in driving the consumption habits of early twentieth-century American urbanites. Building on the work of scholars like Heather Lee, Yong Chen, Erica Peters, and James Loewen, this project places race, space, class, immigration, and foreign affairs at the forefront of explicating the changing status of Chinese restaurants during the Exclusion era. Finally, through such analytical prioritizing, this dissertation further illuminates the often-downplayed connections between the patronage of restaurants and consumption, foreign policy, immigration legislation, and racial interaction.

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To answer these questions and make these interventions, I situate my research into the history of Chinese restaurants during the Exclusion era in Chicago from 1893 to 1933. Although I examine events and developments that drift beyond these chronological barriers, I choose these starting and stopping dates as they correspond to two useful bookends to the historical process of Chinese restaurants' shifting cultural status: the 1893's World's Columbian Exposition, in which the restaurant featured in the Chinese Village drew considerable attention and represented a novel means of catering Chinese culture to non-Chinese patrons; and the 1933 Century of Progress International

Exposition, in which the Chinese restaurant situated on the fairgrounds garnered almost no interest at all from fairgoers and observers.

Within this research, I focus specifically on Chinese restaurants as sites of cultural production and digestion. More than any other type of business established by Chinese immigrants in the United States, Chinese restaurants amounted to consumable embodiments of Chinese (or at least “Oriental”) culture. In my analysis, the contents of these restaurant spaces, including the food that was served, the décor that was arranged on the walls and tables, and the bodies that were included in and excluded from the interiors, form legible cultural texts that inform patrons’ understanding of what they consumed in these cultural spaces. Rather than treat restaurants as structures within which Chinese food was served, I conceptualize these establishments within my analytical framework as cultural embodiments, as consumable spaces in and of themselves. “Eating Chinese” did not simply amount to the act of taking in chop suey, chow mein, or bird’s nest soup. To patronize a Chinese restaurant, it was thought, was to be transported to a different world, to experience the sensation of taking part in Chinese culture, and to be exposed to an otherwise corrupting Eastern influence while (ideally) avoiding the negative consequences of such corruption. Like yellowface (and blackface) performances of plays about Chinese people, Chinese restaurants offered the possibility of consuming a disembodied Chinese culture, of “safely [transmuting] anxieties about becoming like the Chinese...into the pleasures of temporary racial masquerade.”<sup>2</sup>

Relying as well on newspapers, magazines, and city directories, I also analyze the cultural and spatial milieu in which these restaurants were physically and culturally

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<sup>2</sup> Ju Yon Kim, *The Racial Mundane: Asian American Performance and the Embodied Everyday* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2015), 49–50.

situated, emphasizing that the way in which non-Chinese Americans conceptualized and understood these spaces was significantly informed by factors other than the creative actions of restaurateurs themselves. The ornamented buildings in which the restaurants were situated, the sights, sounds, and tastes that patrons experienced within their walls, the rumors and whispers that informed what urbanites imagined to be going on inside those walls, the geopolitical status of the country of which the restaurants were said to be representative: these all helped to create what Americans believed they could consume by patronizing a Chinese restaurant.

There are a number of reasons for choosing to base this research project in Chicago. First, in the grand scheme of Asian American history, Chicago is relatively underrepresented. Although major works that address the history of Asians in Chicago exist, including Huping Ling's *Chinese Chicago* and Adam McKeown's *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change*, the city is not studied with anywhere near the frequency of sites like New York and San Francisco. Although the size of Chicago's historical Chinese population as compared to those in New York and San Francisco would seem to justify this disparity in coverage, much is lost by assuming that the Chinese experience in Chicago can be equated to that on the eastern and western coasts of the country. Second, Chicago itself represents a most useful site of any examination of American history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for its peculiar property of being both nationally representative yet comparatively unique. The city was representative in the sense that it was in many ways a microcosm of the changes that wrought the United States in this period. As Adam Mack puts it, "the city embodied the economic and demographic growth that characterized the United States in decades following the Civil War:

Chicago's population growth, economic expansion, and rapid change were common characteristics of the industrial city."<sup>3</sup> At the same time, Chicago is also unique in the sense that it offers such stark examples of these processes for historical analysis. The social, political, and economic developments that occurred in older American cities like New York took place on a much more condensed temporal and geographic scale in Chicago. Instead of developing over centuries, Chicago coalesced into a major modern American city in a matter of decades. It thus represents, in many ways, a petri dish of modern American history.

Chicago serves as a particularly useful examination site for the study of the history of race and immigration. For one, historians of Chicago have often designated the city as an immigrant city, one in which its neighborhoods, politics, culture, and identity have been marked by waves upon waves of new arrivals. Irish, German, Italian, Polish, Czech, Greek, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Indian, and Swedish immigrants, as well as black migrants from the American South, have all made their mark on the history and culture of Chicago. There are few urban locales in the eastern half of the United States that offer a better vantage point for the historical process of immigration and its impact on American consumer culture than the Windy City. For another, the presence of distinct racial and ethnic neighborhoods, marked by rigidly defined and defended spatial boundaries, render the analysis of Chinese restaurants as racialized spaces significantly easier to carry out in a city like Chicago. It is nearly perfectly catered to research into the intersection between race, immigration, foreign affairs, and consumption in an urban environment.

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<sup>3</sup> Adam Mack, *Sensing Chicago: Noisemakers, Strikebreakers, and Muckrakers* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 8.

## Chapter One

The first chapter serves two principal purposes. The first is to provide relevant and extensive background on Chinese migration to the United States in the nineteenth century, on Chinese migration *out* of the West to Chicago and other locations in the eastern half of the country, on the anti-Chinese movement and effects of the Chinese Exclusion Acts, and on the emergence of Chinese restaurants in eastern Chinatowns. On this last point, I discuss the purpose that Chinese restaurants served to Chinese American communities and the process by which they were stigmatized and fetishized by non-Chinese Americans in the nineteenth century. Here I employ the concept of fetishism in which commodities are endowed with meaning and significance beyond what is inherent to them physically. It is impossible to adequately explicate how the status of Chinese restaurants changed at the turn of the twentieth century without first unpacking the particular way in which Chicagoans and other American urbanites viewed the eateries as endowed with particular traits of Chinese culture, for good or for ill. Just as French cuisine signaled the taste associated with the Francophile upper class, Chinese cuisine signaled those qualities associated with the Middle Kingdom.

The second purpose is to analyze the Chinese restaurant that was included in the Chinese Village at the World's Columbian Exposition. This represented one of the earliest and most prominent Chinese restaurants in and around Chicago to deliberately manipulate its presentation of Chinese culture to appeal to the Orientalist expectations of white Americans. I examine this restaurant as a model that other Chinese restaurants in Chicago could emulate to potentially appeal to a wider non-Chinese clientele.

## Chapter Two

This chapter analyzes the emergence of the chop suey craze, the sudden and widespread embrace of chop suey and the Chinese restaurants that served it, through the framework of Sinophilia. I argue that the chop suey craze emerged when it did in the 1890s and early 1900s in response to the emergence of an American empire in the Asia Pacific, which brought the United States into closer and closer interaction with China proper. The emergence of this American empire in the Pacific renewed American Sinophilia, which found expression in the increased patronage of Chinatown and Chinese restaurants, as well as the greater fondness for and consumption of chop suey. Arguing against scholars who have described the 1890s as marked by disillusionment with or even contempt for China, I contend that the emergence of an American empire in the Asia Pacific in the 1890s engendered a resurgence in Sinophilia, as Americans came to feel increasing proximity to and contact with China, and that this Sinophilia more adequately explains both the underlying reasons for and the particular timing of the chop suey craze.<sup>4</sup>

In assigning central significance to the emergence of the American empire in Asia to the onset of the chop suey craze, I am largely in agreement with the assessments of Andrew Coe and Yong Chen, though with certain distinctions. In his influential cultural history of Chinese food in the United States, Andrew Coe marks the chop suey craze as beginning with Li's visit to New York, but places greater importance on American cosmopolitanism and the outward-looking perspective that Americans acquired in the late 1890s as a result of their imperial activities in Asia, arguing that the Li visit "ushered in

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<sup>4</sup> Harold R. Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Images of China and India* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1958).

an era when American attention was suddenly and aggressively trained on the outside world.”<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, in his *Chop Suey, U.S.A.*, Yong Chen describes the appeal of chop suey, and of Chinese food more generally, to Americans as stemming from it being cheap, convenient, and prepared by a racial minority long associated with personal service, while the celebration of Li’s visit, and the artificial association between him and chop suey, represented a marketing ploy by Chinese American restaurateurs to boost sales of their cuisine to white consumers. In their restaurants, Chen argues, “Chinese Americans continued their designated role as personal-service providers in the emerging consumer society. In this role, they helped to extend the material abundance (in the form of lifestyle) of the empire not merely to the middle class but also to marginalized groups.”<sup>6</sup> In this dissertation, I carry these assessments a step further in explaining the chop suey craze, by emphasizing the unique place of Chinese culture in the American psyche, not just as an identifier of the type of racialized personal service the middle- and lower-classes aspired to enjoy; and by connecting American imperial activity in Asia to heightened interest in Chinese culture in particular, rather than to a more general outward-looking cosmopolitanism.

Ascribing the chop suey craze principally to a resurgent Sinophilia in the 1890s allows for a number of significant interventions to be made in the field of Chinese American food history. First, such a framework highlights the importance of Sinophilia, and Chinese culture’s special status in American consumption history, to the history of Chinese American cuisine, and distinguishes the perception and patronage of Chinese

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew Coe, *Chop Suey: A Cultural History of Chinese Food in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 165.

<sup>6</sup> Yong Chen, *Chop Suey, U.S.A.: The Story of Chinese Food in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 42.

restaurants and Chinatowns from the consumption of other ethnic restaurants and Oriental exoticisms in this period. Second, this argument corrects a tendency in the literature on Chinese restaurant history to overstate the significance of the Li Hongzhang visit. While the Li visit certainly popularized chop suey as a dish and brought increased attention to Chinese culture, the expansion of the chop suey craze beginning in 1899, well after Li's visit, as well as pervasive enthusiasm for China and Chinese culture in forms other than Chinese food in the late 1890s, indicate that a broader cultural force also underwrote the patronage of Chinese restaurants in this period. While media attention to Li helped to make chop suey famous among non-Chinese Americans, his visit was not the sole nor even the principal reason that these Americans found so much appeal in consuming Chinese culture. Finally, conceptualizing the chop suey craze as an expression of Sinophilia also highlights the mutually influential relationship between the United States' international interactions with China, and Americans' domestic consumption of Chinese culture.

### Chapter Three

This chapter examines the case study of Chin Foin's upscale Chinese restaurants in early twentieth-century Chicago and his move into an exclusive, predominantly white neighborhood on the city's South Side in 1912. At the time of the move, which coincided with the forcible relocation of the Chicago Chinatown, Chin was well known among Chicagoans as a particularly wealthy and Americanized Chinese immigrant of high class and distinction. Importantly, he was also prominently associated with the brand of upscale Chinese restaurants that he helped to pioneer in the city. Chin's restaurants

offered a supposedly Chinese dining experience to middle- and upper-class men and women in environments that were safer, more accommodating, more respectable, and more distinguished than the seedy, corruptive, and dangerous Chinese restaurants of popular imagination. In this chapter, I contend that the significant social mobility that Chin was able to accomplish in Exclusion-era Chicago was due principally to his career as a restaurateur. His restaurants significantly expanded his wealth, demonstrated his cultural competence as a provider of Oriental luxury to Chicago's discerning elite, and emphasized and solidified his social status as a distinguished and "acceptable" class of Chinese immigrant. This argument contributes to the literature on Chinese American immigration by partially applying Liu's conclusions about Chinese food in the post-1965 United States to Exclusion-era Chicago, and by countering the strain of argument within the field of Chinese immigration history that characterizes Chinese restaurants as dead-ends entirely incapable of providing for the upward mobility of Chinese immigrants. Chin's case study not only demonstrates that Chinese immigrants in the Exclusion era were not all "sojourners" who had no desire to integrate into American society, but also reveals the particular pathway for upward social mobility through the restaurant industry available to certain Chinese immigrants in this period. Due to the fetishization and popularization of Chinese restaurants during the chop suey craze, the Chinese restaurant industry in early twentieth-century Chicago offered immigrants like Chin Foin the opportunity to transform their ethnic and cultural capital, in the form not only of Chinatown's community resources but also of their own racial and class identity, into financial and social profit and to achieve a significant degree of upward mobility in the Chinese Exclusion period.

## Chapter Four

This chapter examines the comparatively mild treatment that Chinese immigrants and restaurants received from non-Chinese Chicagoans in the late 1910s and 1920s, during the time of the movement of large numbers of black Southerners to the city. My case study centers around the bombing of the Golden Lily café, one of the few instances of anti-black violence being carried out against a Chinese establishment. I use this episode, as well as the shifting view of Chinese restaurants in the 1920s, to examine the different kinds of racialization that were extended to Chinese immigrants and black migrants in Chicago. I argue that by catering to the tastes and expectations of the city's white diners, as well as participating in the exclusion of black citizens from the city's leisure spaces, Chinese restaurants in the late 1920s had become white or white-accepted spaces, situated on the white side of the era's dichotomous color line, claimed and "defended" by the city's white population. To make this argument, I rely on analytical frameworks effectively deployed in whiteness studies, as well as the pioneering work of James Loewen on the Mississippi Chinese, to adequately understand and illuminate the ambiguous status of Chinese Americans in Chicago's racial geography. Chinese restaurants in 1920s Chicago, like Chinese Mississippians in the mid-twentieth century, occupied a more nuanced position than a dichotomous racial structure would allow for. No longer the completely foreign Chinese cultural colonies of the nineteenth century, yet not so familiar as to avoid characterization as "Chinese," Chinese restaurants were normalized and exclusive, while the immigrants who ran them remained excluded in the

United States. As spaces of leisure that were made to be off-limits to black Americans, they can be considered, by some definitions, effectively white.

## Chapter Five

This chapter examines how the changing views of China in the 1930s, brought about by the publication of literature that presented the Chinese in a sympathetic light, such as Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth*, the Japanese annexation of Manchuria, and other events, impacted and influenced Chicagoans' views of Chinese immigrants and restaurants in the city. It also details the process by which Chinese food fully entered the mainstream of American mass culture, as exemplified by the success of La Choy, Fuji, and other canned Chinese food companies, as well as the pervasive characterization of chop suey as separated from its "exotic" origins. I contend that the increased attention paid to China and Chinese affairs in the 1920s and 1930s represented a period of resurgent Sinophilia in the United States, much like the one experienced in the 1890s during the rise of the American empire in the Pacific. Unlike the Sinophilia of the turn of the century, however, the Sinophile consumption that marked the 1920s and 1930s did not include any significant change in the status or popularity of Chinese restaurants and cuisine as a result. While Chinese restaurants and chop suey certainly remained widely popular in this period, they did not receive any special boost from Americans' Sinophile consumption. I argue that the absence of a second chop suey craze in the 1930s was due primarily to the normalized status of Chinese restaurants and cuisine by this time. Instead of titillating embodiments of an Oriental culture, they had now become mainstays of the typical American diet, divorced in many ways from Chinese culture and from the Chinese

immigrants that established them. I take the lack of popular excitement over and interest in the Chinese restaurant included at the 1933 World's Fair Chicago as a stark demonstration of this normalized status.

## Chapter One:

### The Fetishization of Chinese Restaurants and the 1893 World's Fair

The World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893, was a particularly elaborate affair that mixed technological innovation with cultural and racial titillation. The more spectacular exhibits were located on the principal fairgrounds and included the grand architectural displays of the White City, which has remained the most well-known aspect of the exposition. However, Chicago's world's fair was also the first to feature an area set aside for amusements, known as the Midway Plaisance, that included a number of depictions of "exotic" non-Western cultures along with acting and technological entertainments. Among the tawdry and exciting foreign exhibits, the Chinese Village stands out for one of its more interesting components: a Chinese restaurant principally intended to cater to non-Chinese customers.

The café inside the Chinese Village was not the first Chinese American eatery to serve white customers; Chinese restaurants in several mining towns in the American West had been popular among white laborers in the 1850s, mostly for their cheap prices, with some offering all-you-could-eat meals for only \$1.<sup>7</sup> In these restaurants, where the clientele was composed of both Chinese and non-Chinese, menus often became mixed: "besides many genuine English dishes" for American patrons, Chinese owners also

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<sup>7</sup> Bayard Taylor, *Eldorado* (New York: Putnam, 1850), 116-117.

served “their chow-chow and curry” to other Chinese.<sup>8</sup> However, the Chinese restaurant located on the grounds of the Columbian Exposition was among the first and the most prominent to be deliberately crafted to appeal to white patrons on cultural lines. In this regard, it represented a significant and successful model of how a Chinese restaurant could self-Orientalize for the sake of attracting non-Chinese tourists and patrons. Rather than merely a business established to financially support an immigrant, as nearly all Chinese American restaurants to date had been, the Chinese Village café was also a social and cultural statement aimed at combating the negative stereotypes surrounding Chinese restaurants and Chinese culture more generally. Chinese restaurants were seen as spatial embodiments of Chinese culture, as well as of the alleged negative attributes of Chinese immigrants to the United States. Uniquely fetishized within American culture as a result, they amounted to malleable sites of cultural artifice where a fictive notion of Chinese ethnicity and culture could be constructed and consumed. As the unofficial ambassadors of a stigmatized culture, the organizers of the Chinese Village at the 1893 World’s Fair took advantage of this facet of Chinese restaurants’ perception to render an exotic, entertaining, and approachable version of Chinese culture that appealed to white fairgoers’ expectations and that aimed to counter negative depictions of Chinese culture.

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In the early 1830s, the small town of Chicago, Illinois, was inhabited by only a few hundred settlers from the eastern United States. Following the establishment of the City of Chicago in 1837, its population began to grow; over the next half century, the number of city residents increased at an exponential rate. Much of this growth was due to

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 117.

the city's important geographical location. Chicago lay at the center of a massive transcontinental trading network, made exceedingly important in the 1840s by the junction of the Illinois and Michigan Canal and Lake Michigan, and was the stopping and starting point for railroads traveling between the East and the West.<sup>9</sup> As this network expanded across the country, in particular into the West, Chicago became in effect a geographic plexus for trade and transportation, experiencing tremendous growth as a result.<sup>10</sup> By 1890, the population of Chicago had grown to over one million, just surpassing Philadelphia and rivaling only New York for most populous city in the country.<sup>11</sup>

Historians of Chicago have often designated the city as an immigrant city, and indeed, as Chicago grew, it quickly developed into a notably cosmopolitan society, welcoming immigrants and native migrants from both coasts of the continental United States.<sup>12</sup> In 1850, residents of the city born outside the United States numbered nearly 16,000, whereas American-born citizens numbered just less than 14,000.<sup>13</sup> Through 1870, the population of Chicago remained nearly equally divided between native-born and foreign-born residents.<sup>14</sup> Most of these early immigrants came from Western Europe, especially from Britain and Ireland, although the native origins of Chicago's immigrants became increasingly diverse as the nineteenth century progressed. From its inception

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<sup>9</sup> Bessie Louise Pierce, *A History of Chicago Volume II: From Town to City, 1848-1871* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Steve Pile, "What is a City?," *City Worlds* (Routledge: Taylor & Francis, 1998), 28.

<sup>11</sup> "Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1890," U.S. Bureau of the Census, June 15, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> For examples of scholars who have characterized Chicago as an immigrant city, see Dominic A. Pacyga, *Chicago: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 2–6, 71; Stephen Longstreet, *Chicago: 1860-1919* (New York: David McKay Co., 1973), 191; John M. Allswang, *A House for All Peoples: Ethnic Politics in Chicago, 1890-1936* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1971), 15.

<sup>13</sup> J. D. B. DeBow, "Statistical View of the United States...a Compendium of the Seventh Census" (Washington, 1854), 399.

<sup>14</sup> "A Compendium of the Ninth Census," (Washington, 1870), 386-391.

through the turn of the twentieth century, Chicago witnessed the influx of a wide variety of immigrant groups, although the city remained predominantly Euro-American in its ethnic makeup.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, while Chicagoans have not always all been entirely hospitable toward foreign-born arrivals, the city's immigrant demographics have long shaped Chicago's political and social history as a relatively hospitable destination for would-be Americans.

By the turn of the twentieth century, there were several readily identifiable ethnic neighborhoods in Chicago. Jewish immigrants from Europe mostly settled along the west side of Grant Park after their arrival in the city, to the east of the area that eventually would become Chinatown. The Greek population was contained mostly in the West Loop, while Little Italy was established in the West Side. Sizable numbers of other Eastern European groups, such as Poles, Hungarians, and Lithuanians, would also establish themselves in Chicago in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, although none of these groups were able to compete with the Irish in terms of size and length of residency. After 1910, African American migration into the city would also take place in large numbers, with most newly arriving black migrants settling in the South Side.

Although significant Chinese immigration to the United States began in the 1840s and 1850s, an appreciable Chinese population would not take hold in Chicago until the 1870s.<sup>16</sup> The first Chinese immigrants were dispersed to Chicago, among other places, from California by the increasingly violent anti-Chinese movement taking hold there in

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<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of early European immigrant groups to Chicago, see Pierce, *A History of Chicago*, 6-23.

<sup>16</sup> Ling, 21.

the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>17</sup> Thousands of male Chinese laborers had poured into California in the 1840s and 1850s, come to make their fortunes in the mines opened up during the California Gold Rush and later to help construct the transcontinental railroad. Although Western industrialists eagerly sought the importation of cheap Chinese labor to help construct the industrial infrastructure in the region, Euro-American workers quickly responded to the perceived economic competition with hostility. To be sure, anti-Chinese sentiments have, in some form or another, been present in American thought since the colonial period. As Stuart Creighton Miller has demonstrated, many aspects of the anti-Chinese racism of the 1870s had their origins in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, originating with reports from traders, diplomats, and missionaries who had traveled to China and returned with damning descriptions of the Asian nation. Spread among the general populace through mass media, and reinforced and deepened by media coverage of calamitous events in China, including the Opium Wars, the devastation of the Taiping Rebellion, and the Tientsin Massacre, this negative view of China had by the 1850s reached a national audience that included Easterners and Midwesterners with no significant personal experience of Chinese culture or immigration.<sup>18</sup> However, the anti-Chinese racism that emerged in California in the 1860s and 1870s among Euro-American members of the working class was the strongest and most violent expression of this prejudice to date.

The bases for this anti-Chinese violence were composed of both economic causes, such as anger with an exploitative system of industrial capitalism and job scarcity following the onset of the Long Depression in 1873; and racist causes, including the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>18</sup> For more on this, see Stuart Creighton Miller.

pervasive belief in Chinese “coolie” labor, or that Chinese immigrants were in fact an enslaved class with which free (white) laborers could not compete; the similar belief that Chinese workers could endure harsher conditions and could live on substantially lower wages, an imagined laborer that Euro-American laborers once again believed could not be competed with; and the general image of the Chinese as an immoral, vice-ridden, and racially inferior migrant group in the West.<sup>19</sup> The pervasiveness of these beliefs, coupled with the racial mandate of Manifest Destiny and the economic tumultuousness of the decade, resulted in a significant period of anti-Chinese violence beginning in the early 1870s, carried out by miners, European immigrants, mayors, governors, judges, newspaper editors, and other accomplices who all sought to mark their common whiteness through a campaign of ethnic cleansing in the American West.<sup>20</sup> This decade bore witness to some of the worst incidents of anti-Chinese violence in the United States, including the 1871 lynch mob attack on Los Angeles’ Chinatown and a number of pogroms in cities and towns up and down the West Coast, and also saw this racism manifest into a political movement, in the form of the Workingmen’s Party of California. The party, led by the Irish demagogue Denis Kearney, helped bring Chinese exclusion to prominence as a political goal, eventually culminating in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. In the short term, however, California became an increasingly dangerous location for Chinese immigrants to live and work. Following the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869, and during the height of racial violence directed against them in the 1870s, not only were Chinese laborers now forced to find new avenues of employment outside the railroad, but the improved infrastructure made

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<sup>19</sup> Sandmeyer, 25-40.

<sup>20</sup> For a lengthy treatment of this anti-Chinese campaign, see *Driven Out*.

internal migration significantly easier, and many Chinese immigrants thus took advantage of such an opportunity to escape the anti-Chinese pogroms of the American West and seek out better livelihoods and sanctuaries in cities like New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago, where their presence was not perceived as an existential threat to the white working class.

The Chinese who relocated to Chicago in the 1870s encountered a social environment much less hostile to Asian immigrants than the one they had just escaped. The first Chinese immigrants to arrive in Chicago congregated along South Clark Street, between Harrison Street and Van Buren Street, forming what would effectively be the first Chicago Chinatown (although it did not bear this name at the time).<sup>21</sup> The majority of nineteenth century emigrants from China came from Taishan (then known as Xinning) County, including the majority of those emigrants who settled in Chicago.<sup>22</sup> One of the first Chinese immigrants to take up residence in Chicago was Moy Dong Chow, a Taishanese who arrived in the city in the 1870s with his brothers and his family following soon after.<sup>23</sup> The Moy family would go on to achieve great prominence in Chicago's Chinatown, and would become one of the most prevalent surnames among the Chinese American community. Upon his arrival, Moy found Chicagoans much more accepting of Chinese immigrants than Californians had been; he reportedly was never asked whether he ate rats, as racially charged American preconceptions of Chinese eating customs held at the time, and was viewed as having a soul "worth saving" by the Christian community

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<sup>21</sup> Ling, 22.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

there.<sup>24</sup> This warm reception to their immigration brought more displaced Chinese laborers to the city in search of prosperity. Between 1870 and 1890, the officially counted Chinese population of Chicago increased from less than a dozen to over 500.<sup>25</sup> By the final decade of the nineteenth century, the Chinese enclave had grown to include several business establishments, most of which were grocery stores, two Tong organizations (the Hip Sing Tong and On Leong Tong), several family associations, and a Chinese Baptist mission.<sup>26</sup>

At first, Chinatown was generally looked upon by Chicagoans with less suspicion and racial misconception than were other Chinatowns located in the United States and Canada in the nineteenth century. Instead of aggressively acting on fears of unsanitary conditions or dens of immorality (although such fears were certainly present), as was the case in Vancouver's contemporaneous Chinatown, white residents of Chicago generally looked on their city's Chinese population with curiosity and interest, though certainly with trepidation as well.<sup>27</sup><sup>28</sup> This relatively benign tolerance of Chinese immigration was most likely reflective of a number of extenuating circumstances, not the least important of which was the lack of competition between Chinese immigrants and the city's white working class. In contrast to Chinese immigrants in the American West, who competed with non-Chinese immigrants for construction work and gold-mining opportunities,

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<sup>24</sup> Fan Tin-Chiu, "Chinese Residents in Chicago," Master's thesis, University of Chicago, 1926; reprint, (Saratoga, CA: R & E Research Associates, 1974), 13-14 (cited in Ling, 32).

<sup>25</sup> US Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population*, cited in Ling, 50; some sources other than the US Census placed Chicago's Chinese population at nearly two thousand.

<sup>26</sup> Susan Lee Moy, "The Chinese in Chicago: The First One Hundred Years," in *Ethnic Chicago: A Multicultural Portrait*, Fourth Edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 380.

<sup>27</sup> For more on the Vancouver Chinatown of the 1880s and 1890s, see Kay J. Anderson, "The Idea of Chinatown: The Power of Place and Institutional Practice in the Making of a Racial Category".

<sup>28</sup> Ling, 22-24.

Chicago's Chinese population were economically segregated into establishments that either catered to the Chinese community, such as grocery stores and restaurants, or that revolved around "women's work," such as laundries, and thus did not threaten the livelihoods of working-class men. Another extenuating circumstance was the highly cosmopolitan makeup of Chicago itself, described above.<sup>29</sup> By the 1890s Chicago's population was still highly heterogeneous, containing a large number of foreign-born residents, mostly from Western Europe; less than 60% of the population of the city in 1890 had been born in the United States.<sup>30</sup> As well, Chinese immigration to Chicago represented a drop in the bucket compared to the broader movement of peoples to the city at the time. In 1890, for example, average Chicagoans were far more concerned about the immigration of Eastern European Jews and the uneducated than they were about Chinese immigration to the city.<sup>31</sup> While Chicago was certainly not the only locale in the United States to boast such heterogeneous demographics (indeed, the American West was a highly cosmopolitan environment in the mid- to late nineteenth century, and yet bore witness to some of the worst anti-Chinese violence in American history), its reputation and identity as an immigrant city, coupled with the absence of economic competition between Chinese and white laborers, almost certainly played a significant role in the reception of Chinese immigrants in the city in the late nineteenth century.

To be sure, this did not mean that non-Chinese Chicagoans expressed no negative views of their Chinese neighbors. On the contrary, all manner of sentiments, ranging from benevolent to benign to belittling, were directed towards Chicago's Chinese

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<sup>29</sup> See Huping Ling, *Chinese Chicago*.

<sup>30</sup> "Compendium of the Eleventh Census," (Washington, 1890).

<sup>31</sup> "Views on Immigration," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 29, 1890, 3.

immigrants. As Moy Dong Chow described them, non-Chinese Chicagoans certainly found the Chinese to be “a peculiar people to be sure, but they [also] liked to mix with [them.]”<sup>32</sup> Such mixing may have included economic and social interactions, but it definitely included efforts by the local Christian community to convert Chinese Americans, not only for the sake of their individual souls, but also to foster improved relations between the United States and China. It was in the pursuit of these ambitious goals that the local Baptists established the Baptist Chinese Mission at 295 South Clark Street in 1878, bringing English language education and female missionary activity to the heart of the Chinese enclave.<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, in that same year, a particularly damnatory article was published in the *Inter Ocean*, decrying the scourge of opium said to be running rampant in the morally lacking Chinatown. In the article, tellingly entitled “Celestial Smokers,” the journalist alleges that “Chinadom has contaminated Caucasian civilization by the bowl that intoxicates, but doesn’t inebriate,” and that of the supposed 110 Chinese immigrants living in Chicago, “from ninety to ninety-five are either opium-smokers or opium-eaters, and that nine-tenths of the washee-shops [sic] are smoke-shops too.”<sup>34</sup> Beyond the obvious and presumably racially motivated exaggeration of the prevalence of opium abuse among Chinese Chicagoans, this article is particularly demonstrative of the presence and manner of Orientalist and anti-Chinese thought in certain segments of Chicago discourse. In using the phrase “Chinadom” in opposition to “Caucasian civilization,” the article refers not only to all aspects of Chinese immigration to Chicago, including economic establishments, alleged vices, and immigrants

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<sup>32</sup> Fan, 13-14

<sup>33</sup> Ling, 32

<sup>34</sup> “Celestial Smokers”

themselves, but also to the concept of Chinese culture itself, thereby buying into the Orientalist logic of “Oriental” culture in oppositional distinction to “Occidental” culture, and embodied in the physical presence and alleged influence of Chinese immigrants. The article concludes its alarmist description of opium dens in Chinatown with an appeal to readers to support efforts to expunge the plague from Chicago’s cityscape, asking “Will...the public generally be allowed to go down to a living death without an effort to close these dank holes of Sodom?” While many Chicagoans expressed benign interest or even proselytizing zeal towards their Chinese neighbors, still many others demonstrated more than a passing familiarity with the broader anti-Chinese rhetoric of the 1870s and directed it with particular intent towards Chinese businesses.

Following their arrival, most of Chicago’s early Chinese entrepreneurs founded laundries, grocery stores, or restaurants, to serve the burgeoning Chinese community, and which became the first businesses of what would later be called Chinatown.<sup>35</sup> These industries provided work for newly arriving laborers and were also a particularly convenient avenue for Chinese immigrants to provide for their community while also earning a safe living for themselves. In addition to meeting the needs of the Chinese enclave, these types of businesses also avoided the kind of economic competition with white Americans, particularly those in the working class, that underwrote the intense anti-Chinese rhetoric and violence that had marked the Western states for decades. Furthermore, under the conditions of the Chinese Exclusion Act, passed in 1882, Chinese immigrants wishing to avoid deportation could not be manual laborers, and instead had to qualify as merchants. Establishing businesses like laundries and restaurants, which

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<sup>35</sup> Ling, 22.

required relatively small amounts of capital to start and low levels of skill to operate, were cost-effective and racially accommodating ways for Chinese immigrants to establish a mercantile status and remain in the United States. They also served as a means of achieving wealth and social status for successful business owners like the Moy clan. In the 1880s and 1890s, laundries were the most prevalently established Chinese businesses in Chicago, as they were relatively easy to operate and required little initial capital, and far outpaced the number of restaurants in the city; indeed, many of the first restaurants on Clark Street were located in basements beneath other Chinese businesses.<sup>3637</sup> These laundries expanded in number rapidly, from eighteen in 1874, to just less than 200 in 1890, with nearly half located outside the Loop.<sup>38</sup>

While laundries certainly represented an economic mainstay of the Chinese community of Chicago, the laundry industry was never endowed with the same cultural significance, nor enjoyed the same historical influence, as Chinese eateries. The first Chinese restaurants in the city were principally intended to serve the dietary and social needs of Chicago's Chinese population, not to appeal to a city-wide clientele.<sup>39</sup> Restaurants in Chinatown typically offered cuisine that was meant to appeal to the palate of Chinese immigrants, not to that of natives of the United States, and sold low-cost meals generally based on Cantonese cooking methods. However, restaurants in Chinatown were not unreceptive to non-Chinese patronage. When Wong Yee established

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<sup>36</sup> "Where Chinamen Trade," *Chicago Tribune*, May 5, 1889; Huping Ling, *Chinese Chicago: Race, Transnational Migration, and Community since 1870* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012), 32–33.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>39</sup> Such restaurants offered immigrants familiar tastes and opportunities for social engagement with each other, rather than interaction with the broader native society; for more on the relationship between basement restaurants and immigrant-native interaction, see Cindy R. Lobel, *Urban Appetites: Food and Culture in Nineteenth-Century New York* (University of Chicago Press, 2014), 185.

his restaurant at 322 Clark Street in 1891, he assured a local reporter that although he intended his restaurant to cater to the city's Chinese community, any American who would "behave himself" would be welcome.<sup>40</sup> Other Chinese restaurateurs expressed similar openness towards American customers, with some even providing knives and forks in their locations, while simultaneously fearing the "scoffers" who "enter [the restaurant] only to ridicule."<sup>41</sup> Beyond providing meals for the majority-male Chinese American community, restaurants also served as spaces for community functions, social gatherings, and celebrations. Although they were business establishments, Chinese restaurants served as much of a social function catering to the Chinese immigrant community as they did a profit-making one.<sup>42</sup>

However, even as nineteenth-century Chinese restaurants were principally intended to serve Chinese customers, the racialized rhetoric informing Americans' perceptions of the eateries simultaneously discouraged most white urbanites from catering the Chinese businesses. By the time a significant Chinese population emerged in Chicago, most Midwesterners, even if they did not frequent Chinese restaurants, would have been well acquainted with much of the anti-Chinese rhetoric in the United States that had been directed against Chinese foodstuffs. Among those Americans who viewed Chinese culture as barbaric and backwards next to Western civilization, the alleged diet of the Chinese peasant (and by extension the Chinese immigrant), which was said to

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<sup>40</sup> "A Chinese Restaurant," *The Inter Ocean*, September 28, 1891.

