“Bona Fide” Merchants

Negotiating Life, Labor, and Transnational Mobility in the Time of Chinese Exclusion

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THE UNITED STATES was nearly a century old before the federal government began restricting immigration into the country. Some restrictions targeted Asians in general, with many directed specifically toward Chinese immigrants. While sweeping exclusionary policies are not unique globally, the U.S. Chinese exclusion laws were exceptional in that they individuated the practice by evaluating each specific immigrant’s right to enter. From 1875 until 1943, these treaties, laws, legal opinions, administrative rules, and regulations increasingly circumscribed the free movement of Chinese immigrants inside the United States and strictly limited the inflow of new migrants of Chinese descent. These efforts had a profound and lasting impact on the Chinese diaspora in the Pacific Northwest and have influenced U.S. immigration policy into the twenty-first century. Having to navigate the ever-changing laws, rules, and regulations aimed at their exclusion shaped the nature of Chinese communities and affected their relations and interactions with their white neighbors. Exclusion laws also divided the Chinese community into two distinct classes: laborers and a privileged class that included merchants. Attaining officially recognized merchant status offered a degree of certainty and stability, as well as social and transnational mobility, providing immigrants and their families with opportunities for prosperity in a largely unwelcoming land. This privileged status gave individuals the ability to travel back and forth to China, to maintain close personal ties to their qiaoxiang (home village), and to bring their immediate family to the United States.

Forming partnerships in jointly owned stores allowed multiple, often related, members of the community to pool resources and to share the profits as well as the costs and challenges of operating a business—and attain merchant status. In the more rural parts of Oregon, these enterprises often served as gathering places while providing multiple business purposes,

ON THIS IMMIGRATION FORM, Wong Quon Sue attests on January 7, 1921: “I am a merchant, doing business in Ashland, State of Oregon, and have been doing business as such merchant in Ashland Oregon for the past twenty years.” He is applying to bring his adopted son, Wong Kim Won, to the United States to attend school. Wong Quon is pictured in the top photograph on the form, and Wong Kim Won is in the photograph below.
including merchandise store, bank, lodge, laundry, restaurant, and labor contracting. These businesses functioned as crucial community anchors and allowed partners to enjoy the rights of the privileged class.

The merchandise store served a critical and multifaceted role in the formation, development, and decline of rural Chinatowns throughout Oregon and in Chinese Oregonians’ transnational lives. Chinese Oregonians also used these businesses to facilitate resistance and community persistence in the face of ever-evolving U.S. immigration policy, which they widely saw as “lacking social and moral legitimacy” and therefore unworthy of compliance. Chinese migrants and U.S. government officials were each navigating a “system of formalized deception.” In effect, the more explicit the exclusion policy, the more predictable it became, thereby easing subversion. The process was established with a “restrictionist mind-set” wherein the default position was to consider Chinese immigrants excludable. The increasingly complex immigration process, aimed at identifying “legitimate” immigrants, instead ironically served to “create, systematize, and facilitate fraud.” As earlier scholars have noted, just as illegal immigrants were ruthlessly pursued through this process, they were also created by it.

While contemporary residents may remember Chinese mercantile stores as important community resources in their towns, the more subversive, and perhaps substantial, role of these businesses has been lost over time. When successful, these critical services were invisible to outsiders and went largely unnoticed. As a result, many of the same men who were engaged in a sophisticated counter-attack against an unjust immigration system have been portrayed in the historiography through paternalistic tableaus or victim narratives that romanticize and condescendingly complex transnational identities of Oregon’s early Chinese residents. This article uses two case studies to explore ways in which Chinese Oregonians circumvented exclusionary policies: the Wing Hong Hai Company (永同泰) in The Dalles (姐里阜) and the Wah Chung and Company (和昌) of Ashland.

The Wing Hong Hai and Wah Chung companies were chosen for this analysis because they each served as a critical anchor business run by Chinese men who were esteemed and active members of their respective towns. The Wing Hong Hai Company store was the more typical Chinese mercantile store, offering a wide range of imported goods to all residents of The Dalles. In contrast, the Wah Chung and Company store was one branch of a business that provided labor and supplies to the Southern Pacific Railroad from its Ashland base. While each business was organized to ensure the partners could obtain and maintain legitimate merchant status, most of those partners were also actively engaged in the various side hustles needed to supplement the income they could generate as merchants alone. In order to contextualize the actions and agency of these merchants as they navigated the impacts of Chinese exclusion in Oregon, we begin with an overview of the evolving federal exclusionary policies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CHINESE EXCLUSION

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the United States struggled to balance its treaty obligations to China (necessary to maintain a desired favored-nation trade status) with the overt racism toward Chinese immigrants and the economic fears and frustrations of a largely white West Coast population that was increasingly focused on Chinese exclusion. This villainization of a specific immigrant group resulted in a barrage of targeted local restrictions, discrimination, and often vigilante violence. Such conditions affected not only Chinese immigrants working and living in nineteenth-century Oregon, but also the twentieth-century demographics of the state. Federal exclusion laws effectively legitimized local policies and violence, making it difficult for the large populations of Chinese migrants living in rural Oregon to remain and to establish generational roots in these communities.

This increasingly complex political dance started with the Page Act of March 3, 1875, wherein the United States sought to limit immigration by targeting Asian laborers, making it illegal to take or transport “any subject of China, Japan, or any Oriental country, without their free and voluntary consent, for the purpose of holding them to a term of service.” This provision of the act addressed the primary concern stated by advocates for Chinese exclusion: unfair competition from inexpensive, indentured Chinese labor. It also limited the immigration of Chinese women by prohibiting “the importation into the United States of women for the purposes of prostitution” under the contemporary, widespread belief that most Chinese women immigrating into the United States were sex workers. Legislators used purposefully vague language in this act, intending to avoid violating provisions of the Burlingame Treaty of 1868, which had allowed free emigration between the United States and China. In practice, the Page Act failed to stem the flow of Chinese laborers into the United States; however, it drastically slowed the immigration of Chinese women.

The evolving exclusion laws that followed placed an untenable burden on Chinese residents living and working in the United States. The “gatekeeping culture” created through exclusion shifted the ways Americans considered immigration and race within the traditional mindset that the United States was a “nation of immigrants.” As a result of continually expanding restrictions, Chinese became more openly defiant and creative in their strategies to sidestep the system. U.S. immigration officials understood that classify-
ing individuals based on occupational categories was “highly arbitrary and subject to manipulation,” yet they insisted on the practice as a means toward achieving the underlying goal of Chinese exclusion. As a result, fraud went hand-in-hand with the immigration process.

The Angell Treaty of 1880 modified the 1868 Burlingame Treaty and served as the template for all of the exclusionary laws that followed. The first article granted the United States the ability to regulate, but not prohibit, the entry of Chinese laborers for the purposes of maintaining “the good order of the said country.” For the first time, the United States restricted free immigration on the basis of race. Those restrictions were based on “class,” splitting Chinese immigrants into two groups: the excluded laborer class and a welcomed class that consisted of teachers, students, merchants, and travelers. At this time, the privileged class also included laborers who already were established U.S. residents, but this distinction between groups of laborers would prove difficult to demonstrate, document, and track.

The