<sup>41</sup> "Where Chinamen Trade;" although some Chinese restaurants made knives and forks available to their diners, it is not clear if this was meant to actively cater to a non-Chinese clientele, or if this was because some Chinese immigrants had adopted the knife and fork as part of their broader efforts to integrate into American society.

<sup>42</sup> Cite people talking about social function of Chinese restaurants

include dogs, rats, lizards, and all manner of disgusting unknowables, seemed to support the idea of Chinese inferiority.

These racist allegations leveled against Chinese foodways, and Chinese civilization overall, were also extended to restaurants themselves. This is because restaurants are not neutral eateries that serve only to sustain our biological demands. Rather, they operate as cultural embassies, allowing patrons quite literally to consume a culture in commoditized form.<sup>43</sup> Thus, to nineteenth-century Americans, Chinese restaurants amounted to spatial embodiments of Chinese culture, and thus all the stereotypes and anxieties surrounding the promulgation of the latter were foisted onto the popular imagination of the former. The predominant stereotype in the late nineteenth century imagined Chinese restaurants as sinister dens of iniquity, hosts to vices like opium trafficking and smoking, gambling, and the prostitution and enslavement of white women. Reports of white American girls becoming enamored with Chinese “Casanovas” operating out of dingy restaurants were not uncommon in nineteenth-century newspapers. Such women were usually depicted either as victims of the cultural corruption emanating outward from Chinatowns, or as immoral degenerates naturally inclined towards such sinful spaces. This latter characterization was often foisted onto other immigrant, particularly Italian, women. Meanwhile, as described above, the food served in Chinese restaurants was frequently maligned as being composed of pets and vermin, such as dogs, cats, rats, and snakes, or as being totally incomprehensible to Western diners for its barbarousness. Although this discourse was never used to bolster a major anti-Chinese

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<sup>43</sup> See David Y. H. Wu, “Improvising Chinese Cuisine Overseas,” in *The Globalization of Chinese Food*, ed. David Y. H. Wu and Sidney C. H. Cheung (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2002), 60-61; Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 120-121; and Cho, *Eating Chinese*, 12-14.

political movement in Illinois, as it had in California, notions of Chinese restaurants as spaces of vice, and of Chinese food as strange and disgusting, were not infrequently articulated in turn-of-the-century Chicago. As early as 1878, the city's Chinatown was described as a corrupting influence on "Caucasian civilization," due mainly to the opium traffic taking place in the enclave.<sup>44</sup> Into the 1890s, commentary on Chicago's Chinatown included humorous "allegations" of dog meat being served in the restaurants, as well as persistent concerns about opium addiction among non-Chinese Chicagoans.<sup>45</sup> As well, the notion that one could never entirely be sure of what ingredients constituted Chinese food, and chop suey in particular, was often used as the punchline to jokes in the early 1900s.<sup>46</sup> Short of outright praise, oftentimes the most benign descriptions of Chinese cuisine in the United States simply labeled the food "queer" or "mysterious."<sup>47</sup> At any rate, any Chicagoan who stepped into a Chinese restaurant in the second half of the nineteenth century would have been at least somewhat knowledgeable of the stereotypes surrounding the Asian American eateries.

However, it bears repeating that the negative or dismissive view of Chinese immigrants and their restaurants was not the only discourse in which Chicagoans participated. Indeed, through the 1880s and 1890s, descriptions of Chinese restaurants and those who ran them or patronized them were often as reflective of benign curiosity or acceptance of Chinese immigrants and their culture as they were damning. For example, in 1886, in a paper presented to the Presbyterian Social Union of Chicago, Edwin Burritt

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<sup>44</sup> "Celestial Smokers," *The Daily Inter Ocean*, April 18, 1878.

<sup>45</sup> "Out of the Way Eating Places in Chicago," *Chicago Tribune*, January 27, 1895; "What Chinamen Do In Chicago," *The Daily Inter Ocean*, August 13, 1890.

<sup>46</sup> "A Mystery, Indeed," *The Daily Herald*, October 4, 1902; "Composite," *Chicago Tribune*, October 30, 1902.

<sup>47</sup> Cite some people talking about Chinese food stereotypes; missionary writings

Smith rejected the assertion that the small numbers of Chinese American immigrants represented any danger to the United States. Instead, Smith argued, the demagoguery of the anti-Chinese movement in California had degraded American politics and ideals, while simultaneously offending “a mighty empire” which had just emerged from “its long seclusion” to join the rest of the world in modernity.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, Chicagoans who ventured into their city’s Chinatown in the late nineteenth century often noted that, although the smell of the cooking was disagreeable, the restaurants they ate in were remarkably clean.<sup>49</sup> In a similar article published two years later, describing a birthday celebration hosted in a Chinatown restaurant, Chinese immigrants and their foodways were again described in both positive and negative terms. For the party, the article described, the restaurant was “tastefully decorated” with banners, streamers, colored tissues, and lanterns, while the dinner was described as a sumptuous meal “as only a Chinese epicure could devise.” However, the same article described the celebrators as partaking of opium after the meal was finished, and went on to draw a qualitative distinction between those attending the party and the broader class of Chinese immigrants in Chicago, which were described as “common rabble” and whose consumption of the meal’s leftovers was depicted as akin to the eating of parasitic insects.<sup>50</sup> Overall, views of Chicago’s Chinese population, their restaurants, and their foodways, were not monolithic, nor were they totally negative or totally positive in nature.

Nevertheless, the perception of Chinese foodways as particularly treacherous, savage, mysterious, or simply exotic, coupled with the parallel perception of the types of

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<sup>48</sup> Edwin Burritt Smith, “The Chinese in the United States,” 1887, 15–16, Newberry Library.

<sup>49</sup> “Where Chinamen Trade”; “A Chinese Restaurant,” September 28, 1891.

<sup>50</sup> Society Event in Chinatown

people who frequented Chinese restaurants, as well as the general anxiety over Chinese immigration, all resulted in Chinese restaurants receiving a level of fetishization not similarly experienced by any other type of ethnic eatery in the United States. To many Americans, those who visited or patronized Chinese restaurants were seen as untoward in a number of ways: as impoverished ruffians; as opium addicts; as other marginalized members of society, such as African Americans, Italian immigrants, or Eastern European Jewish bumpkins; or as morally compromised women. As spatial embodiments of Chinese culture, Chinese restaurants represented to many observers inkblots of a corrupting Oriental influence, one that stood poised to effeminize, erode, and destroy the order of Western civilization, that threatened to emanate outwards and degrade their immediate environs. The relatively unique concerns over Chinese immigration in the nineteenth century combined with the particular cultural endowments of restaurant spaces to make Chinese restaurants unlike any other ethnic eatery in terms of symbolism and significance.

For Chicagoans in particular, the location of the Chinese enclave near the infamous Levee district carried its own connotations of vice and sin that left Chinese restaurants all the more fetishized as exotically dangerous. A part of Chicago's geography from the 1880s to 1912, the Levee, located south of Harrison Street, between Clark and Dearborn Streets, amounted to an infamous red-light district featuring saloons, dance halls, and a large number of brothels. These iniquitous establishments ensured their own protection through the bribing of corrupt officials, and were also so awash with pickpockets and thieves that one judge even allegedly remarked that any man who

ventured into the district deserved to be robbed.<sup>51</sup> Although it was not necessarily within the “official” borders of the Levee, Chicago’s Chinatown, like Chinese enclaves in other cities like Philadelphia, was seen by many as an area of similar vice and ill-repute, in many ways an extension of the kind of moral degradation on display in the red-light district. Meanwhile, Chinese restaurants were also viewed with trepidation or excitement, depending on the individual, due to the possibilities for inter-race and inter-class mixing the eateries offered. In nineteenth century cities defined by fears of porous “borders” between the heterogeneous racial and class-based categories of urban residents, Chinese restaurants stood out as emblematic of the kind of improper and potentially dangerous social mixing that a lack of control over urban space threatened to allow. For turn-of-the-century consumers seeking out exotic and novel amusements, Chinese restaurants would become increasingly popular sites of titillating consumption of an Oriental culture. For reform-minded individuals anxious over the cultural upheavals that the late nineteenth century bore witness to, the restaurants, like other spaces of amusement in Chinatown, represented the kind of chaos and social disorder that was threatening to fundamentally redefine American society.<sup>52</sup> In either case, as spatial embodiments both of Chinese culture and of all that excited or frightened Americans about the social and cultural changes wrought by urbanization and immigration in the nineteenth century, Chinese restaurants, like Chinese immigrants overall, occupied a unique space in nineteenth-century American culture. Endowed with a litany of prejudices, stereotypes, and fantasies emanating from Western Orientalist discourses, the eateries stood as either threatening

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<sup>51</sup> Chicago: A Biography, 106-107.

<sup>52</sup> Chinatown Trunk 1-16 and 65; Search for Order; Amusing the Million

purveyors of a corrupting influence or the consumable embodiments of titillating exoticism.

The factor that most facilitated the widespread fetishization of Chinese restaurants, however, was the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. By the end of the 1870s, the violent anti-Chinese racism that had run rampant along the West coast had evolved into a national issue surrounding the question of Chinese immigration. A narrow political equilibrium between the Democratic and Republican parties in presidential contests made Chinese exclusion, a most important issue in the swing state of California, part of their respective national platforms. Although nominally a regional issue, Chinese exclusion received no shortage of support from Americans in the East, many of whom held negative views of Chinese immigrants as unassimilable, dangerous, and menacing to public health.<sup>53</sup> Through this combination of regional political influence and national disposition against Chinese immigration, the exclusion of most Chinese immigrants from entering the United States along racial lines was passed into law. The first piece of American legislation to regulate immigration based on the exclusion of a particular race, the law was designed to specifically prevent Chinese laborers and “prostitutes,” the broad definition of which applied to most Chinese immigrant women, from entering the country. As a result, all Chinese Americans had to be able to classify themselves as “merchants,” or would no longer be allowed to stay in the United States.

The Chinese Exclusion Act, which would remain in force until 1943, shaped the history of Chinese American restaurants in Chicago in three key ways. First, as the law allowed only “merchants” to enter and remain in the country, laundries and restaurants,

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<sup>53</sup> Stuart Creighton Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969).

which required little skill or capital investment to be established, remained for decades the principal types of business run by Chinese American immigrants seeking a “merchant” status, and were used to extend such a status to the extended family of immigrants already established in the country. Second, and more importantly, the Chinese Exclusion Act reflected and reinforced a perception of Chinese immigrants as inherently inassimilable and thus permanently alien noncitizens.<sup>54</sup> With the passage of the Exclusion Act, the status of Chinese Americans as an undesirable, inassimilable class of dangerous immigrants, capable of culturally corrupting “Caucasian” civilization, was thus not only reflected in the discourse surrounding Chinatown restaurants as outposts of the Yellow Peril, but also enshrined in United States law. Third, and most paradoxically, the law which established the supposed veracity of the cultural threat posed by Chinese immigrants also seemed to address it. By taking steps to bar further Chinese immigration to the country, the federal government had finally addressed the “Chinese Question” and significantly reduced the urgency with which many observers had reported on the threat of cultural corruption stemming from Chinatown institutions. Though establishments like Chinese restaurants remained fetishized by their intimate association with many of the racially charged concepts applied to Chinese immigrants and culture, the Exclusion Act significantly mitigated the threat they seemed to pose to the social order in the United States and opened the door for their eventual surge in popularity in the late 1890s. Meanwhile, those Chinese immigrants who could remain in the country were marked by

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<sup>54</sup> For more on the impact of the Exclusion Act on Chinese American immigrants and their status within the national polity, see Madeline Y. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), Erika Lee, *At America’s Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), and Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

an alien status that they had to engage and overcome if they were to be successful in American society. For Chicago's Chinese American community, the most visible opportunity to carry out this engagement came with the city's hosting of the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893.

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In a bid to demonstrate to the rest of the country and to the world that it had achieved the status of a global city, and more immediately that it had completely recovered from the destructive fire of 1871, Chicago petitioned to and successfully hosted the World's Columbian Exposition from May to October 1893. For a young city keen not only to demonstrate its recovery from its greatest calamity to date, but also to prove its parity with other great cities of the world, and its successful development from a wild frontier town to a "mature" metropolis, hosting a world's fair seemed just the ticket.<sup>55</sup> International expositions of the nineteenth century served a number of political, economic, and social functions, perhaps the most significant of which for Americans, judging by how organizers and observers discussed plans for exhibitions such as that in Philadelphia in 1876 and the Columbian Exposition in 1893, was that of competitive comparison between nations. As Representatives Daniel Morrell and Leonard Myers of Pennsylvania proclaimed in a speech before the House of Representatives in December 1870, the purpose of the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 was to compare "the results of human effort" across multiple countries, and "give opportunities to compare the relative progress of nations."<sup>56</sup> According to Illinois Representative George R. Davis, who also served as the Director General of the World's Columbian Exposition, this was also the

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<sup>55</sup> Chicago's Greatest Year, 7-9.

<sup>56</sup> Morell and Myers speech pg 3.

purpose of the 1893 world's fair. In an article published in the *North American Review* in 1892, Davis stated that the goal of the Chicago exhibition was "to exemplify [human] development the world over, in all its details and ramifications," and "to present the achievements of mankind in man's dealings with the products and forces of nature, as by an exhaustive balance-sheet."<sup>57</sup>

In furtherance of this goal, Chicago's exposition planners set out to surpass all previous fairs in scale and ostentation, demonstrating not only the United States' relative progress, but also the magnificence of Chicago itself. To many observers, the opulence of the World's Columbian Exposition seemed to indicate the planners' success. As David F. Burg has argued, the 1893 World's Fair "far surpassed its forebears. Paris, London, Vienna temporarily transformed their appearances to host their expositions. Chicago created a veritable new city. That city was not only larger than any previous exposition but also more elaborately designed, more precisely laid out, more fully realized, more prophetic." Furthermore, the Columbian Exposition was intended to be even more international than its forebears as well, to better demonstrate the United States', and Chicago's, "coming of age." According to Burg, the 1893 fair was the first of its kind "truly to solicit the participation of the entire world," and "reflected a unique spirit of internationalism" unparalleled by any previous international exhibition.<sup>58</sup> While such an interpretation of the fair's sense of international fraternity overlooks the simultaneous racist and imperialist motivations behind the 1893 Exposition's sights and exhibits, the exhibition nevertheless impressed multitudes of observers for its spectacle.<sup>59</sup> In both style

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<sup>57</sup> Davis article, "The World's Columbian Exposition," pg. 308.

<sup>58</sup> Chicago's White City of 1893, xii-xiii.

<sup>59</sup> Rydell

and substance, Chicago's world fair certainly appeared to have achieved the goal of elevating the city's prominence on the world stage.

However, the fair's spirit of internationalism and exhibition of global achievement had to carry on without the participation of the Qing Empire, leaving the responsibility for representing the accomplishments and prestige of Chinese culture to Chinese Americans themselves. Despite the efforts of representatives of the Exposition to secure its participation in the fair, the Chinese government refused to have any involvement in the proceedings, in protest of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.<sup>60</sup> As a result, in order for Chinese Americans to be able to participate in the fair, the Chinese immigrant community itself would have to fund and construct its own exhibit. This challenge was taken up by the Wah Mee Corporation, a private company formed by three prominent Chinese investors seeking to represent Chinese Americans and their native culture in a positive light: Dr. Gee Woo Chan, Hong Sling, and Wong Kee.<sup>61</sup> The three investors were well positioned to take the lead in one of the first major cultural initiatives to present an alternative image of Chinese culture to a crowd ranging from dismissive to hostile. Dr. Chan was a former Chinese government official, who became an investor in real estate and various business enterprises upon moving to the United States. Hong Sling, meanwhile, had made a considerable amount of money investing in railroads, and was one of the more prominent Chinese American restaurateurs in the Midwest. Finally, Wong Kee was a successful merchant and owner of a grocery store on South Clark Street, and was even alleged to be one of the richest Chinese immigrants in Chicago. All three of the men were practiced and adept at engaging with Euro-American culture, all had some

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<sup>60</sup> William Walton, *Art and Architecture* (Philadelphia: G. Barrie, 1893), 54.

<sup>61</sup> Ling, 76.

knowledge of the English language, and all were wealthy enough to be counted among the “better class” of Chinese immigrants in the eyes of white Americans.<sup>62</sup> Taking responsibility for representing China at the Exposition where the Qing government would not, the three Chicago merchants constructed a “Chinese Village” on the Midway Plaisance, adjacent to but not within the fair itself, consisting of a theater, a restaurant, a joss house or regional Chinese temple, and a bazaar.<sup>63</sup>

The Chinese Village was meant to be a positive portrayal of Chinese culture rather than a reflection of predominant anti-Chinese stereotypes in the United States, though the merchants must have realized how difficult it would be to challenge this perception at the fair. As Robert Rydell has demonstrated, although the world’s fairs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were marvels of economic development, scientific progress, and spectacular entertainment, defined by a diversity of represented nations, their diversity “was inseparable from the larger constellation of ideas about race, nationality, and progress that molded the fairs into ideologically coherent ‘symbolic universes’ confirming and extending the authority of the country’s corporate, political, and scientific leadership.” Within this ideological constellation, the world’s fairs of this era “existed as part of a broader universe of white supremacist entertainments,” distinguished only by “their scientific, artistic, and political underpinnings.”<sup>64</sup> The 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition was certainly no exception to this. As Rydell argues, the Chicago World’s Fair

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<sup>62</sup> Ling, 76.

<sup>63</sup> Walton, 54.

<sup>64</sup> Rydell, 2-6.

introduced millions of fairgoers to evolutionary ideas about race – ideas that were presented in a utopian context and often conveyed by exhibits that were ostensibly amusing. On the Midway [Plaisance] at the World’s Columbian Exposition, evolution, ethnology, and popular amusements interlocked as active agents and bulwarks of hegemonic assertion of ruling-class authority.<sup>65</sup>

Through the juxtaposition of “marvels” of Western progress in the White City with spectacular exoticisms on the Midway, the very layout of the Columbian Exposition reflected the organizers’ racially charged goals for the fair, lending ethnological and scientific credence to turn-of-the-century ideas of a global racial hierarchy and presenting non-Western cultures for the most part as inferior and backwards.

Not only did many Americans already attend the fair to seek out exotic visual spectacles that aligned with their racial worldview, but the geographical location of the Village on the Midway Plaisance also made it difficult for it to be viewed with any seriousness by fairgoers. The Midway was intended as a site of rowdy, spectacular, exotic entertainment, in contrast to the more prestigious and monumental exhibitions of the White City. Featuring all manner of amusements, from sordid belly dancing in the “Street in Cairo” area, to life-size reproductions of the three ships used by Christopher Columbus on his voyage to the Americas, carnival rides including the original Ferris Wheel, and, just beyond the official edge of the exposition, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show. With its location on the Midway, among other ethnic exhibits clustered amid the various exciting and novel entertainments described above, fairgoers would have been inclined to view

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<sup>65</sup> Rydell, 40-41

the Chinese Village as a source of exotic amusement, rather than internationalist respect.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, Asian exhibitions at the world's fairs of the nineteenth century were also continually subject to the exoticizing discourse of Orientalism, which underwrote the appeal of Asian exhibits for white fairgoers and which also found particular resonance in Asian foods. The discourse of Orientalism posited that the "West" was inherently dynamic and superior in comparison to the "Orient," a broad characterization of the Middle East and East Asia that described non-Western peoples as static, inferior, and essentially "other." This discourse underwrote the appeal of the Asian exhibitions in world's fairs of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, insofar as they purportedly enabled fairgoers to visually and materially consume this essential Otherness of "Oriental" culture, as it was imagined to be embodied in the various spectacles and objects available for consumption in each exhibit. As with Chinese restaurants in the American popular imagination, Asian food was particularly subject to Orientalist interpretations by Euro-American fairgoers. For example, the racially charged significance of food is particularly visible in depictions of dining options at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. In one instance, a notice for a Turkish café on the fairgrounds emphasized that patronizing the restaurant would "do more to acquaint [visitors] with the customs of the Turkish people" than any book could, and enabled diners to "enjoy a pleasant moment in real Oriental style."<sup>67</sup> A notice for the German department of the Southern Restaurant, meanwhile, made no such claims of offering a

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<sup>66</sup> Rydell, 50.

<sup>67</sup> "Turkish Cafe & Bazaar," n.d., Historical Society of Pennsylvania collection of Centennial Exhibition records, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

vicarious experience of European culture, instead merely highlighting the eatery's low prices.<sup>68</sup> In another such example, an artistic representation of the exhibition's restaurants, entitled "Our Artist's Dream of the Centennial Restaurants," depicts caricatures of various nationalities in the form of potential restaurants on the Exhibition grounds. The caricatures generally align with gastronomic stereotypes of non-Western peoples that served to reaffirm their alleged inferior status. For example, the offerings of the hypothetical Chinese restaurant include "Hashed Cat," "Rat Pie," and "Puppy À La Centennial." The African restaurant, combining culinary exoticism and the material pursuits of imperialism, advertises "Zebra Chops" and "Hippopotamus Fricassee," along with "Diamonds on Toast" and "Gold & Silver Cake."<sup>69</sup> In contrast, the illustration's European restaurant caricatures, though conveying certain stereotypes of particular European nations, depict no similar culinary construct of cultural essentialism or exoticism. Overall, such ideas of repugnant culinary experiences were limited to the non-Western restaurants represented at the exhibition. As will be discussed below, such cultural meanings were also extended to the Chinese food on offer at the Columbian Exposition's Chinese Village.

In spite of this propensity for viewing representations of non-Western culture, including especially food and restaurants, with disdain or dismissive amusement, it must be stated that such representations did not amount to unilateral impositions of meaning by the hegemonic culture, but instead also offered a level of agency to the non-Western representors themselves to shape the narrative surrounding their own culture. As stated

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<sup>68</sup> "German Department of the Grand Southern Restaurant," n.d., Historical Society of Pennsylvania collection of Centennial Exhibition records, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>69</sup> Walter F. Brown, *Our Artist's Dream of the Centennial Restaurants*, n.d., n.d., Historical Society of Pennsylvania collection of Centennial Exhibition records, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

above, the Orientalist aesthetic on display at the World's Fair largely reflected the American and European viewing public's desire to see exotic and titillating clichés of non-Western peoples that conformed to their view of non-white races. However, as Zeynep Celik has argued, the Orientalist displays at the World's Columbian Exposition were not limited to the mere reiteration of Western audiences' racist expectations. Instead, they also included the intentional depiction of certain images and cultural objects that reflected oppositional perspectives that challenged the dominant Orientalist constructions of non-Western cultures and aimed to present their nations as being on equal footing with those of the West.<sup>7071</sup> The presentation of "exotic" cultures at the Chicago World's Fair thus not only amounted to a moment of racially charged objectification of peoples, but also represented an opportunity for these same peoples to talk back to the hegemony, assert their own truths about the nature of themselves and their culture, and, for the Chinese Americans bankrolling the Chinese Village, attempt to seize some level of control over the discourse in the United States surrounding Chinese immigration.

Within this opportunity to engage Orientalist discourses, the Chinese Village created by Dr. Chang, Hong Sling, and Wong Kee, ultimately reflected a level of self-Orientalization that was meant to cater to American Orientalist consumerism, presenting something of a caricature of an imagined China to draw in fairgoers, without necessarily reinforcing the more negative discourse surrounding Chinese culture and immigration in

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<sup>70</sup> Zeynep Çelik, "Speaking Back to Orientalist Discourse at the World's Columbian Exposition," in *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 77; Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 48-49.

<sup>71</sup> Celik, 77-97.

the United States. Despite their own active support for China's modernization in the late Qing period, the three investors filled the Village with features and displays that played to Western images of the exotic Orient, sometimes sacrificing authenticity for the sake of visual appeal. For instance, while the exteriors of the buildings designed for the Chinese exhibition looked more Thai than Chinese in their architecture, the interiors included fortune-telling sticks and black-and-white mats as table skirts, all of which was meant to provide a material sense of "the Orient" for whites who visited the Village.<sup>72</sup> Other depictions of Chinese culture within the Village varied from the particularly exotic to the generally mundane. For instance, in the joss house, the organizers included a model of a Chinese farmhouse, one belonging to someone of status in China, which depicted the average life of a typical Chinese family. At the same time, in a part of the Village more prone to being viewed by white fairgoers as exotic, a fortune-teller, who according to one newspaper description "[could not] speak English and hate[d] money," sat to tell fairgoers their fortunes. While this was possibly meant to be an informative portrayal of traditional Chinese fortune-telling, the set-up of this particular feature of the Village lent itself to being perceived as more exotic than enlightening. By including a fortune-teller who communicated only through a translator, the organizers established an aura of mystique and linguistic separation between this "ancient" and "traditional" Chinese practice and the presumably non-Chinese fairgoers who came to witness it; although they could get so close to this aspect of Chinese culture, direct mutual comprehension yet

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<sup>72</sup> Chuimei Ho and Soo Lon Moy, eds., *Chinese in Chicago: 1870 - 1945*, First Edition (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), 112.

remained impossible.<sup>73</sup> Meanwhile, the incense burning in the fortune-teller's room created for white visitors "an atmosphere of asthmatic orientalism and mystery," adding to the more exotic allure of this particular installation.<sup>74</sup> However, this atmosphere was not meant to reflect Chinese culture in a *negative* light per se; instead, the three investors hoped merely to galvanize interest among white Americans in consuming Chinese culture, an act which many Americans had viewed with great trepidation throughout the nineteenth century. The overall setting created in the Chinese Village, as Mae Ngai has argued, amounted to "an early prototype for Chinese American efforts to develop urban Chinatowns as tourist destinations."<sup>75</sup> Years before San Francisco's Chinatown underwent its process of self-Orientalization for the sake of attracting tourists, the investors of the Wah Mee Corporation deliberately crafted an "Oriental" atmosphere in the Village that encouraged American patrons to consume an exotic cultural product divorced from its negative stereotypes and stigmas.

The restaurant within the Chinese Village represented a particularly nuanced example of such self-Orientalism, as it sought to make Chinese restaurants appealing to Western audiences at the Exposition by diluting its presentation of Chinese cultural products. For many residents of the American Midwest, the Chinese Village café was their first experience of Chinese food in a "safe" environment, as it was one of the first Chinese restaurants in the region to directly cater to a non-Chinese palate.<sup>76</sup> Prior to the opening of the Chinese Village café, the only Chinese restaurants that could be found in

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<sup>73</sup> Mae M. Ngai, "Transnationalism and the Transformation of the 'Other': Response to the Presidential Address," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005): 62; "Freaks of Chinese Fancy at the Fair," *The Chicago Sunday Tribune*, September 24, 1893.

<sup>74</sup> "Freaks of Chinese Fancy at the Fair."

<sup>75</sup> Ngai, "Transnationalism and the Transformation of the 'Other,'" 63.

<sup>76</sup> Ling, *Chinese Chicago*, 77; "The Chinese Cafe," n.d., <http://www.ccamuseum.org/index.php/en/research/columbian-exhibition-1893/160-the-chinese-cafe>.

Chicago were located along Clark Street, so deep within Chinatown that they sometimes were established in basements.<sup>77</sup> Although the *Chicago Tribune* reported that “everything about it [would] be strictly Chinese except some of the table ware [sic],” in actuality the restaurant’s offerings were a premeditated mix of Chinese and American dishes and eating customs: the restaurant provided imported chopsticks alongside Western utensils, rice wine alongside brandy, and Chinese delicacies alongside American fare.<sup>78</sup> The menu of the Village eatery was well balanced between comfortable American offerings and exotic Chinese food, including shark’s fins and bird’s-nest soup, fried chicken, and ham sandwiches, allowing American patrons a recourse of “safe” food should the exotic cuisine prove too unpalatable.<sup>79</sup> This deliberate inclusion of Western offerings did not go unnoticed by observers of the fair; indeed, in one tongue-in-cheek article printed in the *Chicago Tribune* in September 1893, the offerings of the restaurant in the Chinese Village were described as including the “[Chinese] national beverage, with such other characteristic Chinese delicacies as ham sandwiches, corned beef, potato salad, and oatmeal and milk.”<sup>80</sup>

To be sure, although many nineteenth-century Americans who actively catered Chinese restaurants were partially motivated by the pursuit of “authentic” Chinese food, including obviously some fairgoers at the World’s Columbian Exposition, what counted

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<sup>77</sup> Chinese-American Museum of Chicago, “1901: The boom in Chinese restaurants begins,” <http://www.ccamuseum.org/index.php/en/research/research-1900-1949/107-1901-the-boom-in-chinese-restaurants-begins>

<sup>78</sup> “Low Luck Will Be Head Cook,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 18, 1893; “Chinese Also Have a Function,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 20, 1893.

<sup>79</sup> *A Week at the Fair: Illustrating the Exhibits and Wonders of the World’s Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Company, 1893), 232; Elizabeth Badger, “The World’s Fare: Food and Culture at American World Fairs from 1893-1939” (Western Washington University, 2012), 32, <http://cedar.wvu.edu/wwuet/222>.

<sup>80</sup> Freaks of Chinese Fancy.

as “authentic” was a problematic and contested notion. Although the modern restaurant has its origins in eighteenth-century France, the concept of a business serving food and drinks has not historically been limited to either the modern era or to the West. The commercial food industry in China has an extensive history, dating back at least to the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127).<sup>81</sup> In the nineteenth century, an English observer in China described such eateries as catering both to wealthy diners who desired a select meal in a private setting, as well as to “persons in the humbler walks of life” seeking cheap and readily made nourishment.<sup>82</sup> When Chinese cafés first began to be opened in the United States in California, many were largely modeled on the Chinese style of the two-story restaurant, with private rooms for elite patrons on the top floor, and customers with less time or money to spend ordering simple quick dishes on the bottom.<sup>83</sup> However, as the *Tribune* article above and other descriptions of late nineteenth-century Chinese restaurants in the United States attest to, Chinese American eateries did not always align with this pre-existing business model. Instead, many restaurants in Chinatowns in the eastern United States appeared in basements, catering primarily to working-class immigrants and fulfilling a particular role in the Chinese American community. As well, once these restaurants began catering their offerings to non-Chinese Americans, they too served a mixture of Western and Chinese cuisines, adopting the successful model employed by the restaurant in the Chinese Village. In spite of this heterogeneity in offerings, or indeed perhaps because of it, the Chinese dishes sold by these restaurants

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<sup>81</sup> Andrew Coe, *Chop Suey: A Cultural History of Chinese Food in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 94.

<sup>82</sup> John Henry Gray, *China: A History of the Laws, Manners, and Customs of the People* (London: Macmillan, 1878), 64.

<sup>83</sup> Coe, 96.

that were adapted to appeal more to a non-Chinese palate, such as chop suey and chow mein, were widely seen as “authentic Chinese cuisine.” Chop suey was even described by some as the “national dish of China.” Although this was clearly not the case, and many modern scholars would strongly contest the description of chop suey as authentically Chinese, American patrons of Chinese restaurants nevertheless placed a great deal of importance on the idea of such establishments providing *authentic* experiences of Chinese culture.

This prizing of authentic Chinese cultural experiences is somewhat visible in certain descriptions of China and the Chinese Village in newspapers and included in guidebooks to the fair, which also served the purpose of normalizing the experience of dining in a Chinese eatery. For instance, in April of 1893, an article in *The Inter Ocean* emphasized that the Chinese restaurant within the Columbian Exposition would be serving foods that people from China would be accustomed to, including birds’ nests and dried smoked duck.<sup>84</sup> Meanwhile, in the 1892 *Historical World’s Columbian Exposition and Chicago Guide*, author Horace H. Morgan describes restaurants and “tea-saloons” as being “everywhere numerous throughout the [Chinese] empire,” drawing a subtle connection between the eatery within the Chinese Village and dining establishments in China proper.<sup>85</sup> The description included in this guidebook also served to normalize the act of dining in a Chinese restaurant for fairgoers who might have been anxious about the prospect and whose only knowledge of Chinese restaurants may have stemmed from the racially charged rhetoric of the era. In addition to describing the regimented and conventional nature of Chinese restaurants in China proper, the author also stated that

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<sup>84</sup> “Will Have Birds’ Nest Soup,” *The Inter Ocean*, April 18, 1893.

<sup>85</sup> *Guide*, 377.

“the rats which are regarded by the Chinese as edible are by no means the creatures so unfriendly to us.”<sup>86</sup> In other words, recognizing the predominant stereotype surrounding Chinese foodways in the United States, the guidebook author sought to assure fairgoers that their anxieties concerning Chinese restaurants were in some way or another misguided. The efforts of the Chinese Village organizers to create a restaurant that catered to Westerners’ Orientalist pursuit of the exotic, while not causing gustatory discomfort, reflected a similarly deliberate effort to overcome anti-Chinese prejudice among non-Chinese attendees of the World’s Columbian Exposition.

In this endeavor, the organizers of the Chinese Village met with a small though not inconsequential amount of success. Although the accommodating restaurant they established for the fair did not change Chicagoans’ views of Chinese restaurants overnight, it did lead some to view their city’s Chinatown a tad more favorably and with a slightly more adventurous spirit. For example, a reporter who ventured onto South Clark Street in 1894 during Chinese New Year described it as the “Midway Plaisance” of thoroughfares, in reference to the foreign entertainment and attractions area of the World’s Columbian Exposition, for its heterogeneous and cosmopolitan revelers.<sup>87</sup> Using descriptive terminology that betrayed as much of his racially hierarchical worldview as it did his benign appraisal of Chinese Americans, he further found the Chinese to be the most “picturesque class of humanity,” laying praise in particular on their smiles.<sup>88</sup> Notably, his description contained no disparaging remarks about the food they ate. In a *Chicago Tribune* article published around the same time, a reporter described Chinese

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<sup>86</sup> Guide, 377.

<sup>87</sup> “Where Orient and Occident Meet,” *Graphic*, February 17, 1894.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

New Year celebrations in the Chinese quarter by reference to Chinese immigrants “making merry” amid richly decorated shops made “doubly attractive” by their festive decorations. As well, the article emphasized that, in contrast to typical anxieties surrounding nineteenth-century Chinatowns, non-Chinese would be made to feel particularly welcome during the festivities, extending an offer to Chicagoans to experience their city’s Chinese enclave and its cultural offerings.<sup>89</sup> These slightly warmer relations between Chinese Chicagoans and their neighbors were not limited to the first year following the World’s Fair; indeed, as Yuan Liang has argued, during the first decade after the Exposition’s closure, the Chinese community of Chicago enjoyed relatively good relations with their neighbors.<sup>90</sup> It seems plausible, and indeed likely, that this period of relative bonhomie, marked by an increased interest among a small number of Chicagoans in visiting Chinatown and by comparisons drawn between the Chinese enclave and the Midway Plaisance, was in part brought about by the organizers of the Chinese Village and their successful presentation of Chinese culture in an entertaining and relatively accessible form. Through the various components of the Chinese Village, including its Chinese restaurant in particular, members of Chicago’s Chinese community rendered Chinese culture simultaneously exotic, exciting, and readily approachable, to an extent that was largely unprecedented for many of the attendees of the World’s Fair.

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Other than ushering in a brief period of bonhomie, perhaps the most significant contribution of the Chinese Village café was demonstrating how restaurant spaces could be crafted to make Chinese culture more appealing to non-Chinese patrons. Beyond

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<sup>89</sup> “Chinese Make Merry,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 4, 1894.

<sup>90</sup> Yuan Liang, “The Chinese Family in Chicago” (The University of Chicago, 1951), 14.

selling palatable cuisines, the restaurant utilized its ambiance and menu offerings to make white fairgoers feel as if they were experiencing authentic Chinese culture in an authentically Oriental environment, while mollifying potential concerns nineteenth-century Americans might have had about eating in a Chinese restaurant. Moving forward, the Chinese Village restaurant created a model that future Chinese restaurants utilized in the 1890s and 1900s to appeal to a broad array of middle-class, and eventually upper-class, patrons: offering a reliable gustatory experience for Western diners in a space designed with Orientalist trappings. As will be argued in the succeeding chapters, this model enabled Chinese restaurants to significantly expand in popularity and assisted the immigrants who ran them in improving their socioeconomic status in the United States.

## Chapter Two:

### Sinophile Consumption and the Chop Suey Craze of the 1890s

The “chop suey craze,” the moment at the turn of the twentieth century when middle- and upper-class white Americans suddenly embraced Chinese cuisine and the restaurants that served it, has received much attention in the literature on the American history of Chinese food, both for its significance and its spectacle. Much of this scholarship has attributed the craze primarily to the advent in the late nineteenth century of chop suey, a dish that catered Chinese cuisine to the American palate, and to the widely publicized 1896 visit of Chinese minister Li Hongzhang to New York City, whose arrival stimulated much curiosity about Chinese culture and who himself became intimately associated with chop suey during and after his visit.<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile, other scholars, while not necessarily working to explain the specific chop suey craze of the 1890s, have described the turn of the twentieth century as a period marked by a new cultural appreciation, stemming in part from the United States’ ascendance as an imperial

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<sup>91</sup> For examples of such arguments, see John Jung, *Sweet and Sour: Life in Chinese Family Restaurants* (Yin and Yang Press, 2010), 52; Jennifer 8 Lee, *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles: Adventures in the World of Chinese Food*, Reprint edition (New York: Twelve, 2009), 57–61; Samantha Barbas, “I’ll Take Chop Suey’: Restaurants as Agents of Culinary and Cultural Change,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 36, no. 4 (2003): 674–75; “Chop Suey as Imagined Authentic Chinese Food: The Culinary Identity of Chinese Restaurants in the United States,” *The Journal of Transnational American Studies* 1, no. 1 (2016); Heather Lee, “A Life Cooking for Others: The Work and Migration Experiences of a Chinese Restaurant Worker in New York City, 1920-1946,” in *Eating Asian America: A Food Studies Reader* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2013), 60; Paul Freedman, *Ten Restaurants That Changed America* (New York: Liveright, 2016), 211–19; Thomas O. Hollmann, *The Land of the Five Flavors: A Cultural History of Chinese Cuisine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 154; Anne Mendelson, *Chow Chop Suey: Food and the Chinese American Journey* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 93.

power, for titillating and novel experiences, Oriental exoticisms, and ethnic restaurants in general, and have ascribed the patronage of Chinese restaurants in this period to the consumption imperatives of this broader cultural shift.<sup>92</sup> However, these arguments, while not inaccurate, do not adequately explain the chop suey craze's particular timing and trajectory in the 1890s and early 1900s. Moreover, such explanations for the sudden popularity of chop suey in this period grant too little significance to the particular treatment and perception of Chinese immigrants and restaurants in the nineteenth century, as well as to the outsized place that China and Chinese culture have historically occupied in American thought.

Rather than a food fad caused by Li Hongzhang's celebrity status, the palatability of chop suey, or the culture of empire and Orientalism ascendant at the end of the nineteenth century, the chop suey craze ultimately formed part of a larger resurgence in periodic American enthusiasm for China and Chinese cultural products in the late 1890s, an enthusiasm I term Sinophilia. The emergence of an American empire in the Asia Pacific in the 1890s engendered a resurgence in this Sinophilia, as Americans came to

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<sup>92</sup> For works emphasizing the underlying importance of Orientalism and the pursuit of exotic novelties to consumer culture in this period, see Mary Ting Yi Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 38–39; Naomi Rosenblatt, "Orientalism in American Popular Culture," *Penn History Review* 16, no. 2 (2009): 51–63; Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Holly Edwards, ed., *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000). For arguments emphasizing the emergence of a culture of empire in the United States and the appeal of ethnic restaurants to middle-class consumers pursuing feelings of cultural superiority and cosmopolitan sophistication, see Cindy R. Lobel, *Urban Appetites: Food and Culture in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 8–9; Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 10–11; Andrew P. Haley, *Turning the Tables: Restaurants and the Rise of the American Middle Class, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Kelly Erby, *Restaurant Republic: The Rise of Public Dining in Boston* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 83–105; Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987); John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

feel increasing proximity to and contact with China. Ultimately, this resurgence in Sinophilia formed the cultural backdrop to Americans' sudden embrace of Chinese restaurants and cuisine, along with other means of consuming Chinese culture, from the beginning of the chop suey craze in 1896 through its intensification and expansion after 1899.

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Sinophilia, or some form of special attachment to China or to the idea of China, has been present in American thought since before the nation's founding. As John King Fairbank has noted, initial encounters with Chinese society in the eighteenth century aroused as much curiosity and sympathy among Americans as feelings of greed or contempt. As a result, American folklore has simultaneously included concepts of China as an exoticized and backward culture representing the polar opposite of that of the West, and of China as the idealized and sagacious birthplace of ancient civilization, and a potential model of enlightened government for Western nations.<sup>93</sup> According to John Pomfret, since the colonial period, those Americans who did not hate the Chinese cultivated a unique emotional attachment to China unlike that held for any other nation, save for Great Britain.<sup>94</sup> For these Americans, the United States held a "special status" vis-à-vis China, unique among the Western nations for its supposed paternalistic benevolence and lack of arrogant condescension. Because of this perceived special status, many Americans in the early nineteenth century also came to believe that theirs was a

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<sup>93</sup> John King Fairbank, *The United States and China*, Fourth Edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), 311–18; Akira Iriye, *Across the Pacific: An Inner History of American-East Asian Relations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), 5–6.

<sup>94</sup> John Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present* (New York: Picador, 2017), 4.

moral mission to help the Chinese reach the same level of human advancement that the United States had achieved, thereby not only returning China to its former greatness, but also proving the exceptional nature of the United States as a model of freedom and progress to the world.<sup>95</sup>

In addition to this moral imperative for the United States and its place in world history, China also represented to many Americans a land of fantastical opportunity, both for the future of East Asia and for Americans themselves. As John R. Haddad has illustrated, “Americans imagined China as a field of potential, a vast canvas on which they could project gaudy visions of self-actualization.”<sup>96</sup> These visions ran the gamut from the achievement of great personal wealth, the improvement of one’s fame and class, the accomplishment of acquiring total knowledge of China and of Asia, or even winning personal military glory. American missionaries and churchgoers, meanwhile, exhausted tremendous energy toward the goal of Christianizing China, believing that converting the Chinese would help bring about the Second Coming. As well, businessmen and politicians in the mid-nineteenth century viewed China as a source of magnificent potential, both as a market for domestically manufactured goods and as a democratically inclined “America-in-waiting.” Americans expressed great optimism for what lay in China’s future with the United States acting as an “older brother” guiding the Asian nation forward, while also holding “fantastic dreams” about what this romanticized culture could help them achieve for their own individual goals.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Iriye, *Across the Pacific: An Inner History of American-East Asian Relations*, 6–7.

<sup>96</sup> John R. Haddad, *America’s First Adventure in China: Trade, Treaties, Opium, and Salvation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 4.

<sup>97</sup> For detailed explorations of the numerous aspirations and optimistic dreams Americans, especially merchants, missionaries, and politicians, have held for China in particular, see John R. Haddad, *America’s First Adventure in China: Trade, Treaties, Opium, and Salvation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013); Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present*;

This Sinophilia was not limited to China specialists or to those who had a direct stake in Chinese affairs, but also percolated among those Americans whose experience of China remained limited to virtual encounters with Chinese culture.<sup>98</sup> For instance, when a call was put out in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1872, for families to host Chinese students on an education mission to the United States, an “overwhelming” number of families volunteered to house the sojourning students, expressing an eagerness to take part in an endeavor that could positively influence the future of China.<sup>99</sup> Such optimistic zeal also existed among evangelical Christians and, nearer the turn of the twentieth century, social workers in American cities, who carried out extensive and exhaustive work to improve the living conditions of Chinese immigrants beginning in the 1850s. Conversely, this “lay” Sinophilia also included ideas of how Chinese culture could improve the lives of everyday Americans. When Harvard University established a Chinese language course in 1879, for example, although the impetus for the class had originated with the need for American merchants in China to speak proper Chinese, newspapers at the time endowed the course with tremendous cultural significance. One article described the Chinese class as bringing China “nearer to [the United States] with every revolution of the earth,” while another delighted in the thought of “how greatly the province of [American] thought would be enlarged by an acquaintance with the productions of Chinese study and fancy”

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Iriye, *Across the Pacific: An Inner History of American-East Asian Relations*, 13–20; Fairbank, *The United States and China*, 308–12; Michael H. Hunt, *The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and China to 1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 41; John Rogers Haddad, *The Romance of China: Excursions to China in U.S. Culture, 1776-1876* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), xiii–xix. Though such optimism and aspirations were also extended to other countries in East Asia, Americans placed their greatest hopes in, and held the greatest affection for, China in particular.

<sup>98</sup> Many of these virtual encounters amounted to inherently biased constructions of China, re-created by those who had traveled in Asia to educate or simply entertain interested American audiences. See Haddad, *The Romance of China: Excursions to China in U.S. Culture, 1776-1876*, xv.

<sup>99</sup> Xu Guoqi, *Chinese and Americans: A Shared History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014), 80–81.

and the study of Chinese history.<sup>100</sup> Through these and other virtual encounters with China, average Americans came to possess their own feelings of attachment to or interest in the Middle Kingdom.

Although this tradition of Sinophilia has never fully disappeared from the national culture, it has waxed and waned in intensity throughout American history, often in response to shifting social and political contexts and changes in the relationship between the United States and China. During an extended period of heightened Sinophilia in the early decades of the nineteenth century, American fascination with China was so strong that the trader William Wood published an illustrated account of his travels in Guangdong in 1830, reportedly in order to dispel the “romantic illusion” of China he found to be widespread among his annoyingly curious compatriots.<sup>101</sup> Although such positive feelings toward the Chinese had begun to wane in the 1840s and 1850s, American Sinophilia was re-energized in the late 1860s, when Anson Burlingame led a major Chinese delegation on a diplomatic mission to the United States. Including a series of prominent speeches, celebrations, and banquets, and culminating in the successful signing of the Burlingame Treaty in July 1868, the mission reignited American enthusiasm in China’s potential as a democratic trading partner and inspired fresh optimism in the future of Sino-American relations.<sup>102</sup> This oscillating nature of American Sinophilia has not been lost on scholars of Chinese and American history: Harold Isaacs, in his study of American views of China and India in the nineteenth and twentieth

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<sup>100</sup> Ko Kun-hua Collection: no author, no date, newspaper clippings, quoted in Xu, *Chinese and Americans: A Shared History*, 125–30.

<sup>101</sup> William W. Wood, *Sketches of China* (Philadelphia: Carey & Lea, 1830), viii–xi.

<sup>102</sup> Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present*, 62–65.

centuries, established a chronology of American feelings toward the Chinese that moved from the Age of Respect in the eighteenth century, to the Age of Contempt from 1840 to 1905, to a period of benevolence and admiration in the first half of the twentieth century. Similarly, John King Fairbank, who identified a pattern of “fluctuation between energy and apathy” in Americans’ feelings toward China, argued “ultra-enthusiasm” for China was incited among Americans in the 1930s during the Second Sino-Japanese War, as well as following President Richard Nixon’s trip to China in 1972, while American disillusionment with China was particularly pronounced in the 1920s and then again among American soldiers during World War II.<sup>103</sup>

These periods of heightened Sinophilia, in the early nineteenth century, the 1860s, the 1890s, and the 1930s, have also corresponded with increased interest among Americans in consuming Chinese culture and commodities, resulting in historical episodes of Sinophile consumption. Such bouts of Sinophile consumption, like Sinophilia more generally, have also been contingent on favorable political, economic, and social contexts. In the eighteenth century, for example, American and English consumers often drank tea for its supposed medicinal and social benefits. However, as Caroline Frank has argued, the particular economic context behind the importation and consumption of tea in the 1770s led American colonists to view Chinese tea as a poisonous “agent of tyranny”, part of an effort by the British government to render colonists docile and dependent consumers by delivering unto them “a soporific substance produced by a despotized people.”<sup>104</sup> Conversely, immediately following the success of the Revolution, importing

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<sup>103</sup> Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Images of China and India*, 71; Fairbank, *The United States and China*, 316–20.

<sup>104</sup> Caroline Frank, *Objectifying China, Imagining America: Chinese Commodities in Early America* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2012), 166–92.

tea from China without relying on the British became a proud symbol of American independence. By the 1820s, Americans by and large no longer associated tea with any nefarious intent: the Chinese drink, along with blue-and-white porcelain, became widely consumed staples of ordinary American households from 1820 through 1850, successfully marketed by merchants as enabling consumers to partake in an authentic Chinese experience.<sup>105</sup> The Sinophile consumption of the early nineteenth century also saw Americans across the Northeast accumulate sizable private collections of Chinese commodities and material culture, or see such collections in venues such as Nathan Dunn's Chinese Museum in Philadelphia, which operated with great success from 1838 to 1854. In other periods of heightened Sinophilia, such as the late 1860s, 1930s, and the early 1970s, Americans again consumed embodiments of Chinese culture in greater quantities, devouring Chinese philosophy, literature, art, and in the twentieth century, Chinese food.<sup>106</sup> Ultimately, these bouts of Sinophile consumption amounted to the particular expression of Sinophilia on the part of American consumers.

To be sure, while Sinophilia has been a continual presence in American culture and thought throughout the nation's history, it has been juxtaposed with an equally consistent and decidedly more impactful anti-Chinese racism. As Stuart Creighton Miller has demonstrated, such racism dated back to the colonial period, originating with reports from traders, diplomats, and missionaries who had traveled to China and returned with damning descriptions of the Asian nation. Spread among the general populace through mass media, and reinforced and deepened by media coverage of calamitous events in

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<sup>105</sup> Haddad, *America's First Adventure in China: Trade, Treaties, Opium, and Salvation*, 58; Haddad, *The Romance of China: Excursions to China in U.S. Culture, 1776-1876*, 22-55.

<sup>106</sup> Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present*, 4, 63; Coe, *Chop Suey*, 240.

China, including the Opium Wars, the devastation of the Taiping Rebellion, and the Tientsin Massacre, this negative view of China had by the 1850s reached a national audience that included Easterners and Midwesterners with no significant personal experience of Chinese culture or immigration.<sup>107</sup>

The late 1870s and early 1880s represented a particularly stark nadir in the fluctuating pattern of American feelings toward China. By the end of the 1870s, the anti-Chinese racism and near-genocidal violence that had run rampant along the West coast, motivated by the racial imperatives of Manifest Destiny and the economic competition posed by Chinese immigrants to white laborers, had evolved into a national issue surrounding the question of Chinese immigration. A narrow political equilibrium between the Democratic and Republican parties in presidential contests made Chinese exclusion, a most important issue in the swing state of California, part of their respective national platforms. Although nominally a regional issue, Chinese exclusion received no shortage of support from Americans in the East, many of whom held negative views of Chinese immigrants as unassimilable, dangerous, and menacing to public health.<sup>108</sup> With the passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, Congress enshrined this anti-Chinese racism in national immigration policy, seemingly resolving the so-called “Chinese Question” and leaving those Chinese immigrants remaining in the United States marked by a permanent alien status.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> For more on this, see Stuart Creighton Miller.

<sup>108</sup> Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882*.

<sup>109</sup> For more on the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act and its impact on race and American immigration, citizenship, and identity, and on the lived experience of Chinese immigrants in the United States, see Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Madeline Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and*

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As Sinophilia experienced a significant low in the 1870s and 1880s, this period also saw Americans in the eastern half of the country come into significant personal contact with Chinese immigration and cuisine for the first time. Discernible Chinese enclaves emerged in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, in the early 1870s, composed primarily of Chinese immigrants fleeing increasingly deadly anti-Chinese violence in western cities and mining towns.<sup>110</sup> As immigration into these cities continued, the populations of these Chinatowns grew throughout the decade. Between 1870 and 1890, the officially counted Chinese population of Chicago increased from less than a dozen to over 500, while in New York, Manhattan's Chinese community had grown to number roughly 750 by 1880, rendering it the largest Chinese enclave in the eastern half of the United States at the time.<sup>111</sup> It was within these neighborhoods that American urbanites in the East and Midwest were first exposed to the most divisive embodiment of Chinese culture in the United States, Chinese food. At first, Chinese restaurants in these cities were generally not established to cater to a non-Chinese clientele, but instead provided for the gustatory and social needs of the Chinese American community. Restaurants in Chinatown typically offered cuisine that was meant to appeal to the palate of Chinese immigrants, not to that of natives of the United States, and also served as spaces for social interactions, community functions, and celebrations. Although they were business

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*Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Sucheng Chan, ed., *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

<sup>110</sup> Jean Pfälzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War against Chinese Americans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>111</sup> United States Census Office, *Compendium of the Eleventh Census* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1892); John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 225.

establishments, Chinese restaurants served as much, if not more, of a social function for the Chinese immigrant community as they did a profit-making one.<sup>112</sup>

Even as these Chinese restaurants were principally intended to serve Chinese customers, the racialized rhetoric informing Americans' perceptions of the eateries simultaneously discouraged most white urbanites from patronizing them. Reflections of both Chinese culture and Chinese immigration, the predominant stereotype in the late nineteenth century imagined Chinese restaurants as sinister dens of iniquity, hosts to vices like opium trafficking and smoking, gambling, and the prostitution and enslavement of white women. Reports of white American girls becoming enamored with Chinese "Casanovas" operating out of dingy restaurants were not uncommon in nineteenth-century newspapers. Such women were usually depicted either as victims of the cultural corruption emanating outward from Chinatowns, or as immoral degenerates naturally inclined towards such sinful spaces. Meanwhile, the food served in Chinese restaurants was frequently maligned as being composed of pets and vermin, such as dogs, cats, rats, and snakes, or as being totally incomprehensible to Western eaters for its barbarousness, a condemnation frequently directed at Chinese foodways overall. Short of outright praise, oftentimes the most benign descriptions of Chinese cuisine in the United States simply labeled the food "queer" or "mysterious."

Such negative stereotypes certainly surrounded nineteenth-century Chinese restaurants in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. Jokes about Chinese restaurants serving cats and dogs appear in New York City newspapers as early as 1873.<sup>113</sup> In

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<sup>112</sup> Xinyang Wang, *Surviving the City: The Chinese Immigrant Experience in New York City, 1890-1970* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 66; Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 80–91.

<sup>113</sup> "Miscellaneous Items," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 26, 1873.

various articles printed in the 1880s and early 1890s, meanwhile, Chinese restaurants were described as “full of mysteries,” as fronts for Chinese gambling, and as underworld spaces where anarchists met to hatch murderous plots.<sup>114</sup> In Philadelphia, one journalist described a Chinese restaurant opened in 1884 to notable fanfare in Chinatown as an obvious front to “the largest Chinese opium joint and gambling house ever opened in this city,” while in Chicago, observers as early as 1878 argued that the operation of such opium dens in the city’s Chinatown represented an existential threat to “Caucasian civilization.”<sup>115</sup> Clearly, Americans in eastern cities were well versed in the disparaging stereotypes that labeled Chinese restaurants as cancerous blights spreading disease and depravity into their environs.

Beyond denigrating the mysterious or even revolting nature of the cuisine, or decrying the illicit activities occurring within their walls, the rhetoric surrounding Chinese restaurants served as a reflection of many of the broader concerns Americans had concerning Chinese immigration at the time. Restaurants, as sites for the creation and consumption of Chinese cuisine, were intimately associated with Chinese culture, along with the stereotypical vices of Chinese immigrants, and were seen as spatial embodiments of the exotic civilization that Chinese Americans had originated from, as were Chinatowns in general.<sup>116</sup> In the 1870s and 1880s, the fears and prejudices underwriting Americans’ anxieties concerning Chinese immigration were thus seen as being particularly embodied in Chinese restaurants. New Yorkers, Philadelphians, and Chicagoans projected their fears of Chinese vice and cultural corruption onto these spatial

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<sup>114</sup> “With the Opium-Smokers,” *The New York Times*, March 22, 1880; “Training Sparrows to Fight,” *The New York Times*, January 26, 1885; “Among the Anarchists,” *The Times*, July 31, 1892.

<sup>115</sup> “A Chinese Restaurant,” *The Times*, December 8, 1884; “Celestial Smokers.”

<sup>116</sup> Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery*, 64–65.

embodiments of Chinese culture, imagining them as deceptive fronts for hidden evils within. More than any other Chinese business, or any other ethnic eatery, Chinese restaurants represented an outsized threat to many nineteenth-century Americans and their racialized idea of the American republic.

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Beginning in the mid-1890s, this widely denigrating view of Chinese restaurants suddenly gave way to a broad embrace of Chinese restaurants and cuisine at the turn of the twentieth century, resulting in a fad that historians have dubbed the “chop suey craze.” This craze was ushered in by the spectacular visit of Li Hongzhang to the United States. Li was the Viceroy of Zhili Province, a career politician and diplomat in Qing China, who embarked on a global tour through Russia, Europe, and North America in 1896. Li’s arrival in New York City in August of that year was marked by an outpouring of excitement and fanfare, and Li was given what the *New York Times* referred to as a “royal reception.”<sup>117</sup> His arrival was similarly feted in Chinatown, where the main streets of the enclave were thronged with people throughout the night of August 28, following Li’s arrival, and the *New York Sun* reported that “never before in the history of Chinatown was it visited by so many persons in one night.”<sup>118</sup> Li also passed through Philadelphia during his sojourn in the United States, and his visit similarly prompted white Philadelphians to flock to their city’s Chinese enclave as well. In anticipation of his visit, merchants and residents in Chinatown put on elaborate and extensive celebrations: on the night before Li’s arrival, the Chinese enclave was “ablaze” with lantern light, with the buildings “gayly decorated” with Chinese and American flags, and bunting “of all the

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<sup>117</sup> Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 144.

<sup>118</sup> “Li Comes in State,” *The Sun*, August 29, 1896.

colors in the rainbow” strewn over the streets.<sup>119</sup> During the festivities, citizens from all over Philadelphia came in droves to participate in or simply view the Chinese spectacle. Many of the visitors, in addition to viewing fireworks and visiting the stores and joss houses of Chinatown, also journeyed into the enclave’s restaurants, where they seized the opportunity to try Chinese American cuisine for the first time. Even in Chicago, where Li did not visit, Americans reacted to the event with great excitement, and Chicago newspapers extensively covered his activities on the East coast, as well as his political views and daily activities.<sup>120</sup> Before his arrival in New York harbor, prominent Chicagoans publicly speculated as to whether Li would come to their city as well, and if so, what sort of public reception he should be given, if any.<sup>121</sup> Clearly, the significance of Li’s visit, described as that of the greatest Chinese citizen to ever visit the country, was not lost on those Americans unable to physically witness the event, while those who did became inspired to seek out Chinese culture in their cities’ Chinatowns.

Beyond generating such enthusiasm for China and Chinese culture that significant numbers of urban Americans overcame their trepidations about setting foot in Chinatown, Li’s visit also endowed chop suey with tremendous fame and a popularity it had not had up to this point. Chop suey seems to have first appeared in eastern cities in the mid- to late 1880s, though it did not initially inspire much excitement among most urban residents. Wong Chin Foo, in a celebratory article on Chinese cuisine published in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, labeled “chop soly” in 1884 as the “national dish of China,” while in 1887 the dish was described by its relatively few non-Chinese admirers as “a pungent

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<sup>119</sup> “Chinatown Aglow with Lanterns,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 3, 1896.

<sup>120</sup> “Li Hung Chang Here,” *The Inter Ocean*, August 29, 1896; “Visits West Point,” *The Inter Ocean*, September 1, 1896; “The Great Chinaman,” *The Inter Ocean*, September 7, 1896.

<sup>121</sup> “What Shall Chicago Do for Li Hung Chang?,” *The Inter Ocean*, August 9, 1896.

and palatable conception of chicken livers and gizzards, fungi, bamboo buds, bean sprouts, water chestnuts and all manner of savory spices stewed together.”<sup>122</sup> Although the dish was obviously enjoyed by some non-Chinese Americans when it was first introduced in Chinese restaurants, the gastronomical appeal of chop suey did not inspire many acolytes in these early years. Indeed, in the months before Li’s arrival in New York, descriptions of chop suey remained demonstrably influenced by existing stereotypes of Chinese cuisine in the United States. For instance, one woman’s 1896 “exploration” of Chinatown was narrativized in one newspaper as follows: “In front of me was placed a big plate on which was heaped a queer-looking mess. I looked at it with misgivings. Uncanny looking white things trailed through a dark, indescribable mixture. With it was served a sauce which looked like liquid jelly. In it one was supposed to dip the first delicacy. But imagine eating the stuff!”<sup>123</sup> During Li’s closely followed visit, however, several newspapers proclaimed the dish to be the Chinese minister’s preferred meal over Western cuisine, while some Chinese Americans even alleged that he helped invent chop suey during the visit.<sup>124</sup> In the years afterwards, Chinese restaurateurs both intensified and took advantage of the association between Li and chop suey to advertise their own restaurant offerings, listing “Li Hongzhang chop suey” on their menus to entice potential white patrons. Obviously, Li’s invented association with chop suey played a significant role in its marketing and persistent popularity, remaining a piece of popular

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<sup>122</sup> “The Talk of New York,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 30, 1888; “Chinese Cooking,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 6, 1884.

<sup>123</sup> “Dens of Chinatown Explored By a Woman,” *The World*, May 10, 1896.

<sup>124</sup> “Li in Brooklyn,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 1, 1896; Coe, *Chop Suey*, 163; Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 145.

lore surrounding New York's chop suey craze into the early twentieth century.<sup>125</sup>

However, the particular trajectory of chop suey and Chinese restaurants in the years after the Li visit indicates that forces other than his celebrity status and that created for chop suey by his spectacular sojourn in New York underwrote Americans' embrace of Chinese cuisine throughout the chop suey craze.

In particular, from 1899 to 1903, the chop suey craze entered a phase of marked amplification, as Chinese restaurants in multiple American cities began to increase in number and expand outward from Chinatown. As a result of the growing numbers of New Yorkers flocking to Chinese restaurants in 1899, the *New York Times* described the city as having gone “‘chop-suey’ mad” in that year, while an identifiable “craze” for Chinese restaurant fare reportedly became manifest in Philadelphia at the same time.<sup>126</sup> Indeed, by quantitative measurements, 1899-1900 seems to be the starting point for a general increase in the popularity and appeal of Chinese restaurants in eastern cities. While from 1895 through 1899, New York City averaged five Chinese restaurants per year, in 1900 the number of Chinese restaurants increased to eight in total, including the first Chinese restaurant to be established outside of Chinatown: the Mee Hing, located on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The next year, the number of Chinese eateries in the city increased to twelve, with four located outside Chinatown; by 1903, the number increased to fifteen, and reached at least nineteen Chinese restaurants in New York by 1910.<sup>127</sup> Throughout this time, the proportion of Chinese restaurants located in non-Chinese neighborhoods also

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<sup>125</sup> As late as 1908, it was believed by some that the sudden popularity of chop suey at the turn of the century was due directly to Li's enthusiastic embrace of the dish during his New York City visit; Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 145; “Onward March of Chop Suey.”

<sup>126</sup> “Heard About Town,” *The New York Times*, January 29, 1900.

<sup>127</sup> *Trow's New York City Directory* (New York: Trow Directory, Printing and Bookbinding Company, 1895).

increased, such that by 1910 there were more Chinese restaurants located outside of Chinatown than there were *inside* Chinatown. Meanwhile, according to one Philadelphia newspaper, by 1899 there were some thirty Chinese restaurants located outside of the city's Chinatown.<sup>128</sup> Although this figure is not necessarily corroborated by Boyd's Philadelphia City Business Directory, an upward trend in the number of Chinese restaurants beginning around 1899-1900, and their increasing prominence outside of Chinatown, is certainly evident. According to Boyd's Directory, Chinese restaurants in Philadelphia numbered thirteen by 1902, fifteen by 1903, and sixteen by 1906, with approximately half of the restaurants in each year being located outside the Chinese enclave.<sup>129</sup> Finally, Chinese restaurants in Chicago also began to increase in popularity in this period, although two or three years after they did so in New York and Philadelphia. An article for the *Chicago Daily Tribune* first identified this increasing popularity in 1902, ascribing it to the active pursuit of a broader clientele by Chinese restaurateurs. The same article described the Loop area of Chicago as having no shortage of Chinese restaurants beyond the confines of Chinatown, and asserted that "in no case is a proprietor [of one] known to be losing money."<sup>130</sup> By 1903, a discernible fad for chop suey had clearly emerged in Chicago among a range of customers no longer limited to slummers, dregs, and lychnobites, as several streets outside Chinatown were now described as "[having] their quota of places where the mysterious chop suey is served."<sup>131</sup> As in other cities, the increasing popularity of Chicago's Chinese restaurants during these years can also be traced in the city directory, which listed only three Chinese eateries in

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<sup>128</sup> "Philadelphia Is Getting the Chinese Restaurant Craze," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 12, 1899.

<sup>129</sup> *Boyd's Philadelphia City Business Directory*, 1900-1908.

<sup>130</sup> "Chinese Restaurants Increasing in Popularity," *The Chicago Sunday Tribune*, January 26, 1902.

<sup>131</sup> "Chop Suey Fad Grows," *Chicago Tribune*, July 19, 1903.

1899. Within four years, that number increased to nearly two dozen, and by 1905, 40 Chinese restaurants were recorded in the city directory.<sup>132</sup> Evidently, between 1899 and 1903, Americans in Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, and elsewhere, came to embrace eating in Chinese restaurants as an increasingly mainstream, though still exotic, act of consumption, and the eateries themselves enjoyed unprecedented acceptance in eastern urban geographies.<sup>133</sup>

Beyond this numerical sign of Chinese restaurants' increased appeal among non-Chinese Americans, this period also witnessed a more visible cultural appreciation for chop suey as a dish emerge, even outside the context of Chinese restaurants. Newspapers in New York and Chicago in 1900 began reporting on chop suey being consumed in venues such as club meetings, plays, and even a formal ball, while the summer issue of Boston Cooking School Magazine featured a recipe for chop suey for the first time in the same year.<sup>134</sup> The dish even found its way to the exclusive Victoria hotel, at a Chicago Boosters' Club meeting, where eating chop suey was explicitly equated with "playing

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<sup>132</sup> *The Lakeside Annual Directory of the City of Chicago* (Chicago: The Chicago Directory Company, 1899); *The Lakeside Annual Directory of the City of Chicago* (Chicago: The Chicago Directory Company, 1903); *The Lakeside Annual Directory of the City of Chicago* (Chicago: The Chicago Directory Company, 1905).

<sup>133</sup> To be sure, Chinese restaurants were not the only eateries to gain newfound popularity in this period, as ethnic restaurants and foodstuffs took on particular significance for the American middle class. Scholars have put forward a variety of explanations for ethnic restaurants' newfound popularity at the turn of the century. While Cindy Lobel and Kristin L. Hoganson identify the middle class's consumption of foreign cuisine in ethnic restaurants or at home as an act of "imperial buy-in," confirming their own cultural superiority over imperialism's conquered subjects, Andrew Haley explains the middle class embrace of culinary adventurism as an act of resistance against the hegemonic influence of the aristocratic elite and its culinary xenophobia. See Cindy R. Lobel, *Urban Appetites: Food and Culture in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 8–9; Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 10–11; Andrew P. Haley, *Turning the Tables: Restaurants and the Rise of the American Middle Class, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 2–3, 97.

<sup>134</sup> "Chop Suey at the Victoria," *The Inter Ocean*, November 16, 1900; *The Inter Ocean*, March 21, 1900; "Much Like the French Ball," *Chicago Tribune*, January 7, 1900; "A Chop Suey Ball," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 30, 1900; "Queries and Answers," *The Boston Cooking-School Magazine*, 1900.

Chinese” for an evening.<sup>135</sup> Meanwhile, recipes for homemade chop suey began to appear in the *New York Times* in 1901, while in the next year, Chicago newspapers also began instructing housewives on how to make chop suey and chow mein at home, as “Chinese dishes that please the American taste.”<sup>136</sup> By 1902, chop suey had become a featured dish of “fashionable dinners” presented in the more upscale private residences of New York City, and the cuisine was considered by many in New York and elsewhere to be the national dish of China and a reflection of Chinese epicurean sensibilities.<sup>137</sup><sup>138</sup> Even beyond Chinatown and Chinese restaurants, urban Americans took “eating Chinese” to an unprecedented level of popularity beginning in 1900.

Chop suey, along with other mainstays of Chinese restaurants in this period, was popular among non-Chinese Americans for a variety of reasons beyond its association with Li Hongzhang. One of the most widely articulated appeals of Chinese restaurant fare was its reflection of cosmopolitan sensibilities. As one Philadelphia anecdote illustrated, to truly appreciate the offerings of Chinese restaurants, not only chop suey, required cultural competence and know-how. The anecdote described the plight of two “countrymen” who had come to the city to try “yok-o-mai,” a dish which “every good Philadelphian” knows how to eat. The two rural visitors, however, in their ignorance instead drank two bowls of soy sauce, believing these to be the entire meal, and subsequently reacted in predictable revulsion. But, the article concludes the anecdote,

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<sup>135</sup> “Chop Suey at the Victoria,” *The Inter Ocean*, November 16, 1900; for more on the concept of playing at race, see Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>136</sup> “Chop Suey and Chow Mein,” *The Inter Ocean*, November 9, 1902; “How to Make Chop Suey,” *The New York Times*, November 3, 1901.

<sup>137</sup> “Epicurean Chinamen,” *The Inter Ocean*, March 9, 1902; “Chop Suey and Chow Mein”; “China’s National Dish,” *Chicago Eagle*, December 20, 1902.

<sup>138</sup> “How to Make Chop Suey,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 28, 1902.

“had the countrymen understood and properly eaten yok-o-mai they would doubtless have enjoyed it, for it is really a very palatable dish.”<sup>139</sup>

More specifically, as demonstrated above, chop suey was seen, however erroneously, as the national dish of China, and was thus imbued by Americans with a supposed specific significance for the Chinese people.<sup>140</sup> This not only factored into the dish’s ability to render its consumers cosmopolitan, but also reinforced the Sinophile motivations for its popularity. As Harvey Levenstein has argued, the nineteenth-century elite considered the consumption of French cuisine a marker of cultural superiority due to its “elaborate methods of preparation, foreign code-words, and complex dining rituals,” which made it inaccessible to those of a lower cultural and economic class.<sup>141</sup> Although Chinese cultural products were never granted the same level of refinement as those of French culture, the supposedly national dish of the Chinese people was marked by very similar barriers to accessibility, based on foreignness and complexity, which made the ability to enjoy chop suey “properly” a marker of one’s cultural know-how. Chop suey was considered a dish that was prepared via Chinese cooking methods, requiring particular knowledge of Chinese customs (i.e. how to eat with chopsticks) in order to enjoy it, and of which it was said that Chinese people found it delectable.<sup>142</sup> Meanwhile, because chop suey was a product of *Chinese* culture in particular, a culture that had been both idealized and denigrated in the United States for decades, it was simultaneously

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<sup>139</sup> “Philadelphia Is Getting the Chinese Restaurant Craze.”

<sup>140</sup> Beginning in the 1910s, Americans became increasingly aware of the fact that chop suey had held no special significance for the Chinese nation. Newspaper articles repeatedly appeared in numerous American publications from the 1910s through the 1930s “revealing” that chop suey was in fact invented by Chinese Americans.

<sup>141</sup> Harvey Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 14.

<sup>142</sup> “Women Here and There,” *The New York Times*, November 17, 1901; “Made a Raid in Chinatown,” *The New York Times*, March 10, 1899.

subjected to all the cultural meanings and stereotypes that Chinese culture in general had also been subjected to throughout the nineteenth century. As a dish, chop suey embodied all that China, Chinese culture, and Chinese immigrants had represented to Americans for over a century. Overall, chop suey was perceived as a physical manifestation of an imagined Chinese culture, in much the same way that tea and porcelain had been perceived in the early nineteenth century, and thus was endowed with significant appeal, or repulsiveness, because of its particular “origins.” Meanwhile, unlike other Chinese American dishes, chop suey had been made famous by newspaper coverage of the Li Hongzhang visit, granting it a place in the national spotlight that no other Chinese restaurant offering (save perhaps tea) ever enjoyed.<sup>143</sup> Ultimately, whether one viewed Chinese culture, and the dish that encapsulated it, through a cosmopolitan lens or a racist worldview, to dine on chop suey or to patronize a Chinese restaurant was to literally “eat Chinese.” It was because of this Chinese cultural endowment that chop suey and Chinese restaurants enjoyed particular appeal at the end of the 1890s, during the height of a resurgent period of Sinophilia in the United States.

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While such cultural fetishism for Chinese food as the embodiment of Chinese culture helps explain the unique appeal of chop suey to American diners, the timing of the chop suey craze in the 1890s, and especially of its expansion after 1899, remains in need of explanation. Although the excitement caused by the Li Hongzhang visit stands

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<sup>143</sup> Scholars have put forward several different explanations for the particular appeal of chop suey to American diners. Anne Mendelson argues that chop suey was a “culinary idiom,” a version of Cantonese cuisine deliberately constructed to tailor to the American palate. Andrew Coe, meanwhile, postulates that chop suey’s “indecipherability” to Western diners rendered it subconsciously satisfying, in the same way that “savory primal stew” had satisfied European peasants and laborers for centuries. See Mendelson, *Chow Chop Suey*; Coe, *Chop Suey*, 176.

out in the historical record for its spectacle and obvious effect on American perceptions of Chinese cuisine, from a wider perspective it also becomes apparent that the sudden embrace of Chinese restaurants in this period was underwritten by more than just enthusiasm over Li's celebrity status, his personal association with chop suey, or the curiosity that middle class cosmopolitan Americans felt toward the "exotic" dish he allegedly preferred. Instead, in the context of other actions toward China, Chinese culture, and Chinatown in the 1890s, Americans' sudden and energetic embrace of chop suey and Chinese restaurants becomes more readily identifiable as an act of Sinophile consumption, an outburst reflecting a resurgence of Sinophilia at the end of the nineteenth century.

In addition to the Chinatown tourism industry that became considerably popular in the 1890s, American crowds also converged on Chinatowns on several other occasions besides the Li visit, generally in response to exciting developments in Chinatown or in the United States' relations with China proper. In these noticeably sizable excursions, visitors were not necessarily attracted by the lure of chop suey in particular. For example, when in 1897 the Christian League established a mission in Chinatown, and a Philadelphia locomotive construction company hired five Chinese employees around the same time, non-Chinese Philadelphians once again experienced a heightened interest in their city's Chinese community and its "peculiar" way of life.<sup>144</sup> Observers seemed to be particularly excited by the notion that, through the Christianizing work of the League missionaries, the immigrants living in Chinatown would be able to become more like Americans, and thereby gain entry into the social life of American society. As a

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<sup>144</sup> "Great Changes in the Chinese Quarter," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 31, 1897.

population considered to be “a race of people essentially different from anything [the typical American had] ever before encountered,” the work of Christian missionaries seemed the surest way to make the Chinese community “initiated into more of America and things American.” This optimism for the future of Chinese immigrants and the prospect of Americanizing the Chinese stimulated large numbers of Philadelphians to visit the Chinese enclave. Reverend Frederick Poole, who led the Christianizing effort in Chinatown, at one point even remarked that at least a thousand Philadelphians had visited Chinatown for the first time due to the efforts of the Christian League mission. Although these new visitors expressed and acted on desires to tour the various establishments of the enclave, they held equal enthusiasm for Chinatown’s joss houses, opium dens, restaurants, and even the barber shop, while according to one newspaper article, their excursions into Chinese restaurants did not reflect any great affection for chop suey specifically.<sup>145</sup> In this instance, visitors to Chinatown were driven more by the typical Sinophile motivations of interest in consuming Chinese culture overall and enthusiasm for the future potential of Chinese souls, as well as by the newspaper prominence of the self-serving idea of China, than by a particular drive to consume chop suey.

Meanwhile, as the crowds that flocked to the Chinese enclave during the Boxer War attest, events overseas affecting American relations with China also had the capacity to drive urban crowds into Chinatown, as well as to drive them away. When the Boxer Uprising first broke out in China, white tourism in New York’s Chinatown noticeably decreased. For a time, many in Chinatown reportedly felt a sense of anxiety and panic about venturing out of doors in response to the “Boxer excitement,” and several Chinese

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<sup>145</sup> “Great Changes in the Chinese Quarter.”

laundrymen in Chicago suffered a loss of business from non-Chinese customers.<sup>146</sup> However, after a few months, and as a result of the “newspaper prominence” Chinatown received as a result of the conflict, crowds of curious tourists once again began to throng New York’s Chinese quarter. Chinese restaurants as sites of courtship were allegedly a significant draw for many of these visitors, according to an article in the *New York Tribune*, though much of the tourism seemed also to be motivated by a general curiosity about the living conditions and activities, illicit or otherwise, of the city’s Chinese population, and a desire to consume all that the enclave had to offer.<sup>147</sup> In any case, for several months in the year 1900, white enthusiasm for Chinatown tourism corresponded directly with the changing state of Sino-American relations.

Beyond an enhanced interest in Chinatown, the 1890s also witnessed a much broader resurgence in enthusiasm for China along traditional lines of Sinophilia, engendered by changing circumstances both in China and in the United States. A traditionally Sinophile constituency, American missionaries, became significantly more energized and passionate about converting the Chinese at the end of the nineteenth century, due both to the emergence of the Social Gospel movement in the United States and to efforts in China to Westernize at the same time. Additionally, following the “closing” of the frontier in 1890, and as industrialization in the late nineteenth century intensified fears in the United States of the rate of production outpacing that of consumption, the historical view of China as a miraculously vast market for American

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<sup>146</sup> “Chinese Lose Trade,” *The Inter Ocean*, July 23, 1900; “New York Chinese Now Breathe Easier,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 26, 1900.

<sup>147</sup> “Chinatown Full of Visitors,” *New York Tribune*, July 30, 1900; for more on Chinese restaurants as sites of courtship and sexual experimentation, see Heather Ruth Lee, “Chop Suey for Two: The Role of Chinese Restaurants in the Leisure Industry, 1900-1930,” Conference Presentation, American Historical Association Annual Meeting, January 5, 2015.

goods took on a new sense of urgency, and American trade with China began to increase again, after having fallen steeply in the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>148</sup> Beyond economic salvation, China also took on profound importance for the character and future of the American empire as it began to emerge in the Asia Pacific. Indeed, the country's unique importance to American foreign policy and trade significantly underwrote Secretary of State John Hay's pursuit of the Open Door Policy in China in 1899, while other observers increasingly emphasized China as essential to the United States' future as a global power. For instance, Alfred Thayer Mahan, the influential author of *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, argued that future struggles over dominance between imperial powers would be fought in Asia, and that Hawaii and the Philippines were crucial stepping-stones on the way to the "carcass" of China.<sup>149</sup> By the end of the 1890s, Americans for various reasons had, like their ancestors, come to endow China, unique among East Asian nations, and Chinese cultural products in the United States, with particular significance and appeal, representing a waxing moment of resurgent Sinophilia at the end of the nineteenth century.

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Ultimately, it was the emergence of the American empire in the Asia Pacific, and the resulting feeling of "proximity" Americans felt between their country and China through increased international contact, that represented the most profound and significant cause of this resurgence of Sinophilia in the late 1890s. The first efforts

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<sup>148</sup> Iriye, *Across the Pacific: An Inner History of American-East Asian Relations*, 77; Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 48; Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present*, 107.

<sup>149</sup> Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present*, 107.

toward the creation of a Pacific-facing American empire may be traced as far back as 1867, with the United States' acquisition of Alaska from the Russian Empire. However, Pacific imperial activity truly began in 1893, when American Marines helped Americans living in Hawaii overthrow Queen Lili'uokalani and establish the Republic of Hawaii, which was annexed by the United States in 1898. When Li Hongzhang arrived in New York City in August of 1896, his visit signaled to many Americans just how close their budding empire had become to East Asia, and to China in particular, as the United States became increasingly prominent on the world stage. As the *New York Times* described him, Li was not just a culturally exciting Chinese "celebrity," but was also "the greatest foreigner and the most powerful ruler that [had] ever visited the United States."<sup>150</sup>

Following Li's visit, however, an event which prompted still greater excitement about proximity between the United States and China was the Spanish-American War.

Although the principal American acquisition following the war was the Philippines, many observers looked with anticipation *beyond* the Philippines to prospects for American activity in China, while coverage of the Filipino acquisition simultaneously re-energized a discourse of connection between the United States and Asia. For example, Theodore Noyes, an American journalist with the *Washington Evening Star*, argued that the American possession of the Philippines brought the United States "in such relations of proximity and intimate touch with Asia" that its status as an Asia-Pacific power would surely be respected.<sup>151</sup> The ambassador to Siam, in a 1900 article in *Harper's Weekly*, likewise argued that the Philippines would serve as the center of American commercial

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<sup>150</sup> "Welcome to Earl Li," *The New York Times*, August 29, 1896.

<sup>151</sup> Theodore W. Noyes, "Problems in the Orient: Hawaii Safely on the Smooth Highway of American Enterprise and Prosperity," n.d.

and imperial enterprises throughout Asia, notably adding: “We are all now watching China, only 600 miles from our American territory. What of her future?”<sup>152</sup> As a result of the altered geopolitics following the Spanish-American War, an understanding of the United States’ new, more involved connection to Asia, with particular attention to prospects in China, had clearly emerged among Americans, galvanizing considerable excitement.

From 1899 to 1901, American attention was drawn even more to China by the outbreak of the Boxer Uprising and American participation in quashing the rebellion. The Uprising began in Shandong Province in 1899, at first as a reaction to the local experience of Western imperialism and Christian proselytizing, then later evolving into a larger anti-foreign and pro-Qing violent movement. The uprising lasted two years, with American troops occupying Beijing from August 1900, through the end of the conflict in September 1901, as part of a larger international coalition combatting the Boxers. Though the American participation in the Boxer War was relatively limited, the uprising and the United States’ role in suppressing it received enormous attention in the press, and ultimately had a significant impact on American sensibilities regarding China. Indeed, the conflict was so sensational that the *New York Sun* described it in August 1900 as “the most exciting episode ever known to civilization.”<sup>153</sup> While such a description was clearly hyperbolic, the *Sun*’s reaction to the Boxer Uprising reflected Americans’ general sense of the conflict’s excitement as well as its significance. To many, the war seemed to pit the forces of China’s recent modernization against reactionary rebels. As such, the

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<sup>152</sup> John Barrett, “The Philippines: Our Approach to Asia,” *Harper’s Weekly*, July 28, 1900, 707.

<sup>153</sup> “Foreign Affairs,” *Public Opinion: A Comprehensive Survey of the Press Throughout the World on All Important Current Topics*, 1900.

Boxer Uprising represented to American minds their two historical images of China, those of an idealized and wise civilization and of a culture of backwards barbarians, in an open and determinative conflict for China's future. Thus, it is hardly surprising that Americans' reactions to the conflict included concerns as well as optimism for that future: missionaries in the United States saw in the Boxer War the opening of a new opportunity to continue China's Christianization, while President William McKinley sought to ensure that the United States and China would resume friendly relations after the war's conclusion.<sup>154</sup> Even more than the Spanish-American War, it seems, the United States' participation in the Boxer Uprising energized Americans' latent Sinophilia, prompting heightened interest in China's future and the United States' relationship to it, as well as increased enthusiasm for consuming Chinese culture domestically, as discussed above.

However, it must also be stated, the chop suey craze might never have occurred without the agentive actions of Chinese activists, merchants, and restaurateurs. Efforts undertaken by Chinese immigrants themselves in the late nineteenth century played a key role in improving the image of China in the United States and making Chinese culture increasingly "safe" for consumption. As early as 1894, according to one New York newspaper, restaurateurs in the city's Chinatown had begun to take active steps toward attracting and catering to a non-Chinese clientele. Correcting for the stereotypes surrounding Chinese restaurants in the past, newly opened restaurants featured signs in both English and Chinese, aesthetically pleasing interior décor and ambiance, and bilingual waitstaffs, all of which signaled "a desire to cater to outsiders" and to "please

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<sup>154</sup> Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present*, 113–15.

visitors.”<sup>155</sup> Such efforts continued into the decade, as those restaurateurs who sought to capitalize on the Li Hongzhang visit used his name to pedal their chop suey to white patrons. By 1900, as Samantha Barbas has illustrated, Chinese merchants and restaurateurs had initiated a thorough “clean up Chinatown” campaign, meant to suppress illegal activities in the enclave and attract a broader tourist clientele.<sup>156</sup> While white Americans were pushed into Chinatown by their renewed interest in Chinese culture in the era of American imperialism, they were simultaneously pulled by the seductive efforts of Chinese Americans themselves.

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Overall, the emergence of the American empire in Asia, and the subsequent increased contact with, interest in, and enthusiasm for China that it engendered, stoked in Americans their historical passion for China as a unique cultural and political entity in American thought. This passion, amounting to a resurgence of periodic Sinophilia in the 1890s, formed the cultural backdrop to Americans’ sudden embrace of Chinese restaurants and cuisine, along with other means of consuming Chinese culture, from the beginning of the chop suey craze in 1896 through its intensification and expansion after 1899. While the visit of Li Hongzhang led Americans to embrace chop suey as a particularly appealing Chinese dish, and certainly represented the starting point for this period of Sinophilia, it was the continually increasing contact between the United States and China throughout the late 1890s, of which the Li visit was a part, that fundamentally underwrote Americans’ heightened passion for China in this decade and their subsequent energetic consumption of Chinese culture.

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<sup>155</sup> “Visitors Welcome in Chinatown,” *The Sun*, July 1, 1894.

<sup>156</sup> Barbas, “I’ll Take Chop Suey’: Restaurants as Agents of Culinary and Cultural Change,” 674.

In eastern cities, the form this Sinophile consumption took in the 1890s was unique in comparison to its historical antecedents; in locales such as New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, the resurgence of Sinophilia collided with the formation since the 1870s of consumable Chinese cultural spaces in Chinatown. As a widely available and long fetishized source of such consumable Chinese culture, and now directly associated with a prominent Chinese “celebrity,” Chinese restaurants serving chop suey reaped the greatest social and cultural benefits from this bout of Sinophile consumption. As the United States’ interaction with China reached a height between 1899 and 1901, intensifying an already resurgent Sinophilia, the chop suey craze initiated in 1896 also entered a new phase of amplification and expansion, resulting in the expansion of Chinese cuisine into public and private spaces beyond the borders of Chinatown.

The chop suey craze thus represented aprecedented iteration of American Sinophile consumption, carried out in the unprecedented form of a fad for Chinese restaurants and cuisine. By analyzing the chop suey craze in the context of Americans’ historical special attachment to China, and Chinese culture’s subsequent unique place in the minds of American consumers, the particular appeal of Chinese restaurants to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Americans, and their distinction from other ethnic eateries in this period, becomes easier to identify. Moreover, by focusing on the rapidly changing status of chop suey and Chinese restaurants from 1899 to 1903, the need to explain the chop suey craze as stemming from more than the Li Hongzhang visit alone becomes clear, as does the apparent significance of American imperialism in Asia and proximity to China in this same period. Although a variety of factors and historical circumstances converged to give rise to the chop suey craze at the turn of the twentieth

century, it is clear that any explanation for the craze's cause, timing, and ultimate trajectory must also take into account the supposed special relationship between the United States and China, and the subsequent unique status of Chinese culture and commodities, in the minds of nineteenth-century Americans.

In retrospect, the 1890s resurgence of Sinophilia, and the chop suey craze it engendered, was one of the most impactful bouts of enthusiasm for China in American history. During this period, Chinese restaurants were transformed in the eyes of many American urbanites, from bastions of filth and sin, to mainstream sites of adventurous eating. Although the energetic fad for chop suey and other Chinese restaurant offerings eventually attenuated, as Sinophile consumption trends had in previous decades, and chop suey became a normal feature of American ethnic cuisine, the widespread acceptability of Chinese American eateries remained. Ultimately, the turn-of-the-century chop suey craze brought Chinese restaurants and Chinese American cuisine into the mainstream of American mass culture for the first time, a status they would retain for the rest of the twentieth century.

### Chapter Three:

#### Oriental Palaces: Chin F. Foin, Chinese Fine Dining, and Upward Social Mobility

In 1911, the Mandarin Inn Café opened its doors to the Chicago public. Located in the downtown Loop, it was the most elaborate and celebrated Chinese restaurant in the city to date. In contrast to most Chinese restaurants at the time, its offerings catered specifically to the city's wealthy middle- and upper-class elite, rather than to the slummers, rubberneckers, ne'er-do-wells, and victims of racial discrimination who had frequented Chinatown in the nineteenth century. Patrons to the multi-story restaurant sat down to their meals of chop suey or Euro-American cuisine in an atmosphere marked by luxurious Asian and Western décor: elaborate tableware and cutlery, an impressive fountain and chandelier above the main dining room, and Chinese singers performing in the background. The restaurant blended "Oriental" and "Occidental" trappings in an upscale dining environment, creating a restaurant space that was simultaneously exotic yet comfortable, entertaining yet respectable for middle-class patronage.

The next year, the proprietor of the Mandarin Inn, Chin F. Foin, moved his family into a Victorian style mansion in an exclusive neighborhood in the city's South Side. At the time of the move, which coincided with the relocation of the Chicago Chinatown from its original site along Clark Street to its current location in Armour Square, Chin was well known among Chicagoans as a particularly wealthy and Americanized Chinese immigrant of high class and distinction. Importantly, he was also prominently associated

with the brand of upscale Chinese restaurants, which one reporter dubbed “Oriental palaces,” that he helped to pioneer in the city. Chin’s restaurants offered a supposedly Chinese dining experience to middle- and upper-class men and women in environments that were safer, more accommodating, more respectable, and more distinguished than the seedy, corruptive, and dangerous Chinese restaurants of popular imagination. It was due in no small part to these upscale eateries that Chin was able to catapult himself into Chicago’s upper class. His restaurants significantly expanded his wealth, demonstrated his cultural competence as a provider of Oriental luxury to Chicago’s discerning elite, and emphasized and solidified his social status as a distinguished and “acceptable” class of Chinese immigrant. This upward trajectory in Chicago society was spatially realized by Chin’s taking up of residence among the city’s social elite in a fashionable neighborhood on Calumet Avenue. In the middle of the Chinese Exclusion era, Chin Foin accomplished a notable achievement in upward social mobility for an otherwise marginalized and ostracized immigrant population.

Scholars of migration studies have long identified self-employment and entrepreneurship as not only a means of economic refuge for marginalized ethnic groups, but also a mechanism for the acceleration of the upward mobility of immigrant individuals and their offspring. Ivan Light in particular, himself a prolific writer and scholar of Asian American immigration, has asserted in multiple works that ethnic entrepreneurship and self-employment accelerates upward economic and social mobility for first-generation immigrant business owners and their descendants. Indeed, in “Self-Employment: Mobility Ladder or Economic Lifeboat?”, Light and Elizabeth Roach argue that the prevalence of self-employment among Korean immigrants in Los Angeles from

1970 to 1990 was due to “the continued centrality of self-employment to upward economic mobility,” adding that self-employment has been known for decades to be “a key to middle-class status and welfare for native whites as well as immigrant and ethnic minorities.”<sup>157</sup> Meanwhile, in her analyses of Chinatown as an enclave economy and of ethnic entrepreneurship more generally, Min Zhou has also argued for the importance of such entrepreneurship to the upward social mobility of marginalized ethnic groups like Chinese immigrants. By offering security and shelter from overt ethnic discrimination, as well as the opportunity to take advantage of available ethnic resources and to enjoy wider profit margins as a result, the enclave economy significantly enhances immigrants’ ability to raise themselves socioeconomically.<sup>158</sup>

The literature on Chinese immigration and mobility, however, has not always viewed Chinese restaurants in the first half of the twentieth century as enabling institutions for the vertical mobility, either social or occupational, of Chinese immigrants, or has often minimized the potential benefits that restaurants enabled some Chinese Americans to possibly reap. In an early work on the sociology of Chinatowns and their decline, Rose Hum Lee described Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in the 1940s as evidencing no vertical occupational mobility, and implicitly characterized the opportunities stemming from the restaurant industry as so minimal that immigrants

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<sup>157</sup> Ivan Light and Elizabeth Roach, “Self-Employment: Mobility Ladder or Economic Lifeboat?,” in *Ethnic Los Angeles* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996), 194; Ivan Light and Steven J. Gold, *Ethnic Economies* (San Diego: Academic Press, 2000), 57; Ivan Light, “Immigrant and Ethnic Enterprise in North America” 7, no. 2 (1984): 206–7.

<sup>158</sup> Min Zhou, “Revisiting Ethnic Entrepreneurship: Convergencies, Controversies, and Conceptual Advancements,” in *Rethinking Migration: New Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 222–33; Min Zhou, *Chinatown: The Socioeconomic Potential of an Urban Enclave* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 3–5.

avoided such employment where possible.<sup>159</sup> In his *Surviving the City*, Xinyang Wang more bluntly alleges that prior to the 1950s, “[Chinese immigrants’] employment and business opportunities in small laundries and restaurants promised no hope of upward mobility in American society,” and that their being relegated to work in laundries, restaurants, and grocery stores meant that “the road to social mobility in the United States” was blocked for Chinese immigrants during the Exclusion era.<sup>160</sup> Such an analysis, along with Min Zhou’s assertion that Chinese immigrants in the Exclusion era were “motivated merely by a sojourning goal” and “never tried or wanted to be [assimilated,]” speaks to a characterization of this period by some scholars as marked by Chinese immigrants’ lack of desire or ability to integrate into and advance within American society, while defining restaurant work as the travail of a marginalized ethnic group that offered little hope for movement out of the enclave economy and into the larger national market and society.<sup>161</sup>

In post-Exclusion analyses, the question of Chinese restaurant employment and mobility has yielded more mixed responses. In *Race, Self-Employment, and Upward Mobility*, for example, Timothy Bates, in his analysis of self-employment patterns among Asian immigrants in 1987, argues that the clustering of Asian immigrants into “traditional fields” of small-scale self-employment did not reflect socioeconomic opportunity, as some migration studies scholars have asserted, but instead “[appeared] to be rooted in blocked mobility.”<sup>162</sup> However, in *Foodscapes of Chinese America*, Xiaohui

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<sup>159</sup> Rose Hum Lee, “The Decline of Chinatowns in the United States,” *American Journal of Sociology* 54, no. 5 (1949): 429.

<sup>160</sup> Wang, *Surviving the City*, 7, 53.

<sup>161</sup> Zhou, *Chinatown*, 39.

<sup>162</sup> Timothy Bates, *Race, Self-Employment, and Upward Mobility: An Illusive American Dream* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 95.

Liu boldly asserts that, in the post-1965 era, “Chinese food facilitated the upward social mobility of Chinese immigrants [in the United States].”<sup>163</sup> Liu argues that immigrants of a higher social status were able to accomplish this upward mobility through restaurants because their socioeconomic status enabled them to resist white cultural domination (in contrast to the immigrants of the Exclusion era) and call upon their class capital (their knowledge, cultural values, culinary skills, and managerial experience) to establish restaurants that not only enhanced their reputation, but also promoted authentic Chinese cuisine and culinary art in the United States. Through spreading positive depictions of Chinese cuisine in American media and rendering authentic Chinese food more acceptable to Americans, Liu claims, these immigrants were able to enhance their own reputation and status in American society while maintaining strong ties to their cultural heritage.

The case study of Chin Foin and his restaurants not only demonstrates that Chinese immigrants in the Exclusion era were not all “sojourners” who had no desire to integrate into American society. It also reveals the particular pathway for upward social mobility through the restaurant industry available to certain Chinese immigrants in this period. Contrary to the arguments made by some scholars of Chinese immigration, the restaurant industry was not a dead-end career that condemned restaurateurs to social stagnation and limited income in the Exclusion era. Due to the fetishization and popularization of Chinese restaurants during the chop suey craze of the 1890s and 1900s, the Chinese restaurant industry in early twentieth-century Chicago offered immigrants like Chin Foin the opportunity to transform their ethnic and cultural capital, in the form

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<sup>163</sup> Xiaohui Liu, *Foodscapes of Chinese America: The Transformation of Chinese Culinary Culture in the U.S. since 1965* (New York: Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2015), 13.

not only of Chinatown's community resources but also of their own racial and class identity, into financial and social profit and to achieve a significant degree of upward mobility in the Chinese Exclusion period.

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Chin F. Foin was born in Guangdong Province in South China in the winter of 1876, an area from which the bulk of imperial China's emigrants originated. Like many other Chinese immigrants who found their way to Chicago during the Exclusion era, Chin was Taishanese, a native of Xinning County, or what is today recognized as the county-level city of Taishan, in Guangdong. When exactly Chin first arrived in the United States is not entirely clear. In a 1906 application to re-enter the United States after traveling to China, Chin described himself as having resided in the United States since 1892. However, in a 1924 application, his stated arrival in this country was listed as 1890. In any case, by 1895 a teenaged Chin had traveled east from San Francisco and taken up residence in the burgeoning Chinese enclave of the city of Chicago.<sup>164</sup>

Chin Foin was not a particularly lonely or isolated immigrant in the Windy City and was indeed able to take advantage early on of the assistance and opportunities offered by the Chinese community in Chicago. By the time of his arrival, the Chicago Chinatown was already well established and the city's Chinese inhabitants numbered more than 500 (with some reports numbering as high as 2000), part of a foreign-born population that amounted to more than 40% of Chicago's 1.1 million residents.<sup>165</sup> In Chinatown, the

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<sup>164</sup> "Testimony of Chin F. Foin," 1906, Chinese Exclusion Case Files, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration - Great Lakes Region; "Application for Preinvestigation of Mercantile Status of Chin Foin," 1924, Chinese Exclusion Case Files, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration - Great Lakes Region.

<sup>165</sup> United States Census Office, *Compendium of the Eleventh Census*.

Chin clan was one of the more powerful Chinese families in the early twentieth century, standing as rivals to the even more dominant Moy clan, which originally established the Chinese community in the city in the 1870s. Chin Foin's first job in Chicago, facilitated by his familial connections, was working as an assistant manager of Wing Chong Hai, a Chinese grocery store located at 281 Clark Street in the Chinese enclave. By 1900, he graduated to full manager, and had invested \$2500 in the company by 1906. By 1908 he remained a joint owner of the firm, along with eleven other members of the Chin clan.<sup>166</sup> The Wing Chong Hai was a Chin family business: competing with the Moy family's Hip Lung Yee Kee, the grocery was managed by Chin Foin's brother, Chin Yun Quay, and employed several other members of the Chin clan full-time, including Chin Hee, Chin Wing, Chin Fung Kee, Chin Ning, and Chin Der Bow.<sup>167</sup> Hiring multiple family members was a common practice among Chinese businesses during the Exclusion era. Not only did such hiring practices enable Chinese immigrants to bring family members to the United States and provide them a source of income, but employment in small businesses like laundries, restaurants, and grocery stores, also allowed Chinese immigrants to claim mercantile status and thereby avoid deportation under the Chinese Exclusion Act. As a benefit of his social network in Chinatown, Chin not only was given a decent job immediately after arriving in the Midwest, but also enjoyed access to transnational networks of capital, merchandise, and labor that Chinese immigrants in Chicago often relied on in establishing businesses, and which would eventually help Chin to establish his own series of upscale Chinese restaurants.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> "Testimony of Chin F. Foin"; Ling, *Chinese Chicago*, 63.

<sup>167</sup> "Testimony of Chin F. Foin"; "Testimony of Chin Yun Quay," 1906, Chinese Exclusion Case Files, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration - Great Lakes Region.

<sup>168</sup> Ling, *Chinese Chicago*, 60–61.

These were not only benefits that Chin enjoyed as a result of his familial network, but also advantages that naturally occurred within the enclave economy of Chinatown. As Min Zhou has described, enclave economies like Chinatown represent a special form of ethnic economy, marked by unique characteristics that include a sizable ethnic entrepreneurial class, a diverse array of businesses clustered together, relationships exemplified by coethnicity, and physical concentration in a geographically and ethnically bounded area. This form of economic relations between members of an ethnic group confers several benefits to the group and its individual members: group members, such as newly arriving Chinese immigrants, are afforded better employment and self-employment opportunities than they would receive in the larger market and thus have lower rates of unemployment; marginalized ethnic group members can avoid directly competing with native workers in the general labor market; and, significantly, young or inexperienced group members receive important job training and, ideally, exposure to a culture of entrepreneurship.<sup>169</sup> According to Ivan Light and Steven J. Gold, borrowing a concept from Pierre Bourdieu, such exposure to the culture of entrepreneurship is itself a form of cultural capital, in that it “transmits and maintains [to inexperienced members of an ethnic group] the practical knowledge of how to start and to run business firms.” Because, as they argue, entrepreneurship is “the occupational culture of bourgeoisies,” developing the skills and traits necessary for success in business endeavors through exposure to such entrepreneurship enables youths and new arrivals to prosper in the larger market economy, thereby turning this cultural capital into financial advantage.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Min Zhou, “Revisiting Ethnic Entrepreneurship: Convergencies, Controversies, and Conceptual Advancements,” in *Rethinking Migration: New Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 222–23.

<sup>170</sup> Light and Gold, *Ethnic Economies*, 92.

Although the benefits of ethnic entrepreneurship are widely debated in the literature on migration and sociology, and self-employment can sometimes be seen as a form of economic refuge for marginalized or unemployed ethnic groups, it also seems to be the case that, as Zhou has summarized, ethnic entrepreneurship enables members of an ethnic group to achieve economic independence and “opens up a viable path to social mobility for individual group members and their groups as a whole.”<sup>171</sup> Although the degree to which the enclave economy of Chicago’s Chinatown directly enabled Chin Foin’s later social mobility and economic success cannot be ascertained, to the extent that he was granted employment opportunities, access to familial and social networks in the Chinese community, and exposure to entrepreneurial culture, it seems more than plausible that his ultimate success as a Chicago restaurateur was in no small part enabled by his initial participation in Chinatown’s enclave economy.<sup>172</sup>

After having worked at the Wing Chong Hai for nine years, Chin Foin took advantage of the nascent chop suey craze in Chicago and got involved in the restaurant industry. In 1904 he became the proprietor of the King Yen Lo restaurant, situated on the corner of Clark Street and Van Buren Street near the Chinese enclave.<sup>173</sup> It was a second-floor eatery, located above the saloon of Chin’s political friend Alderman Michael “Hinky Dink” Kenna, specializing in the newly popular chop suey and chow mein. The dining room was spacious and elaborately decorated, featuring chandeliers hanging from the ceiling and “Oriental” décor on the walls. Despite being located so near a “wicked” establishment in Kenna’s saloon, which was not uncommon for Chicago’s Chinese

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<sup>171</sup> Zhou, “Revisiting Ethnic Entrepreneurship: Convergencies, Controversies, and Conceptual Advancements,” 2007, 233.

<sup>172</sup> For more on the concept of Chinatown as a socioeconomic enclave, see Zhou, *Chinatown*, 6–13.

<sup>173</sup> “Fair Chinese Bride Wears American Clothes and Hats,” *The Inter Ocean*, May 19, 1904.

restaurants at the turn of the century, the King Yen Lo was yet considered by urban consumers a relatively respectable and elaborate Chinese restaurant and was among the first of Chicago's Chinese eateries to cater to a middle- and upper-class white clientele.<sup>174</sup>

The King Yen Lo was no small or inconsequential establishment: massive Chinese-style celebrations were held at the restaurant following Chin's marriage to Yoklund Wong in 1904. When his wife gave birth to a son in 1907, a "large and enthusiastic banquet" was thrown in the boy's honor at the restaurant, with many high-profile members of Chicago society in attendance. These included lawyers, doctors, fellow merchants, and politicians, including the acting minister of the Chinese government, as well as prominent members of the Chinese community.<sup>175</sup> The boy was named Theodore, after President Theodore Roosevelt. The restaurant also played a significant role in Chin's political connections and machinations. In 1905, Alderman Kenna called on his upstairs neighbor to write a political broadside in Chinese, in response to attacks launched by one of Hinky Dink's opponents.<sup>176</sup> The next year, the King Yen Lo hosted a banquet for several dozen Chinese imperial envoys who had been visiting the city as part of a global tour.<sup>177</sup>

Clearly, Chin Foin's first foray into the restaurant industry was no ordinary "chop suey joint," and he very quickly added to his reputation by his association with the restaurant. The King Yen Lo featured opulent Chinese furniture, chandeliers, and tables

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<sup>174</sup> Ling, *Chinese Chicago*, 121; Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, and Hawaii, 1900-1936* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 194–205.

<sup>175</sup> "Chinese Baby Is Guest of Honor at Banquet of Chicago Celestials," *The Inter Ocean*, November 7, 1907.

<sup>176</sup> McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, and Hawaii, 1900-1936*, 197.

<sup>177</sup> "Jerry Jenks and a Band of Chinks," *Fort Wayne Daily News*, January 19, 1906, 5.

adorned with mother-of-pearl.<sup>178</sup> By 1907, the *Oakland Tribune* described the restaurant as a “chop suey emporium;”<sup>179</sup> by 1908, the restaurant was hyperbolically advertising itself as “the first and only *high-class* Chinese restaurant in the world.”<sup>180</sup> Its advertisements highlighted the quality of the service and cuisine, the openness of its kitchens to inspection, its setting aside an area of the dining-room exclusively for lady patrons, and its featuring steaks and chops “served in a high-class manner.” Chin Foin’s name as manager, as well as Don Joy’s name as one of the chefs of the restaurant, featured prominently in such advertisements, which also highlighted the orchestra that played in the restaurant every evening, and which encouraged patrons to dine at the restaurant either before or after attending the theater.<sup>181</sup> Such advertising serves to demonstrate the degree to which Chin’s personal identity and status was tied to the perceived quality and respectability of the restaurants he owned and operated; the King Yen Lo’s appeals to consumers were made in part by calling on the identity of the restaurant’s proprietor.

Chin’s status in Chicago was not only reflected in and reinforced by his first restaurant, but also in his personal and social life. In May of 1904, Chin married the 17-year-old Yoklund Wong, whose father, Duck Wong, was an established and influential importer on the West Coast and provided the supplies for Chin Foin’s Chicago grocery. By all accounts other than ethnicity, Yoklund was a very American woman. She was born in the United States, to a mother who had also been born in the U.S., and was thus an

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<sup>178</sup> Ho and Moy, *Chinese in Chicago*, 43.

<sup>179</sup> “Georgia Belle Marries Rich Chinese Merchant,” *Oakland Tribune*, March 16, 1907, 5.

<sup>180</sup> Advertisement, *The University of Chicago Magazine*, vol. 1 (University of Chicago, Alumni Association, 1908), 50.

<sup>181</sup> Advertisement, *The University of Chicago Magazine*, vol. 1 (University of Chicago, Alumni Association, 1908), 50.

American citizen at birth, although she was identified by newspapers at the time as an Americanized Chinese. According to one newspaper account of the engagement, Yoklund “[wore] American dresses and [had] American habits.” Even the headline of the article announcing their marriage, “Fair Chinese Bride Wears American Clothes and Hats,” emphasized her typically “American” attire.<sup>182</sup> Although both bride and groom were described as particularly Americanized, their wedding ceremony and celebration, held in San Francisco’s Chinatown and in Chinese custom, reflected the transnational cultural heritage typical of many Chinese Americans at the time, and which Chin employed in the spaces of his restaurants to appeal to white American customers. Only weeks after their marriage in California, Chin and his wife held a separate postnuptial celebration at the King Yen Lo, following their relocation to Chicago. Hundreds of guests were invited to the celebration, including prominent Chinese merchants, city officials, and Chin’s political friends and patrons. The prominence and sheer quantity of guests, which reportedly numbered five hundred city officials and politicians, testified to the bridegroom’s status both within and without the Chicago Chinese community. Within a year of his marriage and the opening of his first restaurant, Chicago newspapers were already beginning to identify Chin as a particularly Americanized Chinese immigrant, as well as a “plutocrat” and “gentleman,” with some even extolling his financial success to describe him as “the wealthiest Oriental of his age in America” at the time.<sup>183</sup>

Following the success of the King Yen Lo, Chin next became invested in the King Joy Lo Mandarin Restaurant, which formally opened on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1906, on the

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<sup>182</sup> “Fair Chinese Bride Wears American Clothes and Hats.”

<sup>183</sup> “Fair Chinese Bride Wears American Clothes and Hats”; “Randolph Street Lease,” *The Inter Ocean*, December 24, 1905.

corner of Randolph Street and Clark Street. Chin served as the restaurant's general manager, his "experience and reputation in Chicago" evidently sufficiently well known by this time to form a significant part of the restaurant's advertising campaign.<sup>184</sup> Chin Foin set out to make his second restaurant far more extravagant than his first, and to make the rest of Chicago aware of this opulence through advertising and word-of-mouth. Those who first dined at the King Joy Lo in the winter of 1906 were treated to what was likely the most elegant experience they had ever had in a Chinese restaurant, or even considered possible for such an establishment. To be sure, the food on offer was overall not terribly distinct from that served by most other Chinese restaurants in the early twentieth century. The menu's Chinese offerings included a wide variety of Americanized dishes, such as chop suey, chow mein, and egg foo young, while the "American Style" half of the menu (which was longer than the Chinese half) included such familiar fare as mutton chops, fried spring chicken, and "Ham and Eggs, Country Style."<sup>185</sup> The eatery's real elegance, however, lay in its ambience. Touted in its advertisements as the "finest Chinese-American restaurant in the world," little expense was spared in giving the restaurant an opulent interior décor that included several Asian features and designs meant to evoke a sense of the exotic Orient. The elaborate interior included a miniature Chinese theater, carved pagodas, embroideries, and "teakwood carvings with mother of pearl which line[d] the walls."<sup>186</sup> The restaurant's high-ceilinged first floor featured a mosaic fountain centered under a rotunda, a "marvelous Chinese chandelier" hanging above, a hidden orchestra playing live music, and circular tables on

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<sup>184</sup> "King Joy Lo: The Finest Chinese-American Restaurant in the World," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 22, 1906.

<sup>185</sup> "King Joy Lo Mandarin Restaurant Menu," n.d., Digital Collections, Los Angeles Public Library.

<sup>186</sup> "King Joy Lo: The Finest Chinese-American Restaurant in the World."

both sides of the dining room.<sup>187</sup> The second floor offered patrons more private accommodations, although the splendor of the rotunda and the extravagance of the first floor were still completely visible.

It is worth mentioning here that the advertisements for Chin Foin's restaurants, as well as declarations of the restaurant's positive reception, were all printed in white newspapers like the *Daily Tribune* and the *Inter Ocean*. As such, the advertisements presented a filtered image of Chin's eateries that was meant to appeal to the Orientalist fantasies and upscale inclinations of these newspapers' readers. Although the accuracy of the content of these advertisements is thus unreliable at best, the deliberate use of particular Orientalist language and imagery alongside an emphasis on the restaurant's opulent decor is particularly telling. Such a public relations strategy indicates the rich and nuanced cultural status that Chinese restaurants of the early twentieth century were endowed with.

The strategy behind the design choices for the King Joy Lo was one that Chin Foin deployed to great success in all of his restaurants, which was to combine typical elements of upscale restaurants with the trappings of an exotic Asian atmosphere, creating restaurant spaces evocative of a “luxurious Orient.” The restaurateurs behind the King Joy Lo set about creating this luxurious “Oriental” ambiance not only through the décor and dining room layout, but also through the designs of the flatware and silverware. The cost of the materials and appliances used in the King Joy Lo amounted to approximately \$150,000, and potential patrons were made well aware of this price point in advertisements for the restaurant before actually arriving to use them.<sup>188</sup> Diners were

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<sup>187</sup> “King Joy Lo: The Finest Chinese-American Restaurant in the World.”

<sup>188</sup> “King Joy Lo: The Finest Chinese-American Restaurant in the World.”

offered either chopsticks or Western silverware to use, depending on their level of comfort and skill, thus better enabling non-Chinese patrons to exert some control over the level of exoticism in their outing, down to the minute movements of their own hands. The tableware in the restaurant, such as plates and sugar bowls, were made of white ceramic and included elaborate decorations around the edges and sides, design choices evocative of the porcelain brought to the United States through the china trade since the eighteenth century. As Caroline Frank has argued, such products of the china trade had been endowed with Orientalist associations and meanings since the colonial period.<sup>189</sup> Through these material design choices, the owners not only sought to instill a sense of the “mystic East” in their white patrons, but also revealed their, and contemporary society’s, emphasis on the visuality of luxury.

While the interior décor of the King Joy Lo was meant to elicit feelings of being in an exotic Asian environment, the terms that were chosen to describe the restaurant and its offerings in advertisements were also particularly evocative and played to American Orientalist attitudes. Advertisements for Chin’s second eating establishment encouraged patrons to “take a trip to ‘The Streets of the Orient,’” positioning the experience of dining in the restaurant as analogous to being transported to an exotic, distant locale.<sup>190</sup>

Advertising for the King Joy Lo also talked at length of the high taste and quality of Chinese food, describing the Chinese as a race as “the greatest epicures since the famous feasters of ancient Rome.”<sup>191</sup> Chinese merchants were described as acquiring provisions in every corner of the world where good food was to be had, including the Red Sea, the

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<sup>189</sup> Caroline Frank, *Objectifying China, Imagining America: Chinese Commodities in Early America* (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 2012).

<sup>190</sup> “Event Extraordinary!,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 16, 1906.

<sup>191</sup> “King Joy Lo: The Finest Chinese-American Restaurant in the World.”

coast of California, and the far north, painting a picture of cosmopolitan flavors and a worldly dining experience inside the King Joy Lo. Additionally, advertisements prominently featured images of the Chinese dragon, an easily recognized symbol for Imperial China.<sup>192</sup> The Chinese food of the King Joy Lo was also lauded as adhering to culinary “laws” developed in Asian antiquity, such as the vegetarian laws that dictated the proper proportions of vegetables to be served with meats.<sup>193</sup> This proportion, it was claimed, was “determined by 6,000 years of experience and civilization,” reflecting an Orientalist fascination with Chinese civilization as ancient, unchanging, and sagacious. In emphasizing ancient wisdom, worldliness, and culinary expertise, advertising for the King Joy Lo engaged directly with the discourse of Orientalism, reflecting a strategic self-Orientalism that demonstrated Chin’s agency in his depiction of Chinese (and inevitably his own) culture and that was meant to appeal to the desire for Chinese cultural consumption among turn-of-the-century American consumers.<sup>194</sup>

Within this strategy of self-Orientalism, however, Chin Foin also had to convey an image of the King Joy Lo as a safe, accommodating, and respectable “Oriental” environment, while simultaneously avoiding or countering those negative attributes of the stereotypical unclean and unsanitary Chinese restaurant. This need to make his restaurants respectable was not only a reflection of the demands on Chinese restaurateurs combatting pervasive racist stereotypes, but also an aspect of the period’s shifting consumer culture and the new demands placed on commercial entertainment. In the late

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<sup>192</sup> King Joy Lo Advertisement, *The Inter Ocean*, December 20, 1906; King Joy Lo Advertisement, *Chicago Tribune*, February 7, 1909.

<sup>193</sup> “King Joy Lo: The Finest Chinese-American Restaurant in the World.”

<sup>194</sup> For more on the concept of strategic self-Orientalism, see Dan Wishnoff, “Strategic Self-Orientalism: Urban Planning and the Shaping of New York City’s Chinatown, 1950-2005,” *Journal of Planning History* 7, no. 3 (2008): 214–38.

nineteenth and early twentieth century, the “genteel” cultural order of Victorian America began to crumble and be replaced by a mass culture in which amusements and Midway excitements were increasingly targeted to white urban consumers.<sup>195</sup> Within this transformative period, middle-class women and men had to be convinced that entertainments like amusement parks, nickelodeons, dance halls, and other venues, many of which were originally designed to cater to working-class men, were “respectable” in order for these businesses to attract middle-class patronage and succeed.<sup>196</sup> As Cindy Lobel explains in her analysis of New York restaurants in the nineteenth century, a restaurant’s respectability was determined to a significant extent by its interior physical environment; lavish furnishings and opulent interior décor played an outsized role in creating restaurant spaces that signaled their friendliness to female patrons.<sup>197</sup> For a Chinese restaurant like the King Joy Lo, and eventually the Mandarin Inn as well, creating a respectable restaurant environment also meant rendering Chinese culture acceptable and palatable for middle-class consumption. Following the success of the Columbian Exposition’s Midway, as well as the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, the entertainment appeal of visual spectacles of ethnic difference had already become apparent to urban tourists and slummers who sought out stylized markers of cultural difference and racial hierarchy in city slums and ethnic enclaves. Although Chinese restaurant spaces remained largely out of the mainstream in Chicago until the chop suey craze, the period immediately following the Columbian Exposition did see ethnicity made

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<sup>195</sup> Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*, 6–7.

<sup>196</sup> Richard Butsch, “Introduction: Leisure and Hegemony in America,” in *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 16; Mack, *Sensing Chicago: Noisemakers, Strikebreakers, and Muckrakers*, 98.

<sup>197</sup> Lobel, *Urban Appetites*, 6–7.

into a salable commodity.<sup>198</sup> Given that Chinese restaurants are, as Lily Cho asserts, culturally constructive sites, the rendering acceptable of Chinese culture amounted to the use of interior décor, the discourse of the menu, the sights and sounds of dining room entertainment, and the smell of the cuisine itself to render a fictive version of Chinese culture and ethnicity that middle- and upper-class American patrons could more easily find palatable.<sup>199</sup>

To accomplish this palatability, Chin Foin not only played to Orientalist attitudes in his restaurant's interior decors and advertisements, but also emphasized their modern and trustworthy operation. In addition to touting its supposed connection to ancient wisdom, Chin sought to emphasize how modern the King Joy Lo was, highlighting its "perfectly modern kitchens with their modern ranges and refrigerators built in tile after the most approved sanitary methods."<sup>200</sup> Like those of the King Yen Lo, the kitchens of the King Joy Lo were also open to inspection by the public at any time, a point specifically highlighted in the restaurant's advertising. While this practice was not limited to only Chinese restaurants at the time, combatting older stereotypes of filthy Chinese restaurants serving as fronts for illicit vices would have made being open to inspection far more important for Chin's restaurants than for other non-Chinese eateries. Such a description was read by early twentieth century Chicagoans as being in direct contrast to the more bohemian "chop suey joints" that allegedly served dirty food prepared in dirty kitchens by dirty cooks. This engagement with the stereotypes surrounding Chinese

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<sup>198</sup> Catherine Cocks, *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850-1915* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2001), 189–90.

<sup>199</sup> Lily Cho, *Eating Chinese: Culture on the Menu in Small Town Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2010), 55–71.

<sup>200</sup> "King Joy Lo: The Finest Chinese-American Restaurant in the World."

restaurants not only demonstrates the importance of such perceptions among Chicago's diners, but also evidences the performative aspect of respectability and accommodation undertaken by Chin Foin through his restaurant spaces. Though Chin's reputation in Chicago was already established by this point, his image in Chicago society as a provider of safe and elegant Chinese dining experiences was certainly enhanced by the King Joy Lo.

The financial support Chin received in establishing the King Joy Lo also revealed his widening network of social and political connections, as his position in Chicago society and the city's Chinese American community continued to rise. The restaurant was funded in part by white investors, but also received significant backing from the Chinese Empire Reform Association (*Baohuanghui*), a reformist organization founded by Kang Youwei with the goal of restoring power to the Guangxu Emperor, who had been confined to house arrest by the Empress Dowager Cixi following a coup in 1898.<sup>201</sup> The Emperor had been responsible for initiating the Hundred Days' Reform, an effort to reform China on a political, cultural, and educational level, in response to its repeated military defeats by Europeans and the Japanese in the nineteenth century. Although he left behind no written records of his political leanings, Chin Foin himself was almost certainly sympathetic to the goals of the Chinese reform movement that supported his restaurant, which included the alleviation of American mistreatment of Chinese immigrants as well as the Westernization of China's political system. Support for such goals demonstrated Chin's probable progressive politics as well as ways of belonging that speak to the transnational nature of his social field: as L. Eve Armentrout Ma has argued

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<sup>201</sup> McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, and Hawaii, 1900-1936*, 205.

about the *Baohuanghui*, its members “were bound together by nationalism, an interest in becoming politically effective, and a desire to see China adopt a more Western outlook and policies.”<sup>202</sup> Chin was obviously a Chinese American immigrant with a deep concern over how he would be treated in the United States, as well as an overseas Chinese member of a social network committed to the modernization of China. Not only was the King Joy Lo established in part to provide a steady source of income for the Reform Association, but Kang Youwei himself took part in the preparing and opening of the restaurant, assisting in the naming and decorating of the eatery and attending the opening ceremony.<sup>203</sup> Although the King Joy Lo would become briefly mired in scandal not long after its establishment, Chin Foin not only avoided being tarnished by such negative press, but indeed enjoyed a terrific increase in social prestige following the opening of the restaurant.

In 1911, Chin Foin established his next and most famous luxury Chinese restaurant: the Mandarin Inn café, located at 414 and 416 South Wabash Avenue. By this time, due to the success of the King Yen Lo and King Joy Lo, as well as his own prominence in Chicago society, Chin’s own name and close personal involvement was a key selling point for the new restaurant, meriting a much larger amount of space in newspaper advertisements for the Mandarin Inn than for his previous establishments. He also founded his own Mandarin Inn Company, thereby making himself both President and General Manager of the new restaurant. Reflecting the fame Chin had received to this

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<sup>202</sup> L. Eve Armentrout Ma, *Revolutionaries, Monarchists, and Chinatowns: Chinese Politics in the Americas and the 1911 Revolution* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 83; for more on the concepts of ways of belonging and social field, see Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, “Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society,” in *Rethinking Migration: New Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 189–90.

<sup>203</sup> McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, and Hawaii, 1900-1936*, 205.

point as a restaurateur, the announcement for the restaurant's opening night included the boastful pronouncement: "Chin F. Foin's name stands for the best in Chinese and American restaurant operation."<sup>204</sup>

In the Mandarin Inn, Chin once again followed the same model of "luxury Orientalism" that was applied to the openings of the King Yen Lo and King Joy Lo restaurants. Like the King Joy Lo, the Mandarin Inn followed the two-story construction design of traditional Chinese restaurants, although the second floor now held balconies that looked out over the luxurious main floor, rather than the more secluded variety of dining apartments.<sup>205</sup> The opening ceremony, a visually and aurally spectacular affair, featured Chinese artwork and live musical performances, as well as "fountains playing, birds singing, [and] flowers adding their glory to the scene."<sup>206</sup> Much of the interior décor was once again crafted in a Chinese fashion, featuring dragon fixtures and imported Chinese furniture "of the most luxurious type."<sup>207</sup> As with other Orientalized entertainment sites of this period, patrons of the Mandarin Inn likely experienced a feeling of being instantly transported to an imagined China as they crossed the threshold from the streets outside into the restaurant interior.

As with advertisements for the King Joy Lo, the announcement for the Mandarin Inn prominently featured Orientalist imagery, including Chinese dragons and an image of an entryway with pagoda-style architecture. However, advertising for Chin's latest restaurant tended to accentuate its luxury over its Asian ambiance. To emphasize the

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<sup>204</sup> "Mandarin Inn Grand Opening Tonight," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 16, 1911.

<sup>205</sup> "Mandarin Inn Grand Opening Tonight"; Coe, *Chop Suey*, 94–97; Jack Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology* (Cambridge Cambridgeshire ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 105–6.

<sup>206</sup> "Mandarin Inn Grand Opening Tonight."

<sup>207</sup> "Mandarin Inn Grand Opening Tonight."

upscale nature of the establishment, words like “luxury,” “excellence,” and “magnificent” were repeatedly invoked in advertisement descriptions, and the need for reservations was also implied.<sup>208</sup> The live singing and orchestral music that was to be featured in the restaurant was also prominently displayed in advertising, and large drawings of the restaurant’s opulent interior were placed alongside and above the Chinese dragons and pagoda. Although both were obviously important elements of the restaurant’s appeal, the Mandarin Inn’s luxuriousness represented a greater selling point than its Oriental exoticism.

The announcement of the restaurant’s opening also emphasized how distinctive the Mandarin Inn was. Design choices not common in Chinese restaurants at the time, such as linen clothe on the tables, were highlighted, as was the introduction of Chinese afternoon tea service, which allegedly could not be found in any other Chinese restaurant in Chicago.<sup>209</sup> Publicity for the restaurant also contended that its food, the bulk of which to be sure included chop suey, chow mein, and Euro-American cuisine, was more authentic than that of its competitors. Although this sort of claim was not uncommon among turn-of-the-century Chinese restaurants, and though considering chop suey to be “authentic” Chinese food is at best problematic, advertising for the Mandarin Inn made this point rather aggressively, such as by printing in capital letters that Chin Foin’s establishment served “THE ONLY CORRECT CHINESE MANDARIN COOKING IN CHICAGO.”<sup>210</sup> As a luxury Chinese restaurant, Chin’s most recent venture was meant to be, or at least appear to be, unparalleled.

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<sup>208</sup> Mandarin Inn Advertisement, The Chicago Daily Tribune, December 31, 1912.

<sup>209</sup> “Mandarin Inn Grand Opening Tonight.”

<sup>210</sup> “Mandarin Inn Advertisement”; “Mandarin Inn Grand Opening Tonight.”

The Mandarin Inn matched, if not exceeded, the accommodation strategy that was reflected in both the King Yen Lo and the King Joy Lo restaurants. Persisting in presenting safe gustatory options for Western diners, the menu of the Mandarin Inn offered a “limitless variety” of both Chinese and American dishes, while at the same time the restaurant’s serving of European, American, and Chinese alcoholic beverages was also emphasized.<sup>211</sup> Meanwhile, the establishment’s “perfect” ventilation system, which kept the Mandarin Inn cool in the summer and warm in the winter, as well as the professionalism of the wait staff, were all touted in the restaurant’s advertising campaign.<sup>212</sup> These attributes in particular would have been seen as a reflection of modernity, as well as a departure from the negative stereotypes associated with Chinatowns and Chinese food elsewhere. As such, Chin’s newest restaurant, as his older establishments had done, created a space in which white Chicagoans could partake of what they considered to be Chinese culture and Chinese food, even as they simultaneously dined on American steak and European champagne on Wabash Avenue, in a space that combined high-class luxury with a safe sense of exoticism. For white Chicagoans, the Yellow Peril did not exist in these restaurants.

The strategy of accommodation at work in the Mandarin Inn was perhaps most dramatically demonstrated by the naming convention behind it. Obviously, the adoption of an English name for the eatery represented a clear indication of the restaurant’s intended clientele; Chin’s latest establishment would be specifically tailored towards non-Chinese Americans and would appeal to them quite literally on their terms. This stood in marked contrast to the names of Chinese American restaurants in the late nineteenth

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<sup>211</sup> “Mandarin Inn Grand Opening Tonight,” 11.

<sup>212</sup> “Mandarin Inn Grand Opening Tonight,” 11.

century, the Chinese names of which, according to Krishnendu Ray, “[marked] their insider audience and subaltern status” and distinguished them from other “middling and outwardly directed” ethnic restaurants of the time, such as Indian restaurants.<sup>213</sup> By adopting an English name for the restaurant, Chin Foin took an agentive step toward making his restaurant appealing to white Chicagoans by signaling its approachability and accommodating nature, and indeed its outward-facing purpose: the Mandarin Inn was for English-speakers first and Chinese-speakers second. Moreover, the name of the restaurant also indicated the respectable nature of its exoticism. In the early twentieth century, the term “mandarin” referred principally to the educated class of Qing government officials or, occasionally, to the language spoken among these bureaucrats, in contradistinction to the colloquial Cantonese dialect spoken by Chinese immigrants from Southeast China. The Mandarin Inn thus signaled not only that it was identifiably Chinese, but also that it was derivative of a supposedly higher plane of Chinese civilization than that from which undesirable and corrupting Chinese immigrants were imagined to descend. In this way, Chin created in his latest business venture an establishment that rendered Chinese culture comprehensible, accommodating, and respectable in a way that Chinese restaurants in Chicago had not previously done.

The Mandarin Inn also reflected changes that were ongoing in Chicago’s restaurant scene and urban geography in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Following the World’s Columbian Exposition, the city witnessed a marked increase in the number of ethnic restaurants in its various immigrant enclaves, including German, French, Spanish, Polish, Italian, Greek, Turkish, and Jewish restaurants, as well as the

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<sup>213</sup> Krishnendu Ray, “The Immigrant Restaurateur and the American City: Taste, Toil, and the Politics of Inhabitation,” *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (2014): 379–81.

Chinese restaurants that emerged both before and during the chop suey craze. The bulk of these ethnic restaurants were likely established in order to serve Chicago's growing immigrant population, which also significantly expanded in the years after the Columbian Exposition, although certainly many of the eateries were also responding to a turn-of-the-century surge in the popularity of ethnic restaurants and cuisines in general. This turn among the middle class towards consuming the ethnic was largely due to the emergence at this time of a culture of empire, which led middle-class Americans to consume ethnic cuisine, as well as other exotic spectacles, largely to reaffirm their own cultural superiority while rejecting the Victorian era's cultural xenophobia for a new cosmopolitan culinary adventurism.<sup>214</sup> In Chicago, however, these ethnic restaurants were largely located in immigrant enclaves outside of the downtown Loop area, which in the early twentieth century was the focus of fine dining in the city. This fine dining became even more regulated with the passage of a new restaurant licensing ordinance in 1906 which enabled city health officials to carry out surprise inspections on restaurants without warning. Although this ordinance resulted in few actual restaurant closures, it did result in Chicago restaurateurs bearing a certain responsibility for quality assurance, especially those operating downtown.<sup>215</sup> Chin Foin's Mandarin Inn thus amounted to a spatial

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<sup>214</sup> For more on the emergence of a culture of empire in the United States and the appeal of ethnic restaurants to middle-class consumers, see Cindy R. Lobel, *Urban Appetites: Food and Culture in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Andrew P. Haley, *Turning the Tables: Restaurants and the Rise of the American Middle Class, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Kelly Erby, *Restaurant Republic: The Rise of Public Dining in Boston* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016); Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987); John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

<sup>215</sup> Perry R. Duis, *Challenging Chicago: Coping with Everyday Life, 1837-1920* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 149–51.

embodiment of the intersection between this period's movement towards ethnic dining, the heightened popularity of Chinese restaurants, and the restricting of the Loop to fine dining establishments.

To be sure, the success of the Mandarin Inn and other of Chin Foin's restaurants did not necessarily reflect a coinciding shift in public opinion toward all Chinese restaurants and Chinese immigrants overall. On the contrary, his establishments succeeded largely *in spite of* persistent negative stereotypes concerning Chinese restaurants (or, arguably, *because of* their subsequent fetishization by white urbanites). Although the chop suey craze brought Chinese restaurants and cuisine mainstream acceptability to an unprecedented extent in Chicago and other cities, concerns that the activities taking place in Chinese restaurants threatened the purity of white women who ventured into them remained pervasive into the first decade of the twentieth century. Indeed, by 1905, as Chin was preparing to open his second restaurant, the King Yen Lo had already been confronted with scandal as a result of this stereotype. When the chef of the King Yen Lo eloped with a nineteen-year-old white girl, the girl's mother identified the corrupting influence of Chinese restaurants, which she deemed "stepping stones from the home to the saloon," as responsible.<sup>216</sup> Though the personal reputation of Chin Foin remained remarkably unaffected by the scandal, its occurrence speaks not only to the continuous potential overlap between his ventures and negative stereotypes, but also to the enduring influence of said stereotypes, even as Chinese restaurants became increasingly popular in Chicago. Indeed, as late as 1910, nearly a decade following the outset of the chop suey craze in Chicago, a *Chicago Daily Tribune* article entitled

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<sup>216</sup> "Two Girls Wed Chinamen," *The Inter Ocean*, September 23, 1905.

“Chinese Mix Sin with Chop Suey” alleged Chinese restaurants remained corrupting venues through which white girls were being introduced to “smoking, drinking, and other evils destined to make them slave wives of Chinamen, or drag them down to lives of more open shame.”<sup>217</sup> Although Chin Foin’s restaurants received patronage from men *and women* alike, this patronage occurred alongside persistent reports of the dangers Chinese restaurants, and Chinese men in general, posed for white women.

This supposed danger was particularly highlighted after the 1909 murder of Elsie Sigel in New York City by a Chinese waiter.<sup>218</sup> On June 18, 1909, a police officer investigating the apartment of Leung Lim, an employee of a chop suey restaurant in New York, discovered in a trunk the body of 19-year-old Sigel, a local white Sunday school teacher who had been missing for a week. Sigel worked at a Sunday school in New York city which specifically sought to Christianize Chinese immigrants through one-on-one education with a Christian missionary. According to contemporary accounts, Sigel had been seen with Leung, an attendee at one such Sunday school, at the Chinese restaurant at which he worked, and was indeed infatuated with the man; in his apartment were found thirty-five letters “studded with phrases of endearment,” written by Elsie between 1907 and 1909.<sup>219</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the discovery of Sigel’s body, racial vitriol against Chinese immigrants intensified. Leung himself was characterized as a “Mongol Don Juan” who seemed to collect semi-pornographic material in a seedy apartment, as well as

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<sup>217</sup> “Chinese Mix Sin with Chop Suey,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 27, 1910.

<sup>218</sup> For a detailed exploration of Elsie Sigel’s murder and its place in the history of Chinese American New York, see Mary Ting Yi Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City*, New Ed edition (Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>219</sup> “Mother Is Crazy by Sigel Tragedy,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 20, 1909.

pictures and love letters from “hundreds of other American girls” besides Elsie Sigel. The uncle of Elsie, whose comments were printed in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* article which carried the story, claimed to have warned his niece about having associations with Chinese immigrants, who he believed had never actually converted to Christianity, and that white women who sought to Christianize them did so at the risk of experiencing the animalistic urges “Mongolians” felt toward white women.<sup>220</sup> The author’s article went so far as to describe Sigel as having fallen victim to the one-on-one approach to Chinese American education that her Sunday school adopted, mimicking her uncle’s assertion that white women were simply not safe when left alone with Chinese men.

Although fears of Chinese corruption became exacerbated in cities across the country following the Sigel murder, such concerns were generally not extended to Chin Foin and his restaurants, in part because he was seen as a member of the “better element” of Chinese immigrants, rather than of the more dangerous, less assimilable class. Throughout the nineteenth century, both people in China and Chinese immigrants to the United States had been perceived by many (though certainly not all) American and European observers as varying in character and “quality,” as opposed to a universally undesirable monolith. Depictions of Chinese people in locations such as the Chinese Museum in Philadelphia, or in travel writings in imperial China, portrayed the Chinese as divisible into two classes: the poorer rabble, including migrant laborers from Guangdong, and the wealthier “gentlemen” class.<sup>221</sup> Beyond differences in socioeconomic status, these two “classes” were also seen as distinguished by their diets, refinement, and

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<sup>220</sup> “Mother Is Crazy by Sigel Tragedy.”

<sup>221</sup> “*Ten Thousand Chinese Things*”: *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Chinese Collection in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1839); Robert Fortune, *A Residence Among the Chinese: Island, On the Coast, and at Sea* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1857).

behavioral proclivities. Such characterizations were also extended to the Chinese in Chicago; indeed, when Elsie Sigel's murderer was believed to have fled to Chicago, the police partially relied on the supposed "better element" of the city's Chinese community in order to apprehend the fugitive.<sup>222</sup> As a result of his growing wealth and obvious Americanized status, Chin Foin had begun to be identified as part of this better element as early as 1905, referred to by Chicago newspapers as a "Chinese gentleman," a "plutocrat," and born to wealth and privilege in China.<sup>223</sup>

Not only was Chin Foin himself seen as a better class of Chinese immigrant, but his restaurants, the Mandarin Inn in particular, were generally perceived as distinctive and distinguishing sites of consumption. Although prices at the Mandarin Inn were advertised as being "extremely moderate," there is no indication that the consumers who frequented the restaurant were anything other than middle- and upper-class. In a 1913 article attributing the success of the Mandarin Inn to Chin Foin's management, the restaurant was described as Chicago's first "high-class" Chinese eating-house, patronized by "discriminating Chicago citizens."<sup>224</sup> The nightly musical entertainment provided by an organ player and vocalist, both of whom were listed by name and pedigree in the article, was also described as upscale. Furthermore, in the 1917 publication of *Engelhard's New Guide to Chicago*, a small, cursory guidebook of places of interest for visiting sightseers and residents, all three of Chin Foin's restaurants were included among the six establishments listed under "Chop Suey Restaurants" as worthy of interest.

Further still, of these six restaurants, only to the Mandarin Inn was there addended the

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<sup>222</sup> "Expect to Arrest Sigel Girl Slayer in Chicago," *The Inter Ocean*, June 20, 1909.

<sup>223</sup> "Randolph Street Lease"; "Fair Chinese Bride Wears American Clothes and Hats"; "Mandarin Inn Success Tribute to Management," *The Inter Ocean*, December 28, 1913.

<sup>224</sup> "Mandarin Inn Success Tribute to Management."

qualification, “Select clientele.”<sup>225</sup> Clearly, Chin’s latest restaurant was not only considered distinctive in comparison to other Chinese restaurants in the city, but was also recognized as catering to the privileged and aesthetically discerning of Chicago.

The status-affirming function of conspicuous consumption in upscale dining establishments has been well represented in the literature on restaurant history. As Rebecca Spang has argued, the restaurant of eighteenth-century France represented a novel form of public space and publicness that focused on display, spectacle, and consumption, as much as on dialogue and discussion.<sup>226</sup> According to Cindy Lobel, restaurants in nineteenth-century New York served similar purposes of social articulation and status display.<sup>227</sup> In his now classic work, *Revolution at the Table*, Harvey Levenstein identifies the ascendance of French cooking in the United States in the late nineteenth century as likewise fulfilling the needs of those in the highest echelons to distinguish themselves from the *nouveau riche* through the conspicuous consumption of food. The appeal of French cuisine, he argues, is that it was “a cuisine whose basic ingredients were not exotic to most Americans, but behind whose elaborate methods of preparation, foreign code-words, and complex dining rituals the wealthy could find refuge from those trying to scale the ramparts of their newly acquired status.”<sup>228</sup> Ironically, when combined with the various technological and design features of Western luxury dining, Chin Foin’s Chinese restaurants in many respects offered the “highest echelons” of Chicago society a very similar method of distinction through consumption.

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<sup>225</sup> Engelhard’s *New Guide to Chicago: Designed for the Use Both of Visitors and Residents* (Chicago: G.P. Engelhard and Co., 1917), 63.

<sup>226</sup> Rebecca L. Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant: Paris and Modern Gastronomic Culture* (Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 85.

<sup>227</sup> Lobel, *Urban Appetites*, 104.

<sup>228</sup> Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table*, 14.

While owning and operating an upscale Chinese restaurant did not necessarily join him to Pierre Bourdieu's "social hierarchy of the consumers," Chin's status as a provider of a socially distinguishing commodity, who crafted restaurant spaces that rendered Chinese culture simultaneously exotic and respectable for middle- and upper-class consumption, strengthened his perception as a Chinese immigrant of distinction, facilitating his upward social mobility in Chicago. This upward social climb reached a dramatic visual and spatial representation in the fall of 1912, when he moved his family into the Clarence Knight mansion in the South Side.<sup>229</sup> The Victorian-style mansion, located on Calumet Avenue between Thirty-Third and Thirty-Fifth streets, was part of an exclusive and "fashionable" neighborhood reported to house many of the leaders of Chicago society.<sup>230</sup> The house was originally built by, and later named after, Clarence Knight, whom one newspaper article described as a "well known attorney, clubman and social leader" of Chicago.<sup>231</sup> Knight had had a notable and successful legal career in the late nineteenth century. Beginning in 1879, he put his private law practice on hold and served as assistant city attorney of Chicago for five years, after which he served as city attorney for a year, then as assistant corporation counsel until his resignation in 1889. For the following two decades Knight resumed his private legal practice as a leading citizen of Chicago, most notably playing an important role in the passage of legislation in 1889 that permitted the city to annex Hyde Park, Lake View, Jefferson, the Town of Lake, and portions of Cicero.<sup>232</sup> Although it's unclear when Knight moved into the mansion, it

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<sup>229</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Harvard University Press, 1984), 1–2.

<sup>230</sup> "Chinese Boniface Buys Old Mansion in Society Center," *The Inter Ocean*, August 28, 1912.

<sup>231</sup> "Chicago Millionaires to Have a Chinese Neighbor," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 28, 1912.

<sup>232</sup> *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, Being the History of the United States As Illustrated in the Lives of the Founders, Builders, and Defenders of the Republic, and of the Men and Women Who Are*

reportedly cost him \$55,000 to build and it was there that he lived out his days until his death in June of 1911.<sup>233</sup> When Chin Foin moved his family into the mansion the following year, an event which merited newspaper attention in cities as far away as Pittsburgh, it signaled his physical encampment in the upper echelons of Chicago society.

Naturally, for a Chinese immigrant in racially and residentially segregated Chicago, this move was not easily accomplished. Chin faced bureaucratic challenges in securing the deed for the mansion, as well as the initially obstinate opposition of the neighborhood to having a non-white family among them.<sup>234</sup> In order to mollify his prospective neighbors, Chin launched a public relations campaign which emphasized his wealth, his reported graduation from Yale, and his ability to maintain the house and grounds. He also sought to assure his neighbors that he was committed to living an American lifestyle and raising an American family, in contradistinction to the popular criticism of Chinese immigrants as “sojourners” who would not and could not assimilate into American society and who repatriated all of their earnings out of the American economy. Chin’s argument largely relied on the linkage of status to one’s lifestyle, which Bryan Turner, in his assertion that lifestyle and status could be considered identical, described as including “the totality of cultural practices such as dress, speech, outlook, and bodily dispositions.”<sup>235</sup> Through the newspapers, Chin emphasized that he and all the members of his family spoke English, were well educated, and had “already adopted the American style of dress;” that he intended to put his children through the American

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*Doing the Work and Moulding the Thought of the Present Time*, vol. XV (New York: James T. White & Company, 1916), 132.

<sup>233</sup> “Chinese Boniface Buys Old Mansion in Society Center.”

<sup>234</sup> Chinese-American Museum of Chicago, “1912: Chin Foin wins a civil rights battle.”

<sup>235</sup> Bryan S. Turner, *Status* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 66.

college system and for them to “take prominent positions” in the United States; that he had made a lot of money in the United States and “[intended] to spend it here;” and that he expected to spend \$25,000 on improvements to the mansion and to “keep plenty of servants and automobiles.”<sup>236</sup> If status is lifestyle, Chin’s description of his family and of his plans for the mansion indicated that his status was surely equal to that of his would-be neighbors. Through such descriptions, Chin sought to depict himself and his family as not only sufficiently Americanized to counter possible negative assessments of them as Chinese immigrants, but also as members of the more desirable type of Chinese immigrants, those who were of the gentleman class and not of the laboring rabble. Though his purchase of the Knight mansion was still described by a *Chicago Tribune* article in terms of an invasion, an “incursion” into white space, Chin’s status as a “high caste Chinese” seemed to have a significant mitigating effect on his neighbor’s concerns, as they came to view his presence among them as delightfully cosmopolitan. His wealth and class, and his subsequent ability to maintain the mansion’s interior and exterior elegance, ultimately demonstrated his sufficient financial and cultural capital for entry among bourgeois society and trumped any apprehensions neighborhood residents might have had about Chin’s race. As one resident tellingly remarked about the overarching importance of class and taste, “If Chin Foin is a gentleman, we shall welcome him.”<sup>237</sup>

It is worth noting here that Chin Foin’s move from his family’s apartment at 500 East 31<sup>st</sup> Street took place simultaneously as Chinatown was being relocated from the Loop to the South Side, in what is today Armour Square. Between 1911 and 1915, the main Chinese business district, which up to this point had been located along Clark Street

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<sup>236</sup> “Chicago Millionaires to Have a Chinese Neighbor.”

<sup>237</sup> “Chinese Family Takes a Fine Home,” *The Chicago Tribune*, August 28, 1912.

between Van Buren and Harrison, shifted south to its current position on Cermak, Archer, and Wentworth Avenue. While a multitude of reasons for the shift have been put forth and debated, it is likely that anti-Chinese sentiment among white Chicagoans significantly contributed to the relocation, which was brought about by property owners in the Loop who forced out Chinese residents and businesses by raising the rents.<sup>238</sup> In 1911, Chinatown's pending move to Armour Square was reported in terms of a Chinese invasion of an otherwise white neighborhood, and Chinese business owners found it difficult to win over their tentative new neighbors.<sup>239</sup> Chinese Americans spotted in the new location before the move officially took place were likened to reconnaissance scouts for an invading army, highlighting the extent to which Chinese Chicagoans had remained relegated to the status of the alien Other. By as early as 1913, official celebrations such as Chinese New Year were being held in "the Arthur avenue [sic] Chinatown rather than on Clark Street."<sup>240</sup> As this further relegation of the city's Chinese community to the margins was being carried out, however, Chin Foin was relocating himself still deeper into the city's white spaces, purchasing a home on Calumet Avenue and running a Chinese restaurant on the 400 block of Wabash Avenue.

Chin Foin and his family were thus considered a much more distinct and acceptable "type" of Chinese immigrant than those living and working in Chinatown, one whose presence in white society was not considered threatening or undesirable. To the extent that this acceptable status was engendered by Chin's restaurateur career, through the wealth which his restaurants earned him, the distinguished and culturally competent

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<sup>238</sup> Ling, *Chinese Chicago*, 51.

<sup>239</sup> "Chinatown Plans to Move Two Miles to the South," *Chicago Tribune*, November 24, 1911.

<sup>240</sup> "Chinese Keep New Year's," *Chicago Tribune*, February 6, 1913.

“gentlemanly” identity that they helped demonstrate, and the mutually comprehensible middle ground they represented between an immigrant of an “alien” civilization and the national American culture of the early 1900s, the turn-of-the-century Chinese restaurant industry in Chicago played an identifiable role in facilitating Chin Foin’s upward mobility.

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Chin’s notable success in creating a brand of upscale Chinese dining establishment that appealed to the tastes and demands of Chicago’s wealthy classes, and the upward social mobility he enjoyed as result of the success of his restaurants, depended on a number of contingent factors that coincided at that precise moment in American history. Two decades after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, Chinese American restaurants had gone from denigrated loci of cultural corruption and Asian invasion, to relatively mainstream and desirable sites of Orientalist consumption for a significant percentage of newly moneyed consumers following the chop suey craze. The simultaneous demand for distinguishing dining experiences and respectable entertainments among the new middle class coincided with a renewed interest in the consumption of Chinese culture, brought about by increased American involvement in Asia, to create favorable conditions in which upscale establishments that offered “Oriental” fine dining, like the Mandarin Inn, could enjoy tremendous success. During a time of heightened concern over the assimilability of immigrants, and over the corrupting influence of Chinese restaurants in particular, Chin successfully created a brand of eatery that made Chinese food, and hence Chinese culture, safely and respectably consumable for middle- and upper-class white Chicagoans.

The story of Chin Foin's restaurants and his move into the mansion on Calumet Avenue demonstrates the narrow pathway available to certain Chinese American immigrants to achieve upward social mobility during the Exclusion era. Chin was able to move into an exclusive, mostly white neighborhood because he had rendered himself an "acceptable" Chinese immigrant to his white neighbors. He accomplished this in large part through his restaurants, which enabled him to amass a great deal of wealth in one of the few industries Chinese immigrants could safely work in, and to further demonstrate his distinct status as a "high caste Chinese" in contradistinction to other, less desirable Chinese immigrants by crafting luxurious "Oriental" restaurant spaces that stood out in sharp contrast to other, more low-class Chinese restaurants of the time. Furthermore, his last and most renowned restaurant, the Mandarin Inn, allowed him to turn his Chinese ethnicity (otherwise a stigma in most other arenas of American society at the time) to his advantage by positioning himself as a culturally competent insider who could provide other members of the cultural high classes access to a safer, more luxurious version of the Oriental culture Americans had become so fascinated with at the turn of the twentieth century.

Though the restaurant industry was not the only avenue for Chinese immigrants to become wealthy or prove their status, it was perhaps the most convenient means to do so, given Chinese restaurants' surge in popularity during this period, the relative safety in which Chinese immigrants could derive their incomes from them, and their ability to render "Chineseness" into a form of cultural capital rather than a marker of racial inferiority. Ethnic restaurants represent an opportunity for their Chinese owners to become "cultural entrepreneurs," those who utilize their ethnicity as an asset which helps

them to convince their clients that they have had an authentic and exotic cultural experience within their restaurants, while keeping this experience within safe and familiar boundaries. Such cultural entrepreneurship amounted to one of the few, though certainly not the only, ways in which Chinese ethnicity in the United States during the Exclusion period could amount to a positive trait and a form of lucrative cultural capital.<sup>241</sup>

Although it's impossible to say with any certainty whether Chin Foin could have successfully accomplished his move to Calumet Avenue before 1912, given that he had been identified to some extent as a "gentleman" since 1905, it seems likely that his association with the upscale restaurants he established played a significant role in rendering him acceptable and desirable in white Chicago. Through crafting a brand of successful restaurant spaces that rendered Chinese culture, embodied in restaurant food and luxurious décor, safely consumable for middle- and upper-class white patrons, Chin Foin demonstrated to a city-wide audience of restaurant-goers his membership in the "better element" of Chicago's Chinese population, and was thus able to better facilitate his family's access to spaces in American society otherwise barred to Chinese immigrants. This episode further complicates our historical understanding of the Chinese Exclusion period by demonstrating the extent to which the ethnic boundaries that supposedly blocked Chinese immigrants from upward mobility were more blurred and porous, based on parameters of class and Americanization, than has sometimes been alleged. As well, although Chin Foin was certainly not an example of the average Chinese immigrant, his story yet reveals the problematic nature of describing Chinese immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as entirely lacking the

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<sup>241</sup> Shun Lu and Gary Alan Fine, "The Presentation of Ethnic Authenticity: Chinese Food as a Social Accomplishment," *The Sociological Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (1995): 536.

ability or the desire to integrate into American society. Furthermore, the facilitation of Chin's upward social mobility by his career as a luxury restaurateur demonstrates the largely underappreciated ability of Chinese restaurants to aid in the improvement Chinese immigrants' socioeconomic statuses in the United States prior to 1965.

## Chapter Four:

### The Racialization of Chinese Restaurants in Segregated Chicago

On October 16, 1929, Cook County, Illinois, experienced its 103<sup>rd</sup> bombing of the year. The target of the explosion was the Golden Lily café, a Chinese restaurant and night club in the South Side of Chicago. The bomb, thrown from a nearby alley, ripped away a stairway and door from the back of the restaurant. Speculation as to the motive for the attack immediately centered on the restaurant's recent decision to swap out its all-white orchestra for an all-black one and to revoke its "whites-only" service policy.<sup>242</sup> The purpose of the bomb was suspected (and likely) to be to signal the thrower's dissatisfaction with this act of racial tolerance.

The bombing of the Golden Lily café represented a unique and demonstrative act of racial violence in early twentieth century Chicago. It was unique in the sense that it was one of the few acts of violence committed by white Chicagoans against a Chinese establishment following the end of the nineteenth century. It was also the first instance in which the violent response to the Great Migration, during which the city's color line became aggressively and bloodily enforced, had been extended to a Chinese restaurant in Chicago.

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<sup>242</sup> "Bomb Hits S. S. Chop Suey Cafe," *The Chicago Defender*, October 26, 1929.

This dramatic act of anti-black violence demonstrated the extent to which the city's Chinese eateries, including the Golden Lily, had undergone a profound racial transformation by the end of the 1920s. Chinese restaurants in Chicago were, for the most part, no longer the seedy and corrupting threats to white purity they had been in previous decades. On the contrary, by catering to the tastes and expectations of the city's white diners, as well as participating in the exclusion of black citizens from the city's leisure spaces, Chinese restaurants had become white or white-accepted spaces, situated on the white side of the era's dichotomous color line, claimed and "defended" by the city's white population.

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The historical experience of black Chicagoans stands in marked contrast to the experience of Chinese immigrants to the city. Although a relatively small black community had existed in Chicago since the city's establishment, the mass influx of black migrants during the Great Migration engendered the greatest amount of racial anxiety among the city's Anglo-American population. From 1916 to 1918, roughly half a million black Southerners surged North hoping to find work in factories in multiple cities, with 10% of this number traveling to the Windy City.

Although these migrants found employment opportunities in Chicago's packinghouses and steel mills, the city did not amount to the "land of hope" that cautiously optimistic black Southerners had hoped it might be.<sup>243</sup> As in other parts of the country, black Americans in Chicago were spatially and socially segregated, excluded

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<sup>243</sup> James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

from certain parts of the city and barred from many places of public accommodation.<sup>244</sup> This level of segregation was due to the fact that Chicagoans in the early twentieth century were not racial utopianists, at least when it came to white-black race relations. Indeed, as the Chicago Commission on Race Relations stated in their 1922 study of the Chicago race riot of 1919, *The Negro in Chicago*, Chicagoans held the same views of black Americans that Southerners did, only with less intensity: “In the North as in the South the assumptions regarding the Negro have their basis in similar sources. The beliefs, in general, are the same, though held by individuals in varying degrees. Though northerners do not believe so firmly and with such emotional intensity all that southerners believe about Negroes, yet they share these beliefs in proportion as they have been influenced or informed by southerners.”<sup>245</sup> To the commissioners, to be “informed by southerners” was a euphemism for simply being exposed to the presence of Southern black migrants; they argued that a causal relationship existed between the number of black Southerners in a Northern town and the intensity of anti-black racism that they experienced.

The literature on the violent white response to black migration to Chicago has generally articulated a similar though more nuanced argument concerning the cause of anti-black violence during the Great Migration. Some of the major analyses of this historical period point to a combination of economic and social anxieties that resulted in the violence of the era. According to Allan H. Spear, for example, white Chicagoans “grew anxious as a growing Negro population sought more and better housing; they

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<sup>244</sup> Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), ix.

<sup>245</sup> The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1922), 438.

feared job competition in an era of industrial strife when employers frequently used Negroes as strikebreakers; and they viewed Negro voters as pawns of a corrupt political machine.”<sup>246</sup> William Tuttle similarly argued that white animosity towards black migrants was “gut-level,” “nurtured on the killing floors in the stockyards, on all-white blocks threatened with black occupancy, and in parks and on beaches that were racially contested.”<sup>247</sup> The economic competition that white workers perceived in black migrants reacted explosively with a preexisting anti-black racist ideology to produce an animosity in Chicago that quickly and dramatically spilled over into bloodshed.

The most well-known episode of this anti-black violence was perhaps the Chicago race riot of 1919. One of the worst of the multiple race riots that erupted across the country during the so-called Red Summer of 1919, the citywide violence was immediately caused by a small skirmish that erupted on a segregated beach on July 27. On that exceedingly hot summer day, a group of black men and women, armed with rocks and resentment, marched doggedly onto the 29<sup>th</sup> Street beach in defiance of the “unwritten law” that designated the beach as whites-only. Although white bathers were initially frightened away, they soon returned with a larger crowd of sympathizers, similarly armed with rocks and animus toward the interlopers. In the ensuing melee, a young black boy who had inadvertently swam into a section of water deemed off limits to him was struck by a rock and drowned.<sup>248</sup> As tempers flared and rumors spread throughout the surrounding area, crowds of black and white Chicagoans descended on the 29<sup>th</sup> Street beach, ready to vent their frustration over the state of race relations in the city.

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<sup>246</sup> Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920*, 8.

<sup>247</sup> William M. Tuttle, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1977), viii.

<sup>248</sup> Tuttle, 5.

The violence spread outwards from the beach and engulfed the South Side in a week of bloody racial violence, marked by arson, looting, and murder. Fifteen whites and twenty-three blacks were killed as a result of the rioting, while an additional 537 Chicagoans were injured.<sup>249</sup> The violence was only brought to an end on August 3 when the state militia was called up to restore order to the city.

As destructive and infamous as it was, the 1919 race riot was not the only instance of racialized violence directed against African Americans in early twentieth-century Chicago. Indeed, the riot itself merely represents a particularly dramatic outburst of violence that took place in the middle of a multi-year segregationist campaign in which white Chicagoans utilized violence and intimidation to draw and enforce the color line during the Great Migration. In the two years leading up to the riot, at least 26 bombings were carried out across the city, at isolated black homes located in previously all-white neighborhoods and at the offices of realtors who had sold homes to new black arrivals. According to William Tuttle, half of these bombings took place in the six months leading up to the 1919 riot.<sup>250</sup> In the spring of 1919, black homes and businesses were being bombed at a rate of two per month, while in June, 1919, the bombing rate increased to at least one a week.<sup>251</sup> Rather than the culmination of this campaign of violence, the riot simply interrupted Chicago's anti-black bombing campaign. A coordinated and intense spate of racially motivated bombings continued in Chicago through 1921, with nearly 30 black homes being bombed in the two years following the riot.<sup>252</sup> Even white realtors

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<sup>249</sup> "Race Riots," accessed November 12, 2018, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1032.html>.

<sup>250</sup> Tuttle, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919*, 159.

<sup>251</sup> Thomas Lee Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrants, Blacks, and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991), 170–71.

<sup>252</sup> Robin F. Bachin, *Building the South Side: Urban Space and Civic Culture in Chicago, 1890-1919* (Chicago, Ill.; Bristol: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

who had facilitated the movement of black families into white neighborhoods were attacked. For example, a house leased to a black family at 442 East Forty-Fifth Street was bombed because, according to the white realtor who owned the house, “the neighbors didn’t like the idea of Negro families coming into the building.”<sup>253</sup> Even the relatively powerful were targeted, such as Alderman Oscar de Priest, whose home was bombed in 1921 “because he rented his South Side apartment to negroes.”<sup>254</sup>

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By contrast, in the absence of the economic competition and racial ideology of Manifest Destiny that led to the genocidal violence leveled against Chinese immigrants in the West, the Chinese experience in Chicago was considerably less hostile and violent. However, this does not mean that the history of Chinese immigration to Chicago is not without its own forms of anti-Chinese animus and aggression, of which the bombing of the Golden Lily represents a stark though still anomalous example. Much of the negative interaction between non-Chinese Chicagoans and Chinese Chicagoans stemmed from the anti-Chinese racism that, as Stuart Creighton Miller has argued, had permeated the United States to varying degrees of intensity since the eighteenth century.<sup>255</sup> Although, to be fair, such views were relatively muted in Chicago, the city’s discourse surrounding its Chinese American population in the nineteenth century did include anxieties about the potential for opium and other vices in Chinatown to spread out and corrupt the “Caucasian civilization” that surrounded the enclave, as well as the common racist depiction of the caricature of “John Chinaman.”

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<sup>253</sup> “Sells Home to Negro Family; Bomb Hits It,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 11, 1920.

<sup>254</sup> “Negro Politician’s Home Badly Damaged with Bomb,” *Freeport Journal-Standard*, April 5, 1921.

<sup>255</sup> Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882*.

The marginalized status of Chinese Americans, both in U.S. society and in the eyes of the law, combined with the prominence and culturally laden meaning of Chinese restaurants, made these establishments particularly common sites for the discrimination and relatively rare violence that Chinese Chicagoans experienced. In the 1880s and 1890s, Chinese restaurateurs commonly expressed their distaste for non-Chinese Chicagoans who entered their restaurants for the sake of ridiculing the restaurants' offerings and the immigrants who ran them. In an 1889 article relating to non-Chinese Chicagoans the nature of goings-on in Chinatown, the reporter described Chinese restaurateurs in this way: "They welcome Americans if they come to get a meal, but they fear the scoffers who gaze impudently at them, and enter only to ridicule."<sup>256</sup> In a similar article appearing in 1891, which included an interview with a Chinese immigrant opening what was erroneously described as Chicago's first Chinese restaurant, the restaurateur was described as saying: "while the restaurant is intended more especially for the use of the Chinamen of the city, any 'Melican' who will behave himself is welcome."<sup>257</sup> The notion of white slummers and boors causing trouble for marginalized immigrants living in the vice district of Chicago was evidently a matter of continual concern for Chinese restaurateurs in the city.

Beyond this sort of petty troublemaking, Chinese restaurants also stood as the spatial venues in which Americans express their feelings towards China proper, Chinese culture, and Chinese immigrants overall, in both negative and positive ways. A particularly stark demonstration of the linkage between Chinese restaurants and a larger conception of China and Chinese culture appears in the historical record during the Boxer

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<sup>256</sup> "Where Chinamen Trade."

<sup>257</sup> "A Chinese Restaurant," September 28, 1891.

War, as discussed above. For those Chicagoans who were predisposed to viewing the Chinese in a negative light, their response to the outbreak of violence in China, and to the loss of American lives in quashing the rebellion, was to take out their anger on Chinese restaurants at home. For example, in July of 1900, a black Chicagoan named Thomas Roberts entered a Chinese restaurant, Suey Hong Low, on Clark Street, deliberately insulted the white wife of the Chinese restaurateur, and proceeded to scrap with several Chinese waiters and cooks. His stated motive for the attack was to exact vengeance on these Chinese Americans for the presumably white American lives lost in China. That same month, the Chinese owner of Joy Yet Lo on Clark Street also expressed that he had “been bothered by obstreperous white persons who insist on breaking up the fixtures of his restaurant,” while it also reported that a mob of white men assaulted him and forcibly cut off his queue.<sup>258</sup> The owner of Joy Yet Lo seemed to be either singled out for retaliatory attacks during the Boxer War or was singularly unlucky, as his restaurant was again the site of an outbreak of violence in August 1900. Less than two weeks before they were to ship off to China, a group of twelve soldiers from the nearby Fort Sheridan descended on Chinatown on August 9 to celebrate their remaining time in Chicago and, according to one newspaper article, to look for Boxers in the enclave. The soldiers allegedly walked into Joy Yet Lo “in a fighting humor” and quickly came to be at the center of a brawl. As *The Inter Ocean* described it, the action not only included fisticuffs between the soldiers and a number of Chinese Chicagoans, but also featured a notable amount of property damage: “Chairs were seized and broken over the Chinamen’s heads, tables were overturned, and dishes broken before detectives appeared on the scene.” Only

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<sup>258</sup> “Chinese in Terror,” *The Inter Ocean*, July 10, 1900.

two of the soldiers were arrested following the melee, although they managed to get off with only a slap on the wrist. The local judge who oversaw their case suggested that the soldiers “control their pent-up feelings” until they reach China proper.<sup>259</sup> Such a response not only indicates the extent to which the actions taken against a local Chinese restaurateur were considered justified in light of contemporary geopolitical events, but also reveals the widespread linkage made between Chinatown and China proper in the minds of white Chicagoans. The “vengeance attacks” carried out in the summer of 1900, as well as other instances reported by Chicago newspapers of white Chicagoans either assaulting or planning to assault Chinese American establishments and individuals, demonstrate the perceived status of Chinese restaurants and Chinatown as spatially embodied colonies of a broad cultural and political conception of Chineseness.

These episodes of racial violence in the waning years of the nineteenth century, carried out by non-Chinese Chicagoans against the Chinese residents of the city, yet became more and more anomalous in the early decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, in terms of fatal violence, Chinese Chicagoans in the early 1920s had more reason to fear being attacked by *other* Chinese immigrants than by non-Chinese mobs or troublemakers. Beginning in January 1921, for example, a tong war broke out in Chicago between the Hip Sing Tong and On Leong Tong, the two most prominent tongs in the city. The Chicago tong war, of which the exact number of victims is not known, came to an end in October 1922, when the warring associations sat down together to a banquet prepared by the Mon Sang association and negotiated peace.<sup>260</sup> Overall, though, by the 1920s, due to either the diminishing salience of the “Chinese Question,” the overriding anxiety

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<sup>259</sup> “Soldiers and Chinese Row,” *The Inter Ocean*, August 9, 1900.

<sup>260</sup> “Chinese Bury Tong Hatchets in Rare Foods,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 11, 1922.

concerning other groups of new arrivals to the city, or a combination of these and other factors, Chinese immigrants and restaurants in Chicago had become significantly less likely to be the victims of white racialized violence. Thus, while the bombing of the Golden Lily represented a single act in a long history of bombings and explosive violence in Chicago, it was a relatively anomalous experience for a Chinese institution in the city by the late 1920s.

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Although the use of bombs in political and social struggles is obviously not particularly unique in any era of Chicago's history, the enforcement of the color line in the 1910s and 1920s through the bombing of homes and businesses of those who, in one way or another, "crossed the line" yet represented a formative episode in the history of Chicago's racialized society. First and foremost, the bombings reflected the significant extent to which race in Chicago was spatially constructed, determined, and enforced. According to Robin F. Bachin, the 1917-1921 bombing campaign, along with contemporaneous efforts at urban planning and housing segregation, "attest to the central role of territoriality and the racializing of urban space in determining white response to black resettlement patterns," as well as the importance of urban space to realizing Chicagoans' civic ideals.<sup>261</sup> The management and enforcement of order, respectability, and civic identity in the city was to be accomplished through the regulation of the city's spaces. Although some social reformers sought to achieve a racially integrated society through such regulation, the reality of obstinate opposition from white property owners' associations and the overwhelming impetus to maintain black Chicagoans' social

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<sup>261</sup> Bachin, *Building the South Side*, 252.

separation from whites led to the inadvertent reinforcement of racial segregation in Chicago's housing market and the formation of a ghetto in the South Side.<sup>262</sup> As the start of the 1919 race riot demonstrated, the goal of achieving civic harmony and respectability, as well as the logic behind racial segregation, was also extended to Chicago's leisure spaces. Indeed, the efforts of Chicago's civic-minded reformers to eradicate vice in the city were also targeted at eliminating untoward racial mixing in these spaces, the act of racial mixing being itself considered a vice. The potential intermingling of different races in brothels, saloons, and dance halls prompted increased concerns among reformers about the need to police racial boundaries in these spaces.<sup>263</sup> In order to weather the racial shock of the Great Migration, Chicagoans increasingly believed, the city's public leisure spaces would need to be regulated.

Although this regulation was theoretically meant to be done by progressive technocrats, the enforcement of a racially segregated, and thus ostensibly harmonious, society was often carried out in the streets and on the factory floor. In the months leading up to the 1919 riot, the stockyards, mills, and factories where black Chicagoans were employed were the sites of increasingly frequent clashes between black and white workers. According to Thomas Lee Philpott, the latter group viewed black migrants not only as a threat to their economic livelihoods, but also as a threat to the racial integrity of their neighborhoods. Clashes frequently broke out between gangs living and operating in immigrant neighborhoods and those black Chicagoans who dared to use public parks and swimming pools on the white side of the "gang line."<sup>264</sup> The identity of black Chicagoans

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<sup>262</sup> Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrants, Blacks, and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1930*.

<sup>263</sup> Bachin, *Building the South Side*, 252–54.

<sup>264</sup> Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrants, Blacks, and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1930*, 170.

during the Great Migration as racially subordinate, inferior, and undesirable was thus forged among non-black Chicagoans through the violent enforcement of boundaries delineating white and black areas of the city.

This type of violent enforcement of racial segregation in Chicago speaks to the logic of exclusion as an integral component of a white racial identity. The act of excluding black Chicagoans from parts of the city's urban geography was itself a white act. Here, I use Cheryl I. Harris's concept of whiteness as property, endowed with all the functions and attributes of property, to characterize exclusion as a white act. According to Harris, the absolute right to exclude represents one of the four key characterizing property functions of whiteness as a racial identity: "The right to exclude was the central principle, too, of whiteness as identity, for mainly whiteness has been characterized, not by an inherent unifying characteristic, but by the exclusion of others deemed to be 'not white.' The possessors of whiteness were granted the legal right to exclude others from the privileges inhering in whiteness; whiteness became an exclusive club whose membership was closely and grudgingly guarded."<sup>265</sup>

While Harris's analysis focuses on the legal attributes of exclusive whiteness, the practices of native and immigrant whites and near-whites in Chicago in the early twentieth century reflect the spatial and cultural arenas in which racial identities were also contested and shaped through exclusion. The violence directed against black migrants who entered certain spaces in the city served as a means of delineating those spaces as "white," which might in this sense be simultaneously understood as "non-black" or "exclusive to those identified as white." At the same time, the practice of

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<sup>265</sup> Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1736.

slumming had, since the late nineteenth century, worked to identify Chinatown, the black ghetto, and the slums inhabited by southern and eastern Europeans (for a time) as “foreign” spaces. In visiting these spaces, and marveling at the primitivism and Otherness of their residents, middle-class slummers solidified a “white” identity for themselves, here defined as “civilized” and “respectable” in contrast to the primitivism, foreignness, and indeed “non-whiteness” on display in these quarters.<sup>266</sup> Whiteness in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Chicago can thus be understood as an achievement of positioning and ability: one’s position as familiar, respectable, and acceptable in contrast to a foreign Other, and one’s ability, whether achieved through power, allegiance, or consent, to partake in the exclusion of that Other.

Granted, there are several other aspects to whiteness that are applicable to certain groups in early twentieth-century Chicago and that thus require mentioning. While the ability to exclude is one face of the whiteness coin, freedom of social and geographic mobility represents the opposite side of that coin. For instance, as Thomas A. Guglielmo has argued, Italian immigrants who relocated to Chicago at the turn of the century were essentially “white on arrival,” despite being considered racially undesirable. This was largely due, Guglielmo asserts, to the many privileges that their *color* status granted them in spite of their *racial* status, including the ability to “apply for certain jobs, live in certain neighborhoods, marry certain partners,” and access leisure spaces without being met with the staunch resistance of the native white population.<sup>267</sup> Italians, Russian Jews, and all other European immigrants were also legally able to naturalize as U.S. citizens,

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<sup>266</sup> Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 116.

<sup>267</sup> Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6–9.

meaning that their ability to “Americanize” over time was considered an eventuality rather than an impossibility. As Lizabeth Cohen argued, working-class members of these ethnic groups were also able to rely on sources of comfort, welfare, and identity outside of their own ethnic institutions. Industrial workers, for example, could turn to the Democratic Party, industrial unions, the largesse of the federal government, and even the welfare capitalism of their employers for assistance. This occurred simultaneously with and partially facilitated the disintegration of those ethnic institutions that immigrants formerly turned to in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>268</sup> Thus, those European immigrants who were initially identified as ethnically undesirable were yet able to circumvent the type of political, legal, and social exclusion that black Americans and Chinese immigrants were subjected to and which formed the central pillar of these latter groups’ identification as non-white.

This freedom of mobility also permitted white ethnic groups in Chicago to “blend in” over time, seemingly following the assimilation model of immigration. For example, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, Chicago’s North Side was widely considered by other residents of the city to be a “German” neighborhood. Neighborhood businesses and institutions were generally controlled by German immigrants, who were thus able to continually impress their ethnic identity onto the area. However, by the opening of the twentieth century, the dispersal of first- and second-generation German Chicagoans out of the North Side and into the surrounding areas paved the way for not

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<sup>268</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

only the neighborhood's ethnic decline, but also that of the German immigrants themselves.<sup>269</sup>

Such freedom of dispersion was not limited to German Chicagoans. Indeed, by the 1920s, most of the older groups of white ethnics in the city's core, including Czech, Polish, Swedish, and Irish Chicagoans, had begun to relocate from the white ethnic enclaves of the nineteenth century to the surrounding cityscape, branching out into newly developing neighborhoods in the far southwest and northwest of the city. Neighborhoods like Bridgeport, McKinley Park, and Back of the Yards, meanwhile, long associated with these original white ethnics, came to be repopulated by new arrivals from the American South and from southern and eastern Europe. As Michael T. Maly and Heather M. Dalmage have argued, the movement into single-family homes on the Southwest and West Side was "intimately tied to class status and social mobility" for immigrant Chicagoans in the twentieth century.<sup>270</sup> Although the ethnic identities and ties of these immigrants were not simply and immediately severed by their moving out of the old neighborhood, this ability to disperse across the cityscape did allow for some level of dissipation of ethnic Otherness and the ability to more easily become incorporated into the city's white geography.<sup>271</sup>

It is also worth mentioning that the role food played in crafting the identities of white ethnic groups in the United States also made these groups more able to assimilate. As Hasia Diner has explored, immigrants from Italy and other European countries created

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<sup>269</sup> Hartmut Keil and John B. Jentz, eds., *German Workers in Industrial Chicago, 1850-1910: A Comparative Perspective* (De Kalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1983), 34–35.

<sup>270</sup> Michael T. Maly and Heather M. Dalmage, *Vanishing Eden: White Construction of Memory, Meaning, and Identity in a Racially Changing City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016), 22–23.

<sup>271</sup> Melvin G. Holli and Peter d'A. Jones, eds., *Ethnic Chicago: A Multicultural Portrait*, Fourth Edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 606–14.

new “ethnic” cuisines in the U.S. by combining the cooking of the Old Country with available resources and materials in the New World. Such cuisines, reflecting recognizable European and American influences, rather than the strange influence of Chinese cooking, were pivotal in the construction of palatable ethnic identity for groups like Italian Americans.<sup>272</sup>

However, the strongest claim to whiteness, both in Chicago and in the U.S. more generally, yet remained the exclusion of or differentiation from black citizens. As several scholars have pointed out, a group’s relative position in the American racial hierarchy in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries has often depended on that group’s ability to demonstrate its relative desirability and “fitness” for American citizenship vis-à-vis African Americans. Such an arrangement gained particular salience during the Great Migration, as well as the era of the Civil Rights Movement, when the “minor divisions” between white ethnic groups seemed to be less important than the “major divisions” between “Caucasians,” “Negroids,” and “Mongoloids.”<sup>273</sup> The influx of black bodies into city spaces and popular discourse shifted Anglo-American anxieties away from questions about the racial desirability of southern and eastern Europeans and toward the enforcement of a (usually dichotomous) color line between white and black.

In Chicago, the enforcement of this color line, whether it was through bombing, arson, or gang violence, afforded an opportunity for those European immigrants whose racial identity was less solidified to achieve whiteness in the city’s racialized society.

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<sup>272</sup> Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>273</sup> Mary F. Brewer, *Staging Whiteness* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 26; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 91–96.

Those immigrants from Italy and Eastern Europe who in the nineteenth century had resided in the city's tenement districts became, during the Great Migration, as active of segregationists as Chicago's native white population. Indeed, as Dominic A. Pacyga has demonstrated, much of the violence that took place on the city's South Side during the 1919 race riot was carried out between black migrants and newly upwardly-mobile white ethnics who sought to retain their own group's control over their neighborhoods.<sup>274</sup> Insofar as the goal of the assimilating European immigrant was to blend so seamlessly into American society as to be indistinguishable from native whites, joining in the exclusion of black migrants from certain spaces in Chicago became a convenient means of accomplishing this goal in the 1910s and 1920s. As Philpott has argued, the exclusion of black Chicagoans from "white" areas of the city "was one matter in which Irish Americans, Polish Americans, and Jewish Americans really were indistinguishable from all other white Americans."<sup>275</sup>

Although the traditional assimilation paradigm in ethnicity theory has revealed this pathway to whiteness to be generally limited to European ethnic immigrants, Chinese Americans have also historically been able to alter their own racial status through dissociation from and the exclusion of black Americans. The best example of this phenomenon in the literature on racialization is found in James W. Loewen's analysis of Chinese Americans in the Mississippi Delta from Reconstruction to the 1960s. Loewen's work details how the Mississippi Chinese transitioned from being considered "of roughly Negro status" as sharecroppers in the 1870s to becoming "almost white" by the middle of the twentieth century. According to Loewen, this jumping of the segregation chasm

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<sup>274</sup> Holli and Jones, *Ethnic Chicago: A Multicultural Portrait*, 610.

<sup>275</sup> Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrants, Blacks, and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1930*, xx.

between black and white was achieved, first, by ending their close association with black Southerners through marriage and business contacts; second, by accepting a socially subordinate position vis-à-vis Southern whites; and third, by changing their lifestyle and social image as a racial group to mimic that of whites.<sup>276</sup> Granted, Chinese Mississippians did not come to be fully recognized as whites through this dual process of distancing and acculturation. However, as a race, Chinese Americans in the Delta did manage to be welcomed into white society, its schools and institutions, despite their social status in the middle of the South's racial hierarchy. They did this, in a word, by changing themselves; the Chinese enacted changes within their community that "were [in part] based on white standards and were in part due to a desire to transform their image in white minds."<sup>277</sup> Though not quite white, the Chinese in Mississippi were able, through dissociating from blacks and appealing to whites, to position themselves on the white side of the Delta's color line.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, some Chinese immigrants in Chicago were also able to achieve this form of access to white spaces of the city, at least on an individual basis. For immigrants like Chin Foin, in addition to possessing the adequate social, cultural, and financial capital, the ability to render their own inescapable ethnic identification into a positive or at least a neutral trait facilitated this access. Notably, such rendering was made significantly easier by the ever-increasing mainstream status of Chinese restaurants in the city.

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<sup>276</sup> James W. Loewen, *The Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1988), 73–82.

<sup>277</sup> Loewen, 82.

Chinese restaurants and cuisine in the United States underwent a dramatic transformation in popularity and appeal at the turn of the twentieth century, as illustrated in previous chapters, and continued to improve in status in the Windy City throughout the 1910s and 1920s. Following in the mold of Chin Foin's terrifically successful restaurants, other Chinese immigrants also established Chinese restaurants that catered directly to discerning white diners. These restaurants, such as the Bamboo Inn, which opened in 1919 on Clark Street, and the Canton Tea Gardens, which was established in 1920 on the southwest corner of Wabash Avenue and Van Buren Street in the Loop, retained an identification as Chinese, yet also remained oriented towards serving a broad Chicagoan clientele.<sup>278</sup> The Bamboo Inn in particular highlighted in its advertisements, in much the same way that the Mandarin Inn had done, that it was a unique and accommodating Chinese restaurant with no similarities to unsavory Chinese eateries of the past: "With its really 'different' atmosphere – a 'new' Chinese-American Restaurant – The Bamboo Inn adds a better place for Chicagoans to lunch or dine."<sup>279</sup> In advertisements for a restaurant opened in 1920 by the Hong Kong Lo Company, the idea that the restaurant served a broad and upscale clientele was also emphasized: "This restaurant...has enjoyed the patronage of discriminating people who demand the finest cuisine in both Chinese and American dishes."<sup>280</sup> Although the veracity of this sort of claim is obviously suspect, especially in light of the advertisement's simultaneous assertion that the restaurant was the "oldest original Oriental restaurant of Chicago," it is likely that such advertisements

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<sup>278</sup> "Announcing the Opening of the Bamboo Inn," *Chicago Tribune*, August 10, 1919; "Canton Tea Gardens to Be Loop's Newest Oriental Cafe," *Chicago Tribune*, May 16, 1920.

<sup>279</sup> "Announcing the Opening of the Bamboo Inn."

<sup>280</sup> "Hong Kong Lo Advertisement," *Chicago Tribune*, December 16, 1920.

contained at least a kernel of truth, and that the city's Chinese restaurants remained in many instances the province of Chicago's "discerning" population of white diners.

To be sure, white Chicagoans in the 1920s were certainly not devoid of racially charged views of Chinatown and Chinese culture that in some ways harkened back to the Orientalism of the nineteenth century, though Chinese restaurants seemed to enjoy distinctive characterization as compared to other sites of "Chineseness." For example, when the local Walk-for-Health Club ventured into the city's Chinese quarter in April 1926, the *Suburbanite Economist* described the outing as a visit to "Slinky, Shadowy Chinatown" and used strikingly Orientalist language to describe Chinatown and its inhabitants: "Only an occasional and ancient oriental slinking down a side street in gleaming black coolie jacket and soft-soled slippers tells of the odd folk who live behind the drab walls. In the windows of shops one sees, too, strange wares unknown to western eyes but unless one is entirely familiar with the Chinese mind and its working he scarcely thinks of the real life of this section which goes on in the gloomy and forbidding looking buildings. Aloof, removed from the American scene once he is in his house, the Chinaman reverts to the customs of his forefathers."<sup>281</sup> Although this description was relatively extreme in its view of Chinatown's Otherness, this kind of depiction of Chicago's Chinese areas was not entirely uncommon. The Chinese shops that remained on Clark Street into the 1920s were also described as part of an area of "shadowy solitude," and the street itself was seen as being slowly "reclaimed" through new real estate purchases and investments being made at the beginning of the decade (though who

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<sup>281</sup> "Walk-For-Health Club Visits Slinky, Shadowy Chinatown," *Suburbanite Economist*, April 13, 1926.

precisely was “reclaiming” Clark Street was left unsaid).<sup>282</sup> Meanwhile, when society leaders attended a dinner in a Chinese restaurant in Chinatown in 1921 to discuss plans for a Chinese carnival with leading members of the Chinese community, the event was described in an article in the *Chicago Tribune* entitled “Society Invades Chinatown.”<sup>283</sup> This kind of Otherization was also periodically extended to Chinese immigrants themselves, such as in joke articles that ran in city newspapers and that mocked the accents of Chinese restaurant workers.<sup>284</sup> Nevertheless, although Chinese immigrants themselves remained to a large extent Otherized and marginalized in Chicago society, their status in the city was markedly different from the historical treatment of Chinese Americans in the western half of the country. Furthermore, the restaurants and cuisines they had introduced to the city had become almost entirely embraced by the mainstream white society by the 1920s.

Moreover, Chinese restaurants as institutions lost a significant amount of their stigma in Chicago by the onset of the 1920s. Granted, negative stereotypes surrounding Chinese restaurants and Chinatown did not completely disappear in the city in this period. The association between Chinese restaurants and sinful activities, for example, was subtly hinted at in one edition of a newspaper serial appearing in February 1918.<sup>285</sup> In an article that appeared in 1920 detailing how Chicago police broke up a secret gambling gathering, it was alleged that William Lee, the so-called “mayor of Chinatown,” intervened to prevent the arrest of several Chinese Chicagoans on gambling charges.

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<sup>282</sup> “Polite Porter of ‘Floptown’ Wins \$50 Prize,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 2, 1921; “South Clark Street Deal,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 9, 1920.

<sup>283</sup> “Society Invades Chinatown,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 29, 1921.

<sup>284</sup> “Stung!,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 14, 1921.

<sup>285</sup> “Who Is Number One? Fifteenth Episode,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 3, 1918.

When the police presented Lee with a confiscated gambling notebook, filled with entries written in Chinese characters, Lee grinningly retorted that the book was a restaurant menu.<sup>286</sup> The connection between drug trafficking and Chinatown also remained prevalent in this period. Chicago police shutting down the “opium citadel of Chicago’s Chinatown” in a hail of bullets, for example, was heralded as a victory of “Chinese traffickers” in 1919, while stories about officers arresting Chinatown residents for peddling opium, cocaine, and morphine, also made repeat appearances in city newspapers.<sup>287</sup> However, despite these stereotypes, Chinese restaurants themselves were yet subjected to an altogether shrinking amount of negative coverage and rhetoric at the start of the decade. Indeed, in 1921, one reader of the *Chicago Tribune* remarked in a nostalgia piece that it was no longer considered “slumming” to patronize a “chop suey restaurant,” in contrast to the days of their youth.<sup>288</sup> Further still, instructions on how to make chop suey at home, divorced from the context of a Chinese eatery, as well as ways of rendering your home’s interior similar to that of a Chinese restaurant, also frequently appeared in city newspapers, continuing a trend that began with the chop suey craze of the early 1900s.<sup>289</sup>

As a result of this de-stigmatization, the racial status of Chinese restaurants in Chicago had by the end of the 1920s become a matter of some ambiguity, as demonstrated by the bombing of the Golden Lily in 1929. The Golden Lily café was a Chinese American restaurant and night club located along Garfield Boulevard in Chicago’s South Side. Offering up chop suey and nightly entertainment, the Golden Lily

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<sup>286</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, March 15, 1920.

<sup>287</sup> “Opium Citadel Surrenders in Battle with U.S. Agents,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 14, 1919.

<sup>288</sup> “In the Wake of the News,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 4, 1921.

<sup>289</sup> “The Home Harmonious,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 14, 1918.

was described as being a “high-class eating place” catering exclusively to white patrons in the months before the bombing took place. However, as the demographics of the restaurant’s South Side locale shifted in the later years of the 1920s, and as its former patrons began frequenting more and more the new Chinese restaurants established in Armour Square, management felt compelled to act. Thus, in early October, two weeks before the bombing, the Golden Lily replaced its white orchestra with an ensemble of black musicians and announced a policy of allowing patrons of all races to dine at the restaurant. This dual act of racial transgression, done for the sake of financial necessity, was cited in multiple reports as the likely motive for the October 16 bomb.<sup>290</sup>

In light of this type of racialized violence, the Golden Lily and other Chinese restaurants like it seem to have been placed, for better or for worse, on the white side of the city’s color line. Furthermore, the status of such Chinese restaurants thus amounted to something akin to white space or white-accepted space. By this I do not mean that such spaces were owned, operated, created, or entirely controlled by white persons, nor do I mean that they were devoid of non-white bodies or cultural production, nor still do I mean that their racial status was solely the result of non-Chinese agents. Rather, my contention is that white Chicagoans felt comfortable “claiming” these spaces as places where white patrons could, as detailed in the paragraphs above, dine without sacrificing respectability; where they could anticipate and even demand their expectation of anti-black segregation to be carried out; and, most importantly, where the patronage of black citizens would be considered unacceptable.

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<sup>290</sup> “Bomb Hits S. S. Chop Suey Cafe”; “Bombs Roar at Two Places Same Evening,” *The Daily Chronicle*, October 17, 1929; “Another Place in Chicago Bombed,” *The Kane Republican*, October 17, 1929; “Anything Bombing for Chicago, But That Is Not News for World,” *The Clarksdale Press Register*, October 17, 1929; “Black and Tan Cafe Bombed,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 26, 1929.

As illustrated above, Chinese restaurants were relatively normalized among white Chicagoans by this point, significantly less maligned and more relished by mainstream diners. This was partly achieved, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, by deliberately catering to the tastes, desires, and expectations of white patrons. However, the shift in the racialization of Chinese restaurants was also in part accomplished by the owners of these establishments taking part in the exclusion of black Chicagoans from restaurants and other leisure spaces in the city. In the early years of the decade, many if not most restaurants in areas of the city populated mainly by white residents either refused to serve black customers outright, served them only in secluded areas of the dining room where their presence could not offend white patrons, or delivered unto them deliberately poor service until they chose to leave the restaurant of their own accord. Restaurants in South Side areas where black Chicagoans amounted to around half of the population also commonly denied service to black customers, though this varied based on location and economic necessity. According to the Chicago Commission on Race Relations, the stated reason for this selective service was almost always to appease white customers who objected to being served alongside black diners.<sup>291</sup> The Commission also reported at least one instance of a Chinese restaurant on South Wabash Avenue denying full service to black diners in order to placate angry whites.<sup>292</sup> Meanwhile, the example of the Golden Lily also indicates that at least some Chinese restaurants in Chicago completely barred black patrons from eating in them and exclusively catered to white customers. Given that the Golden Lily was, so far as has been determined, the only

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<sup>291</sup> The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot*, 309–16.

<sup>292</sup> The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, 314.

Chinese restaurant bombed for racial motivations through the 1910s and 1920s, and given that Chinese restaurants in general were not universally stigmatized for being sites of racial mixing by this period, it is reasonable to conclude that those Chinese restaurants that served white Chicagoans, which would have been legion by this point, probably did not also provide full service to black customers.

It is also worth noting that opening its doors to black diners resulted in the Golden Lily being categorized in certain reports as a “Black and Tan,” a kind of resort that spoke dramatically to the complexities of racialization and leisure in the early twentieth century. This categorization, as defined by the Chicago Commission on Race Relations, referred to those establishments which promoted or allowed interracial mixing between blacks and whites. Black and Tans were vilified among progressive reformers in New York and Chicago for this dangerous and debauched racial mixing. Understandably, such resorts occupied an uncomfortably complex position in turn-of-the-century American racial ideology. According to Chad Heap, “a wide variety of immigrant and working-class men and women who visited these establishments were racialized as nonwhite simply because of their close and regular association with the resorts’ black patrons, even as middle- and upper-class whites saw the black and tan as a ‘slummers’ paradise’ in which they could observe all the racialized groups of the slums and red-light districts at the same time.”<sup>293</sup> While temporary and touristic sojourns into Black and Tans could reinforce a slummer’s whiteness, continual association with the resorts, either as patrons or as operators, could detract from one’s (potential) whiteness. Such racialization-through-proximity was particularly troublesome for near-white European ethnics, such as Italian and Jewish

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<sup>293</sup> Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940*, 123.

immigrants, whose racial “in-betweenness” gave them access to pathways of assimilation without guaranteeing them full white status. In this liminal racial state, ethnic immigrants’ whiteness hinged in large part on their ability to dissociate themselves from black Americans.

This made Black and Tans particularly distressing racial sites. On the one hand, intimate association with those who are readily identified as non-white (i.e., black Americans) puts one’s whiteness in jeopardy. By the same token, the act of socially separating and dissociating from non-white foils, which extends logically to the act of full exclusion of non-whites, can strengthen or facilitate the achievement of a white racial status. Black and tans thus represented a troublesome gateway in the otherwise ostensibly rigid color line, a portal through which a person could, potentially, enter and exit whiteness. Conversely, those Chinese restaurants that did not promote racial mixing, and thus avoided categorization as Black and Tans, similarly avoided provoking racial anxiety in their white customers. Much as the “minor divisions” between whites and near-whites became elided through solidarity in enforcement of the color line, as Matthew Frye Jacobson has argued, so too could Chinese restaurants reinforce their respectable status among white Chicagoans by preventing untoward racial mixing.

Finally, the mere fact that white Chicagoans were willing to engage in targeted violence to prevent racial mixing in a Chinese restaurant demonstrates the extent to which such leisure spaces were considered to be white-exclusive, at least by the 1920s. Through the turn of the twentieth century, African American patrons had developed a close relationship to Chinese restaurants in many American cities, largely due to the fact

that these restaurants were among the few public places that welcomed black diners.<sup>294</sup> However, as the white patronage of Chinese restaurants increased, so too did the financial and social incentive for Chinese restaurateurs to discriminate against black customers. By the time of the Golden Lily bombing, at least some, if not the majority of, Chinese restaurants were indeed expected to deny service to black Chicagoans. As a result, insofar as the color line produces a dichotomous racial structure, featuring an in-group and an out-group, and engenders spaces that are exclusive to the in-group and from which the out-group is excluded, then the apparent status of a Chinese restaurant like the Golden Lily as off-limits to black patrons indicates the position of Chinese restaurants in general on the white side of the color line. In a span of 30 years, then, Chinese restaurants in the city had gone from sites of racial intermixing to “white” or “white-accepted” sites of racial exclusion, with Chinese managers and waiters caught in the middle.

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Although Chinese restaurants did, at least in certain cases, occupy a racially contested status in 1920s Chicago, Chinese Chicagoans themselves could not utilize these spaces to achieve the same level of whiteness or white-adjacency that ethnic whites or “near-whites” in the city were able to obtain. To be sure, there were several benefits to be enjoyed by running a Chinese restaurant that white customers felt comfortable in and somewhat possessive of. Certainly, some individual Chinese Chicagoans, such as Chin Foin, gained relatively unfettered access to white society, partly through lifestyle changes and partly through dissociation from those bodies that could prove to stymie one’s racial aspirations. Notably, these bodies not only included those of black Americans, but also

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<sup>294</sup> Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 106–8.

those of the Chinese “rabble” who stood in contradistinction to the “better class” of Chinese immigrants. Nevertheless, as was argued in chapter three, the agentive creation of particularly respectable spaces within Chinese restaurants was able to help immigrants like Chin achieve significant upward social mobility in Chicago.

Further still, the maintenance of Chinese restaurants as white-exclusive or white-accepted spaces did have other material benefits that were far less theoretical in nature. For instance, the creation of “whites only” (or “mainly whites”) spaces enabled Chinese restaurateurs to enjoy a good deal of white patronage they may otherwise not have received. Indeed, as the Chicago Commission on Race Relations noted, some Chinese restaurateurs were compelled to deny service to black patrons or risk losing their white customers. At any rate, there was a significant financial reward for Chinese restaurateurs who could attract white customers and keep them happy.

However, these benefits notwithstanding, there were yet many limitations to the social benefits that Chinese immigrants could reap from their restaurants’ racial status, particularly as these benefits pertained to their own racial identities. Perhaps the largest obstacle facing Chinese Americans seeking to achieve a “white” racial status was the fact that they did not “look white.” Instead of being counted among the “white race,” as Italians, Poles, and Jews eventually could be, Chinese, Japanese, and other Asian peoples were invariably categorized as belonging to the “yellow race.” Newspaper articles of the era repeatedly positioned this “yellow race,” sometimes alongside the “black race,” as a threat to the continued supremacy and success of the “white race.” This point was especially salient during the imperial ascendancy of Japan in the early twentieth

century.<sup>295</sup> With the presence of such a “major division,” to use Matthew Frye Jacobson’s terminology, the ability for Chinese Americans to convince white Americans that only “minor divisions” separated them was significantly hindered.

Furthermore, unlike European immigrants, Chinese immigrants to the United States were legally barred from naturalizing as citizens. Marked as permanently alien, they were by default considered incapable of ever truly assimilating into the country. To the extent to which whiteness has been intimately tied to citizenship in the United States, those Chinese Americans not born in the states could never fully ascend the ladder of racial hierarchy.

Thus, although the spaces of Chinese restaurants were in many instances considered to be white space or white-accepted space, per the definition of this phrase described above, the benefits that Chinese Americans themselves garnered from this ambiguous racial status were limited. While some individual Chinese immigrants certainly could gain access to white society in Chicago, and while those restaurateurs who helped engender the racially privileged status of their restaurants enjoyed the material benefits of white patronage, it was not quite the case that the Chinese *as a race* became “almost white” in Chicago the way the Mississippi Chinese achieved in the postwar era.

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Nevertheless, the bombing of the Golden Lily as an act of enforcement of the color line represented a dramatic and poignant example of the extent to which the status of Chinese restaurants in the city had changed by the end of the decade. By following a

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<sup>295</sup> “Who’s Afraid?,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 21, 1920; “White Vs. Yellow Mentality and Culture,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 23, 1921.

practice of exclusion, while simultaneously catering to the tastes, expectations, and demands of the white majority, Chinese restaurants came to occupy a position on the white side of the color line in 1920s Chicago. Although Chinese immigrants themselves faced individual legal and social obstacles on their paths to whiteness, the cultural spaces they had created and recreated in their restaurants since the 1890s had evidently been accepted or claimed by white Chicagoans as, to some extent, spaces of their own, subject to aggressive and violent defense against the incursion of non-white bodies, unless those bodies were those of the Asian waitstaff.

Chinese restaurants in 1920s Chicago, like Chinese Mississippians in the mid-twentieth century, thus occupied a more nuanced position than a dichotomous racial structure would allow for. No longer the completely foreign Chinese cultural colonies of the nineteenth century, yet not so familiar as to avoid characterization as “Chinese,” Chinese restaurants were normalized and exclusive, while the immigrants who ran them remained excluded in the United States. As spaces of leisure that were made to be off-limits to black Americans, they can be considered, by some definitions, effectively white.

## Chapter Five:

### Sinophile Consumption in the 1930s and the Normalization of Chinese Restaurants

Regarding depictions of China and Chinese culture in the United States, the 1930s was a remarkably positive decade. Although China itself underwent a series of intense political and social upheavals in the first decades of the twentieth century, including devastating famine, a series of political revolutions, a civil war, and a destructive invasion by Japan, many depictions of the country in American media and culture portrayed a hardscrabble peasantry aspiring for independence and a way out of poverty, in ways that Americans found readily relatable in the midst of the Great Depression. In contrast to the barbaric civilization many Americans saw in the Qing Empire, Republican China represented a positive foil to the menacing imperialism of Japan.

The increased attention paid to China and Chinese affairs in the 1920s and 1930s, by scholars, journalists, and the public at large, represented a period of resurgent Sinophilia in the United States, much like the one experienced in the 1890s during the rise of the American empire in the Pacific. This resurgent Sinophilia touched off a marked increase in the cultural consumption of China in the United States, much as it did during the chop suey craze. Unlike the Sinophilia of the turn of the century, however, the Sinophile consumption that marked the 1920s and 1930s did not result in any significant change in the status or popularity of Chinese restaurants specifically. While Chinese restaurants and chop suey certainly remained widely popular in this period, they were not

any *more* popular than they had become in the 1900s and 1910s. In other words, they did not receive any special boost from Americans' Sinophile consumption in the 1920s and 1930s, while it simultaneously rendered other, non-culinary features of Chinese culture more popular among the American public.

The failure of a second chop suey craze to materialize in the 1930s was due primarily to the normalized, and largely non-fetishized, status of Chinese restaurants and cuisine by this time. Instead of titillating embodiments of an Oriental culture, they had now become mainstays of the typical American diet, divorced in many ways (though certainly not entirely) from Chinese culture and from the Chinese immigrants that established them. Although Chinese Americans remained members of a permanently alien class of immigrant, the cuisine they had developed became an accepted branch of a larger American foodways by the 1930s.

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The feelings of proximity to, interest in, and compassion for China that fueled the Sinophilia of the 1890s, were also felt and acted upon in the 1920s and 1930s. The trials and tribulations of the Middle Kingdom were neither lost on nor ignored by swaths of the American public in the early decades of the twentieth century. In contradistinction to the ideas of racial hierarchy that colored American opinions of China in much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Americans in this period largely viewed China with either admiration, sympathy, optimism, or some modicum of respect. For example, in the waning months of World War I, an editorial in the Providence *Journal* praised the contribution of the Chinese to the war effort, not only by the 150,000 civilian workers who contributed to the British army, but also by its 40,000 soldiers who stood ready to

fight the Germans. This editorial, reflecting an optimistic appraisal of Chinese potential not dissimilar to those nineteenth-century portrayals of China as a Western democracy-in-waiting, also asserted that Chinese participation in the Allied cause would serve to make the Asian soldiers, and their country, more like the West: “[The Chinese] cannot help catching some of the dogged determination of the French, some of the carefreeness of the British, some of the ardor of the Americans. The ferment of these qualities is bound to have its inspiring effect, and China’s man power may turn out to be something more than the joke which the superior intellects of Prussia have considered it to be.”<sup>296</sup> In the years after the end of the Great War, optimism concerning China’s evolution into an Asian copy of the United States persisted. The *Chicago Tribune* ran one article in November of 1921 that detailed the efforts by Chinese expats in the Philippines to form an independent government in Fujian entitled, “Manila Chinese Plan a United States of China.”<sup>297</sup> The next year, the paper also reported that the Chinese constitution agreed to by the Chinese president and parliament would be “similar to America’s,” implying a sense of progress and accomplishment that such similarity would entail.<sup>298</sup> Granted, such benevolent optimism was not the only idea of China reflected in popular discourse; a report of a devastating Chinese earthquake that appeared in the *Daily Herald* ran as follows: “It is reported that 700,000 Chinese have been killed in earthquakes. Given a little more of a chance and the earthquakes will solve the problem of white man’s domination in China.”<sup>299</sup> Overall, however, American observers tended to understand the

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<sup>296</sup> “China in the War,” *Providence Journal*, February 25, 1918.

<sup>297</sup> “Manila Chinese Plan a United States of China,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 27, 1921.

<sup>298</sup> “News Summary,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 3, 1922.

<sup>299</sup> “Echoes of the News,” *The Daily Herald*, August 23, 1927.

political and social shakeups in twentieth-century China in positive terms of Eurocentric development.

In Chicago, the Chinese tumult which garnered the most attention was the 1920-1921 North China famine, which killed nearly half a million people in North and East China in a two-year period. The principal catalyst for the famine was a prolonged drought from 1919 to 1920, which resulted in a decimated autumn 1920 harvest, although this shortage of food was compounded by other underlying conditions in China at the time, such as endemic and extreme poverty, poor internal infrastructure, and a weakened central government.<sup>300</sup> Throughout the winter of 1920-1921, American newspapers closely monitored international relief efforts aiming to mitigate the famine conditions and prevent what was reported to be the potential deaths of fifteen million people.<sup>301</sup> Chicagoans began working to help prevent such a catastrophe as early as November 1920, when the city's Chinese population gathered at 225 West Twenty-second street to raise funds in response to Chinese consul Iuming C. Suez's call for assistance.<sup>302</sup> Non-Chinese Chicagoans were quick to act as well; during that winter, leading members of the city took part in the nationwide China Famine Relief Committee, established by Woodrow Wilson to aid the famine-stricken Chinese, and solicited charitable donations from the Chicago public. The committee's call to donation directed to the public included a description of the United States' special relationship to China that is worth quoting in full: "The United States has many friends among the nations of the world, but nowhere is greater, deeper friendship manifested for our country than by the government and the

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<sup>300</sup> "North China Famine, 1920-21 | DisasterHistory.Org," accessed December 22, 2018, <http://www.disasterhistory.org/north-china-famine-1920-21>.

<sup>301</sup> "15,000,000 to Perish in China Despite Relief," *Chicago Tribune*, December 12, 1920.

<sup>302</sup> "Chicago Chinese Launch Fund for Famine Victims," *Chicago Tribune*, November 22, 1920.

400,000,000 people of China. They take advantage of every opportunity to express their gratitude to American for the return twenty years ago, of the Boxer Indemnity which enables them to educate their people and later send them to American colleges. Never will they forget what America may do for them in this very dark hour of misery and suffering when tens of thousands of their industrious, patient, courteous, peaceful people are dying daily for the need of a little food. Help great and grateful China in her hour of awful need.”<sup>303</sup>

Although such rhetoric is clearly meant to appeal to the charitable angels of Americans’ nature, the use of the idea of a special bond between the United States and China speaks to the continuing cache of this Sinophile notion in Chicago into the 1920s. Throughout the winter and spring of 1921, citizens and churches in Chicago organized and delivered donations to the China Famine Relief fund, while continuing their charitable giving throughout the year. In June of 1921, following the relocation of the fund’s local headquarters to 211 North Michigan Avenue, a “Chinese fête” was held by the fund at a local casino as part of the organization’s fundraising efforts.<sup>304</sup> Although the specific details of this event are unclear, it’s very likely that a “Chinese fête” would feature many sensory trappings of Chinese culture, including visually and aurally Asian décor and Chinese American cuisine, as this was a common aspect of “Chinese” dinners and celebrations in early twentieth-century American culture. Nevertheless, this use of Chinese cultural trappings, as well as the appeal to Americans’ sense of a special bond between their country and the Middle Kingdom, seemed to have an impact on the amount of aid received by China in its hour of need, at least according to the American media; the

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<sup>303</sup> “China Is Starving!,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 21, 1921.

<sup>304</sup> “Society Plans Several Affairs to Raise Funds for Starving Chinese,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 1, 1921.

*Chicago Tribune* reported in June of 1921 that “owing to the American campaign in behalf of the victims sympathy and cooperation were so stimulated that grain was taken almost continuously to [North China] for distribution.”<sup>305</sup> To some extent, then, by the 1920s, Americans were not only quick to have their attention fixated on China during times of strife, but also remained, at least in terms of their discourse, invested in the notion of a special relationship between the United States and the Middle Kingdom.

Into the 1930s, American views of China remained to a sizable extent positive, representing a notable shift away from predominant views of the country in previous centuries. Indeed, the 1930s witnessed perhaps the most profound move away from the anti-Chinese racism of the 1870s and 1880s towards a more favorable consideration of China proper to occur in the Exclusion era. Part of this shift was simply the continuation of certain of the ideological pastimes within American Sinophilia, such as the concept of the Chinese market as an economic savior of the American economy in times of need. For example, in a *Wall Street Journal* article printed in 1931, entitled “Shall We Sell to China?”, the famine conditions prevailing in that country seemed, next to the overproduction of foodstuffs in the United States, to offer a ready solution to Americans’ economic woes. Indeed, beyond simply advocating for a mere business dealing, the article articulated its argument along lines of discourse that resonate loudly with the ideology of Sinophilia: “Of far greater importance than the possible loss of a part of the price of the wheat is the value to us of China. Not the war-torn bandit-infested China of today, but the China of tomorrow. Give that country a stable government and an opportunity to establish its credit to build adequate transportation and communication

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<sup>305</sup> “China’s Famine Death Toll Cut by Yankee Aid,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 12, 1921.

lines, and call foreign capital to build an industrial system and raise the standard of living to approximately that of the poorest countries of Europe even, and it would be one of the greatest markets that the world could offer us. Then unemployment, overbuilt industries and agricultural surpluses would be outworn terms with us. Let the wheat go, and save China.”<sup>306</sup> Much like in the nineteenth century, the Chinese market was not only seen as a safety valve for American overproduction and resultant financial stress, but also as the means by which the once-great Chinese nation would rise to its rightful place among the community of nations. Importantly, this would be done by following the guidance and assistance of the United States. To some extent, then, the onset of the Great Depression, caused by the collapse of the stock market in 1929, seemed to have rekindled the American Sinophile conception of China as a land of promise, development, and economic salvation.

Much of the positive reception of China proper in the 1930s was also engendered by the status of the Chinese people as heroic, underdog resisters to the Goliath of Japanese imperialism. The Empire of Japan seized Manchuria, in the Northeast of China, in 1931, and soon thereafter established a puppet state in the region known as Manchukuo. While this act itself created considerable antipathy towards Japan and sympathy for China in Western media, this dynamic was only intensified following the broader outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. The plight of the Chinese against the imperialist machinations of the Japanese engendered a great deal of sympathy among American observers, who saw the Japanese as the culpable aggressor. For example, in an article entitled “What Caused the Chinese War?”, the author postulated

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<sup>306</sup> “Shall We Sell to China?,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 21, 1931.

that “in the final history of the present war in China it is probable that the Japanese attempt to set up an Asiatic Monroe Doctrine and oust the western nations from their trade in China will overshadow the brush outside Peiping and the killing of a Japanese naval officer at Shanghai.”<sup>307</sup> Part of this sympathy was also deliberately facilitated by the publication of newspaper articles in the United States by associates of the Nationalist government. Song Qingling, for example, the wife of the late Sun Yat-sen, wrote in a 1941 *New York Times* article that, in regards to the principle of nationalism, which Sun had articulated as a major component of China’s positive development into modernity, the Chinese “[knew] very well the victory over the Japanese aggressors [was] the first condition of its realization,” and that “there [was] little danger of any neglect of this principle of national independence so long as China [was] fighting for her very existence as a nation.”<sup>308</sup> Such rhetoric was likely meant to appeal directly to Americans’ sense of self as a nation whose very birth was the product of a war for independence. Whatever its strategy, this type of public relations campaign seemed to have something of an effect, in combination with the image of China produced in popular literature at the time, as Americans were generally inclined towards a more positive perception of the country by the end of the decade.

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It is apparent that the United States seemed to have entered a resurgent period of Sinophilia in the 1920s and 1930s, spurred on by Americans’ interest in the political and social upheavals wracking China at the time. In this instance of Sinophilia, American attention was garnered most prominently by the increasing hostility between China and

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<sup>307</sup> “What Caused the Chinese War?,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 1, 1937.

<sup>308</sup> “Mme. Sun Analyzes China’s Struggle,” *New York Times*, October 9, 1941.

Japan and the way in which Americans saw something of themselves in the heroic resistance of the Chinese against an imperial power.

However, this resurgent Sinophilia was not only evidenced by American consumption of the news coming out of China. Like previous incarnations of a fascination with China that appeared in American history, the Sinophilia of the 1920s and 1930s was also marked by its impact on American culture and the Sinophile consumption of cultural products relating to China.

Perhaps the most famous examples of this period's Sinophile consumption pattern came in the form of American literature that portrayed the Chinese people in a sympathetic and admirable light. The most notable example of this type of portrayal is found in Pearl S. Buck's 1931 novel, *The Good Earth*, which sympathetically depicted the hardscrabble life of a Chinese farmer and his wife living in poverty in rural China. Buck's book, which was the best-selling novel in the United States in 1931 and 1932, a Pulitzer Prize winner in 1932, and which helped Buck win a Nobel Prize in 1938, profoundly influenced American views of China by endowing readers with newfound respect for everyday Chinese people for the suffering they had endured.<sup>309</sup> Rather than depicting a China full of mystery or Oriental exoticism, Buck showcased an image of Chinese peasant life in which ordinary Americans, experiencing their own trials in the midst of the Great Depression, could relate to, or at least sympathize with, the struggles of the Chinese everyman. As John Pomfret argued, "to American audiences, *The Good Earth* was both a vivid portrait of faraway China and a very American tale: an up-by-the-bootstraps parable about the values – modesty, thrift, and closeness to the land – that had

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<sup>309</sup> Erin Pattison, "Changing Perceptions of China in 1930s America" (Washington University in St. Louis, 2012), 35, <http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/etd/769>.

made America great...As Dorothy Canfield Fisher, one of the judges who chose the novel for the Book of the Month Club, put it, ‘most oriental novels, you know, are for Americans really only curiosities, travel books of the mind,’ but Buck’s novel ‘makes us belong to the Chinese family as if they were cousins and neighbors.’”<sup>310</sup> In the middle of the Great Depression, in which Americans struggled daily with the privations of economic hardship, Buck’s portrayal of the resilient Chinese peasantry found unprecedented resonance among American readers.

The work of Earl Derr Biggers, while not as widely celebrated as that of Buck, also had a significant impact on American views of Chinese people, through its introduction and portrayal of the character of Charlie Chan, a Chinese American detective working for the Honolulu police. Chan’s character was benevolent, heroic, and served as an immediate counter to character representations of the Yellow Peril, such as Fu Manchu. Although Biggers’ intention was not necessarily to profoundly reshape American views of Chinese men or culture, but rather was to add “local color” to a story set in Hawaii, his work nevertheless helped to counter the persistent image of Chinese immigrants in the United States as deceitful, dishonest, and, in a word, evil.<sup>311</sup> While these portrayals did not amount to a complete reversal of longstanding American prejudices and stereotypes concerning China and Chinese culture, they did represent significant progress towards a refiguring of American views of China, as well as stark demonstrations of American consumers’ interest in cultural products dealing with the China of the popular imagination.

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<sup>310</sup> Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present*, 175.

<sup>311</sup> Pattison, “Changing Perceptions of China in 1930s America,” 35.

Granted, while the work of Buck, Biggers, and others helped ameliorate the status of China in American eyes, negative views of the country more in line with the prejudices of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did persist into the 1930s as well. Members of the American government, for example, placed little trust in the Nationalist government during this period, with some considering it not terribly dissimilar to the Qing imperial court. Some media depictions of China also relied on narratives of Chinese backwardness and barbarity of the kind frequently used in the nineteenth century, such as in depictions of Chinese attacks on foreign doctors and hospitals in early 1931.<sup>312</sup> In contradistinction to the optimistic appraisals of China's future, meanwhile, some observers began in the 1930s to grow concerned about the potential for communism to undermine this positive development. Various newspaper articles that appeared in the first half of 1931, including "Bandit-Red Menace Stir Central China," "Chinese Troops Mutiny; Refuse to Attack Reds," "World Warned to Aid China 'Or She'll Go Red,'" and "New Disaffections Threaten Nanking," indicated the extent to which certain narratives of China in this period were that of a country at risk of collapse at best, or a backward country unable to develop along Western lines at worst.<sup>313</sup> While the threat of communism in China could be interpreted as the menace of an external ideology or corrupting influence, as in the headline "World Warned to Aid China 'Or She'll Go Red,'" it could also be read as just another instance of Chinese barbarity and hostility to modernity, as in the headline "Chinese Troops Mutiny; Refuse to Attack Reds."

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<sup>312</sup> Pattison, 18–19.

<sup>313</sup> "Bandit-Red Menace Stir Central China," *New York Times*, n.d., January 11 1931 edition; "Chinese Troops Mutiny; Refuse to Attack Reds," *Chicago Tribune*, March 10, 1931; "World Warned to Aid China 'Or She'll Go Red,'" *Chicago Tribune*, February 3, 1931; "New Disaffections Threaten Nanking," *New York Times*, January 27, 1931.

Nevertheless, while such negative appraisals of the Chinese nation did appear in American discourse in the early 1930s, the trend for the remainder of the decade tended towards increasingly positive portrayals of the Asian country.

Much like views of China proper, the image of Chicago's Chinatown in the 1930s was also one marked by relative positivity and increased consumer interest. This was partially the result of efforts on the part of the city's Chinese American community to create a more positive image of their community. In the late 1920s, for example, the On Leong Merchants Association, under the leadership of Jim Moy, decided to erect a new building at 2216 S. Wentworth Avenue to house many of the association's activities. In planning the building, Moy opted for a Chinese-style design that would visually reflect the Chinatown community. However, because there were no Chinese-born architects in Chicago at the time, the Association hired Christian S. Michaelsen and Sigurd A. Rognstad, Chicago-born architects of Scandinavian descent, to design the building using Chinese motifs. The building, opened in 1928, featured Chinese-style tiles made by the American Terra Cotta Company out of Crystal Lake, Illinois.<sup>314</sup> The building, which came to be informally known as Chinatown's "city hall," was ultimately used as an immigrant assistance center that also housed meeting halls, a school, a shrine, and several offices used by the On Leong Merchants Association.<sup>315</sup>

When non-Chinese companies constructed buildings in the vicinity of Chinatown, the enclave was further described in relatively positive terms. For instance, when Jay W. Rapp & Co., an import company, announced that it would erect a new store building in Chinatown, the *Chicago Tribune* found it "interesting" that the structure "[would] not

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<sup>314</sup> Ho and Moy, *Chinese in Chicago*, 58.

<sup>315</sup> "Chinatown Finishes Its 'City Hall,'" *Chicago Tribune*, April 27, 1928.

find its architectural motif in the land of the dragon and the home of chop suey but will be ultra modern (sic) in design.”<sup>316</sup> Although such a description creates a dichotomy between Asian design motifs and modernity, it also evidences the lack of concern such observations included about either the nature of the Chinese enclave or that of businesses that set up shop in the area.

Chinatown was also a popular destination for sightseers in Chicago, in a way that seemed markedly distinct from the slumming trips of prior decades. In a report on a visit to Chinatown made by a group of schoolchildren from across the state of Illinois in June of 1931, the sojourn was described as a means of studying Chinese culture while visiting the enclave. Instead of emphasizing the opium dens of seedy chop suey joints one might have expected to find in a slumming excursion, this trip’s itinerary was described as including “the churches, the city hall, and [a] luncheon with chopsticks.”<sup>317</sup> In May of that same year, Josephine McKenzie, a woman from the small village of Itasca, Illinois, published an article in the *Daily Herald* which glowingly described a trip to “Chicago’s Famed Chinatown” that she and other women from her village undertook. Her report began with a recounting of the group’s dinner at the Won Kow restaurant on Wentworth Avenue, where they dined on a veritable feast of Chinese American cuisine, including “chop suey sub tum,” “vegetable chop suey,” “chow mein,” “preserved cum quat” for dessert, and ample amounts of tea. According to McKenzie, her experience in the restaurant was quite positive, as “the cuisine service was as nearly perfect as could be.” Her description of the remainder of the group’s tour through the Chinese enclave, wherein they visited “many stores and markets conducted à la China,” is marked

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<sup>316</sup> “Modern Design for Structure in Chinatown,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 22, 1928.

<sup>317</sup> “Chinatown Is Visited,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 28, 1931.

throughout without Orientalist language. Even in recounting the group's visits to widely divergent types of establishments, for example, McKenzie's narrative of the tour emphasized the visual exoticism on display: "[The group's tour guide] conducted the guests into the On Leong Tong chamber of commerce, the Temple and the school; in each, giving a talk on how affairs of government, religion and education were conducted. The furnishings of these places of interest were intricately and elaborately constructed, of solid woods, mostly walnut, with hand carvings. Panels of beautiful hand silk embroidered work were mounted on the walls. The women of China are noted for their exquisite needle work; scenes of the garden, of traditions and folk lore are carried out in their embroideries and tapestries. The carvings on tables, pedestals and chairs include figures of gods, dragons and other intricate designs." Whether such an emphasis on the visual spectacle of Chinatown was a reflection of McKenzie's own Orientalism or that of the print media of the time, its presence in this narrative nevertheless demonstrates the continuing resonance of such Orientalist depictions of Chinatown. At the same time, McKenzie's positive description of her tour of Chinatown, and moreover the absence of any disparaging commentary of the enclave, the activities therein, or the moral standing of the group of women who participated in the tour, indicates the extent to which this Orientalism and its extension towards Chicago's Chinatown had become significantly more positive and less derogatory by the 1930s.<sup>318</sup>

The widespread popular appeal of visits to Chinatown was particularly evidenced in 1935, during a special free tour of the enclave conducted by the Chicago recreation commission. According to the executive secretary of the commission, as reported in the

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<sup>318</sup> "Itasca Women Take Trip Thru Chicago's Famed Chinatown," *The Daily Herald*, May 8, 1931.

*Chicago Tribune*, the enthusiasm for a tour of Chinatown was so great that more than 2500 people had signed up for the tour in the month after its announcement.<sup>319</sup> On the day that the tour was set to take place, according to newspaper reporting, a crowd of more than 4000 Chicagoans appeared in order to take part in the excursion, in which “tourists visited the Chinese city hall at 22<sup>nd</sup> street and Wentworth avenue, numerous stores and other places of interest in the district.”<sup>320</sup> Although these numbers may have grossly inflated for the sake of selling newspapers, it seems certainly to have been the case that visiting Chinatown was a popular activity that appealed to large numbers of people as opposed to only small cadres of the curious and vindictive.

While there was thus a markedly more positive perception of Chinatown in the 1930s, as evidenced by discourses and touristic activities surrounding the enclave, it must also be noted that, as in previous decades, negative depictions of the Chinese quarter were yet present in Chicago’s print media. For example, in a section of the *Chicago Tribune* dedicated to covering newly published books, one article, entitled “Tells About Friend of Chinatown Slave Girls,” described Donaldina Cameron, whose biography had just been published, as “the woman who helped to end the yellow slavery in San Francisco,” having “rescued many Chinese girls from dens in Chinatown and vigorously fought the slave trade there.”<sup>321</sup> Similarly portraying Chinatown as the vice-ridden “Oriental” colony of prior decades, a report describing a manhunt in 1935 recounted how Chicago police officers conducted a raid in the Chinese enclave to find a suspect and her Chinese husband whom they believed to be “hiding in the crowded warrens of

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<sup>319</sup> “City to Conduct Tour of Chinatown Tonight,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 15, 1935.

<sup>320</sup> “4,000 Sightseers Swamp Guides in Chinatown Tour,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 16, 1935.

<sup>321</sup> “Tells About Friend of Chinatown Slave Girls,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 5, 1931.

Chinatown.” As a result of the raid, the report continued, the police “seize[d] 9 Orientals,” with more raids on Chinatown anticipated.<sup>322</sup> However, it must also be noted that, throughout the remainder of the article, no further commentary was offered on either the moral nature of Chinatown or of the Chinese men (and white women) who inhabited the enclave. While such a report thus carried over some elements of anti-Chinese discourses of the past, including a depiction of Chinatown as populated by aliens and vice, this did not seem to be grounds for the articulation of any wider social discourse concerning the Chinese quarter or the character of Chinese immigrants more broadly. By the 1930s, then, Chicagoans seemed, to a significant extent, to have discarded the anti-Chinese discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in such a way that their views of Chinatown, Chinese culture, and China proper were marked by many of the positive aspects of American Orientalism and Sinophilia while lacking most of their negative components.

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As evidenced by the popularity of Chinatown tourism and the positive reception of Chinese culture discussed above, the United States entered a resurgent period of Sinophilia in the 1930s. However, unlike the Sinophilia of the 1890s, the interest in Chinatown and Chinese culture that marked the 1930s did not have a significant impact on the popularity or status of Chinese restaurants, at least in Chicago. Rather than undergo another spike in popularity à la the first “chop suey craze,” Chinese restaurants and cuisine in the United States seemed to receive no especial attention or patronage during the Sinophilia of the 1920s and 1930s.

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<sup>322</sup> “Raid Chinatown for Woman in Swamp Murder,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 14, 1935.

To some extent, this was due to the relatively normalized status that Chinese restaurants had gained by this point in the United States. This arrival at a mainstream status is also articulated by other scholars of Chinese American food history. For example, by the 1920s, Andrew Coe argues, Chinese American cuisine “had claimed a place in the national diet alongside ham and eggs, coffee and a slice of pie, and the Sunday pot roast,” and was considered so ordinary that “for those who were not part of the mainstream culture, eating Chinese food offered one way to joint it.”<sup>323</sup> In Chicago, this mainstream status is not only reflected in the popularity of Chinese restaurants and recipes for making Chinese food at home among non-Chinese Chicagoans, but is also evident in the discourse surrounding descriptions of Chinese restaurants in the city. In a 1928 *Suburbanite Economist* article detailing the offerings of the Golden Lily restaurant, for example, the author claims that the restaurant, serving both Chinese and American cuisine, is ideal for one “seeking fine food and entertainment as well as the most courteous service” and that “the large patronage both during the day and in the evening is in itself proof that this restaurant is held in high regard.”<sup>324</sup> Nowhere in the article did the author refer to Asian-style décor, exotic cuisine, or any other Orientalist trappings that one might expect to find in a Chinese restaurant. A 1929 advertisement for the Chin Chow Café similarly made no mention of its cuisine or décor, instead merely stating that it was “South Center’s Smartest Chinese Restaurant” and that patrons to the restaurant could “listen to the tunes of Bud Byron’s Orchestra and see the wonderful entertainment.”<sup>325</sup> Other than the restaurant’s alliterative name, and the name of its

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<sup>323</sup> Coe, *Chop Suey*, 198.

<sup>324</sup> “Golden Lily Restaurant a Good Place to Dine,” *Suburbanite Economist*, February 10, 1928.

<sup>325</sup> “Dine and Dance at the Chin Chow Cafe,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 19, 1929.

manager, Chang Hong, there was nothing in this advertisement to indicate that this Chinese restaurant was Chinese. Although “Chinese restaurant” remained a category of eatery into the 1920s and 1930s, the restaurants themselves were no longer endowed with the kind of strong cultural meaning that they embodied to non-Chinese Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rather than spatial embodiments of Chinese culture and its corrupting influence on white American society, Chinese restaurants were now mere houses of chop suey, a dish as American as “ham and eggs.”

The absence of another “chop suey craze” and dramatic shift in the status of Chicago’s Chinese restaurants in the 1930s was also due to the thoroughly American status of chop suey by the 1930s. To be sure, the knowledge that chop suey was in fact not the “national dish” of China had been percolating in the United States since at least the 1910s. In an article appearing in the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle* in 1913, for example, Chinese American magician Ching Ling Foo was described as claiming that, in his forty-year experience, he had “never foisted so rare a joke upon the public as [his] shrewd country [had] upon people with would-be Oriental palates” in serving chop suey as Chinese food, stating that “chop suey never saw China and China never heard of chop suey until American tourists called for it in the public restaurants of [his] country.”<sup>326</sup> Despite such a proclamation, this revelation about the true provenance of chop suey apparently did not stick; a similarly revelatory article appeared in the Helena, Montana, *Independent-Record* in 1928, entitled, “Chop Suey, Popular Here, is Hardly Known in China.”<sup>327</sup> Well into the 1930s, the notion of chop suey as the national dish of China, or at least a widely popular Chinese dish, remained persistent enough that “revelations” of

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<sup>326</sup> “The Origin of Chop Suey,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 1, 1913.

<sup>327</sup> “Chop Suey, Popular Here, Is Hardly Known in China,” *The Independent-Record*, November 18, 1928.

the dish's American origins still appeared in newspaper articles. At the onset of the decade, Everett Swingle advised those Chicagoans eating chop suey to "remember you are eating an American dish, whether it is prepared by American or Chinese chefs, and that the food you are eating, according to the Chinese interpretation of the words chop suey is 'many things in small pieces.'"<sup>328</sup> Similarly, in a 1937 Lancaster *Eagle-Gazette* article entitled "Chop Suey's Triumph," for example, which claimed that chop suey had "finally reached China," the article claim that "contrary to general belief, chop suey as a special dish – though enjoyed in this country for 40 years – has been practically unknown in China."<sup>329</sup>

While the "revelations" concerning the American origins of chop suey that appeared in 1930s print media seemed carbon copies of those that "shocked" readers in the 1910s and 1920s, the 1930s did also see chop suey prepared and consumed at home rather than in Chinese restaurants to a significantly greater extent, at least according to advertising trends of the era. To be sure, recipes for chop suey appeared in newspaper columns of the 1930s as frequently as they did in the 1920s, though sometimes in surprising places. For example, in a 1930 article that appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* detailing different ways of cooking with malt extract, author Harriet Holdredge included a recipe for making chop suey at home with malt extract immediately following a recipe for making rye bread. No other recipes were included in the article.<sup>330</sup> In the very same edition of the *Tribune*, an article published on behalf of the Fuji Trading Company, a local Asian food manufacturer and distributor of chop suey ingredients, explicitly argued

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<sup>328</sup> "Chop Suey? It's 'Many Things in Small Pieces,'" *Chicago Tribune*, March 20, 1931.

<sup>329</sup> "Chop Suey's Triumph," *Lancaster Eagle-Gazette*, January 14, 1937.

<sup>330</sup> "New Flavors Obtained with Malt Extract," *Chicago Tribune*, July 2, 1930.

that chop suey had become significantly more popular as a home-cooked meal: “In the last five years chop suey foods have gained materially in popularity with Chicago women, especially in their home preparation. For a good many years the American public has been able to sample the oriental favorites in the restaurants where they are emphasized. The recent trend, however, has been perceptibly toward an invasion of the individual kitchen. Cooks have weighed them in the balance for the variation and novelty they offer, and have not found them wanting.”<sup>331</sup> Although the claims made by this article, which effectively served as a form of advertisement for the Fuji Company, cannot be taken at face value, a minimal level of truth in these claims demonstrates the changing nature of how Chicagoans ate chop suey in the 1930s. Instead of relying solely on Chinese restaurants and immigrant providers for their Asian cuisine, a well-developed infrastructure for making chop suey at home was now in place.

A key component of this infrastructure was the presence of multiple providers of canned Chinese food ingredients in the late 1920s and 1930s. Perhaps the most well-known, as well as successful, of these Chinese food manufacturers was the La Choy company. The company was founded in 1922 by New Il-han, a Korean immigrant to the United States who gained later prominence as the founder of the Yuhan Corporation and an activist for Korean independence. La Choy first began by selling canned mung bean sprouts in Detroit, but the company’s offerings expanded in the 1930s to include soy sauce, subgum, kumquats, water chestnuts, brown sauce, bamboo shoots, and chow mein noodles. Many of their products came in cans that included instructions for using the product to make chop suey at home, indicating their intended consumers. Advertisements

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<sup>331</sup> “Chop Suey Foods Added to Menus of Chicago’s Women,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 2, 1930.

for La Choy's products that appeared in Chicago newspapers, meanwhile, emphasized that the company's canned foods allowed presumably non-Chinese customers to make authentic yet inexpensive Chinese food. Multiple advertisements appearing in the early 1930s claimed that La Choy offered customers "real Chinese" food, while the meals made from these ingredients were "economical," "easy," and "inexpensive."<sup>332</sup> Many of La Choy's advertisements also argued for the appeal of the company's products along gender lines. Ads with headlines such as "Women Win Praise When They Serve Chop Suey at Home" and "Women Delight Their Families with Chop Suey" speak to the "domestic" appeal of these products: they were meant to make it easier for women to prepare chop suey for their families at home, which was the trending location in chop suey consumption.<sup>333</sup>

In addition to La Choy, another major provider of canned chop suey ingredients was the Fuji Trading Company. In contrast to La Choy, however, Fuji Trading Company was actually based in Chicago, with its main office located at 441 W. Huron Street. Fuji was established by a Japanese first-generation (*issei*) immigrant named Shinsaku Nagano, who established the company sometime in the mid- to late 1920s. Much like advertisements for La Choy's products, Fuji ads also emphasized the inexpensive and convenient nature of the company's canned goods. An advertisement for Fuji canned chow mein noodles, for example, placed in capitalized block letters the words "TRULY ECONOMICAL" in the center of the ad space, below an image of two middle-class white children saying "It's our favorite meal," while also adding, "Just a little meat and a can of

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<sup>332</sup> "Something Unusual for Dinner Tonight," *Chicago Tribune*, November 18, 1932; "Chinese Chop Suey Prepared at Home in a Few Minutes," *Chicago Tribune*, February 3, 1933.

<sup>333</sup> "Women Win Praise When They Serve Chop Suey at Home," *Chicago Tribune*, February 17, 1933; "Women Delight Their Families with Chop Suey," *Chicago Tribune*, February 24, 1933.

Fuji Chop Suey Vegetables is sufficient for a dandy chop suey dinner at home.”<sup>334</sup> A common template for Fuji ads similarly emphasized economy by including in its copy the statement, “You can economize and yet have a healthful, well-balanced meal by serving Chop Suey real often with FUJI Chop Suey Foods.”<sup>335</sup> Unlike La Choy, however, certain of Fuji’s advertisements more willingly embraced the Asian categorization of the company’s products by engaging in Orientalist discourse. For instance, in an advertisement that ran in the *Tribune* in 1934, the copy that ran with the ad read, “The glamour and mystery of the Far East is brought to your own table when you prepare a Chinese dinner with FUJI.”<sup>336</sup> However, to be sure, this type of discourse was the exception to the rule, as most Fuji ads simply emphasized inexpensiveness and the act of cooking at home, with at least one ad even including an image of a white housewife carrying a plate of cooked chop suey and exclaiming, “Kitchen fresh is the best!”<sup>337</sup> Overall, as the advertising campaigns for both Fuji Trading Company and La Choy demonstrate, the appeal of chop suey to 1930s Chicagoans lay to a much greater extent in its cost-efficiency, convenience, and enjoyable (and by this point familiar) taste, rather than its association with an imagined Chinese culture.

Granted, this is not to say that chop suey and Chinese restaurants were completely absent from the cultural lexicon during this period. On the contrary, as Haiming Liu has demonstrated, as a theme denoting concoction and blending, chop suey was “a cultural landmark...that embodied the metropolitan American lifestyle.” The Chinese American

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<sup>334</sup> “Fuji Chop Suey Foods,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 31, 1936.

<sup>335</sup> “Fuji Chop Suey Foods,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 21, 1932; “Fuji Chop Suey Foods,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 13, 1932.

<sup>336</sup> “Fuji,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 18, 1934.

<sup>337</sup> “Fuji Chop Suey Foods,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 5, 1939.

dish and the restaurants that served it were frequently included in American cultural productions of the 1920s and 1930s. For example, in his 1929 painting, “Chop Suey,” Edward Hopper depicts four lonely urbanites, three women and a man, sitting at two tables inside a Chinese restaurant. Although the eatery is identified as a Chinese restaurant by the “SUEY” sign in the background and a teapot on one of the tables, the restaurant in the painting is nearly completely devoid of any other décor or features that could be identified as the trappings of Chinese culture. Indeed, there isn’t even any Chinese food on the tables. In Hopper’s painting, the Chinese restaurant is hardly the site of adventurous cross-cultural excitement but is simply a space of socialization for fashionable middle-class Americans. Similarly, in a photograph of New York City’s Chinatown taken in 1934 by Imogen Cunningham, there is little in the shot to indicate that the photo was taken in the Chinese enclave. Apart from three signs for a second-story restaurant that read “Chop Suey,” nothing in this glimpse of New York’s Chinatown indicates that the neighborhood could or should be viewed as culturally distinct from the rest of the city’s geography. Musicians of the era, including Louis Armstrong and Sidney Bechet, also incorporated chop suey into their songs, though not necessarily as something reflecting Chinese culture or the perception thereof. The lyrics of Bechet’s “Who’ll Chop Your Suey When I’m Gone?”, for example, read:

“Chop suey, chop suey!

Mixed with all the hokum and bally hooey.

Something real and glowing grand.

Sheds a light all over the land.

Boston, Austin, Wichita, and St. Louey,

Chop suey. Chop suey, chop suey! Chop suey, chop suey!”

Bechet’s song, as Liu argues, speaks more to the widespread popularity of chop suey across the United States than to any culturally alien status the dish might be perceived to have, and indeed does so in what can only be described as glowingly affectionate terms.<sup>338</sup> Thus, by the late 1920s and 1930s, chop suey and Chinese restaurants are no longer the embodiments of Chinese culture that they had been in the 1890s and before. In actuality, they were deeply interwoven into the fabric of American mass culture.

Furthermore, what the examples of La Choy and Fuji Trading Company also speak to is another major development in the history of Chicago’s Chinese restaurants and cuisine in the late 1920s and 1930s, which is the increasing separation between the production and distribution of Chinese American food and actual Chinese immigrants. While both companies were established (at least in part) by Asian immigrants, neither of these immigrants were Chinese. Furthermore, La Choy was co-founded by Wally Smith, a native American grocer from Detroit, and in the 1940s fell under the ownership of the Beatrice Foods, a white-owned national food processing company. Meanwhile, among Chicago’s Chinese restaurants, this separation took a number of different forms, the first being the mere distancing between the restaurants and any tangible remnants of Chinese culture or people. Chinese restaurants in the city increasingly adopted English names, many of which held little or no connection to Chinese culture, such as the Bamboo Inn and Rialto Garden.<sup>339</sup> Others heavily emphasized the Orientalized Chinese culture on offer, while simultaneously implying their American ownership. For example,

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<sup>338</sup> Haiming Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express: A History of Chinese Food in the United States* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 59–60.

<sup>339</sup> “Dine and Dance at Chicago’s Most Famous Chinese Restaurant,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 6, 1929; “Bamboo Inn,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 1, 1929.

advertisements for Benjamin Joe's Old Cathay restaurant included such images of modern Orientalism as a China doll caricature and bamboo lettering, while also describing the restaurant as "Where East Meets West in Taste."<sup>340</sup> Still other eateries included Chinese cuisine in their offerings without articulating any connection to Chinese culture, real or imagined, at all. Club Alabam, for instance, offered patrons Chinese food alongside French, Italian, and American fare, and billed itself primarily as an Alabamian entertainment establishment.<sup>341</sup>

To be sure, not all Chinese restaurants in Chicago so dramatically reflected this process of separation. The Chin Chow Café and Chop Suey Hung Fong Lo, for example, not only retained Chinese names, but also included the names of their Chinese managers in their advertisements.<sup>342</sup> The other several hundred Chinese restaurants in the city, according to a report by the *Chicago Tribune*, still took part in the enclave economy of Chinatown by procuring their supplies from a number of importers and distributors in the district.<sup>343</sup>

These examples aside, however, the overall trend in the late 1920s and 1930s in Chicago's restaurant scene was a movement away from the largely immigrant-owned and -operated Chinese eateries of previous decades and towards a more heterogenous Chinese food economy in the city. As chop suey and Chinese American cuisine became more and more the province of white, or at least non-Chinese, businessmen and housewives, Chinatown and its restaurants fell (or rose, depending on one's vantage point) to the level

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<sup>340</sup> "Benjamin Joe's Colorful Old Cathay," *Chicago Tribune*, November 25, 1934.

<sup>341</sup> "Club Alabam," *Chicago Tribune*, November 10, 1929.

<sup>342</sup> "Dine and Dance at the Chin Chow Cafe"; "Chop Suey Hung Fong Lo Co. Restaurant," *Chicago Tribune*, December 1, 1929.

<sup>343</sup> "Chicago's Chinatown-A Melting Pot of the Old and the New," *Chicago Tribune*, September 20, 1931.

of normalized tourist attraction for non-Chinese Chicagoans. No longer the destination of slummers, the sexually experimental, or the sinful, Chinatown and its restaurants were by the 1930s a relatively wholesome attraction for tourists seeking to learn about Chinese culture while taking in the various sensory experiences of the Orient, with the latter now considered to be an enjoyable yet familiar encounter.

One of the most interesting examples of a Chinese restaurant no longer being treated as an exotic exhibition of Chinese culture is that of the restaurant located within the Chinese pavilion at the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago. In contrast to the café included in the Chinese Village at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, the 1933 restaurant was hardly a prominent feature of this second Chinese pavilion. The 1933 exhibition most famously included a replica of Golden Lama Temple of Jehol, as well as a jade pavilion, lacquer ware, and a walk-through replica of a busy street in Shanghai.<sup>344</sup>

However, in typical newspaper articles that reported on the World's Fair or on Chicagoans' reactions to it, the restaurant located within the Chinese Pavilion was almost never mentioned, let alone made the focus of people's attention. As such articles would indicate, people were far more interested in the Temple of Jehol on display in the pavilion, as well as the exhibitions of "Oriental workmanship in jade, porcelain and lacquer."<sup>345</sup> The presentation and consumption of Chinese food was evidently no longer as thrilling or exotic as seeing the much-discussed architecture of the pavilion, the Temple on the grounds, or the "Streets of Shanghai" exhibition. On the contrary, it was something of an afterthought, worth patronizing if one was hungry, but hardly an

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<sup>344</sup> Huping Ling, "Chinese Chicago: Transnational Migration and Businesses, 1870s-1930s," *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 6 (2010): 270.

<sup>345</sup> "Fair So Vast It Takes Weeks to See It All," *Chicago Tribune*, May 23, 1933; "Century of Progress Notes," *Chicago Tribune*, June 25, 1933; "Let's Talk It Over," *The Decatur Herald*, September 5, 1933.

adventurous experience.<sup>346</sup> This muted reaction to a Chinese restaurant at the 1933 World's Fair, especially when viewed in contrast to the perception of the Chinese Village café of 1893, poignantly demonstrates the distance between Chinese restaurant spaces and the culture of China proper that had been created in the minds of most Americans in the 40 years between the two fairs. Instead of enabling Americans to take part in a titillating act of Sinophile cultural consumption, Chinese restaurants now only offered American diners the chance to eat something they could (and likely did) make at home as part of their ordinary diet.

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By the time of the 1933 World's Fair, evidently, the food served in Chinese restaurants was no longer degraded or fetishized in the way that it had been throughout the nineteenth century, nor was it the exotic novelty item that it became in the 1890s and early twentieth century. Instead, chop suey, chow mein, and other epitomes of Chinese American cuisine were now mainstays of Americans' ordinary diets, as well. What had been the marker of a worldly cosmopolitan at the turn of the century was now the cornerstone of a typical middle-class family's evening meal.

As a result of this normalized status of Chinese restaurants and cuisine by the 1930s, the increased attention to China and East Asian affairs brought about by the Second Sino-Japanese War did not engender a chop suey craze among consumers in Chicago in the same way that the turn-of-the-century emergence of an American Pacific empire had done in the 1890s and 1900s. While the traditional features of American Sinophilia, including a positive and somewhat fantastical regard of China as a

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<sup>346</sup> Ling, "Chinese Chicago: Transnational Migration and Businesses, 1870s-1930s," 270.

democracy-in-waiting or the United States' economic salvation, remained present in American discourse of the time, the consumptive expression of this Sinophilia did not materially impact Chicago's Chinese restaurants or Chinese cuisine in the city, due in large part to Chinese food's own increased separation from actual Chinese culture and Chinese American immigrants in the United States.

Granted, there were several other changes in American restaurant culture underway during this period that may have come to bear on the waning importance of Chinese restaurants in particular. For example, as Harvey Levenstein describes, Prohibition, along with the onset of the Great Depression, brought about the collapse of fine dining and a marked drop-off in eating out in most localities in the United States. The fact that Americans were less motivated to eat in Chinese restaurants in the 1930s cannot be divorced entirely from the reality that Americans were typically less inclined to eat in *any* restaurants during the Depression. Then also, those restaurants that did manage to proliferate in this period were generally those that didn't rely on alcohol for most of their profits. The bulk of these restaurants were chain restaurants, which went on to maintain something of a dominant position in American restaurant culture throughout the remainder of the century. Finally, Americans by the 1930s generally wanted straightforward cooking in their dining options. According to Levenstein, "whether it was in the Stork Club, Joe's Steak House, Howard Johnson's, or a White Tower, Americans wanted what they considered to be straightforward cooking, with nothing disguising the ingredients... This meant the meat-potato-and-one-vegetable dinner, cooked simply and presented in an uncomplicated fashion, that had become the Anglo-American standard, or the sandwiches (including hot dogs and hamburgers) that had become popular in the

1920s.”<sup>347</sup> Therefore, the popularity of Chinese restaurants specifically may have also been affected by Americans’ tending towards “home-cooking” restaurant options in this period.

However, the historical status of Chinese restaurants and other ethnic eateries as cultural spaces renders their popularity and perception by American diners inextricably linked to the status of the culture they purportedly represent in the larger American discourses of the time. In other words, the status of Chinese restaurants cannot be understood outside this context of their cultural representation. Thus, in line with shifting understandings of both China proper and Chinese American cuisine, Chinese restaurants by the 1930s had gone from being the titillating and exotic embodiments of an invading and corruptive culture, to nearly obsolete providers of a cuisine that had become thoroughly colonized and assimilated into the American diet.

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<sup>347</sup> Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 52.

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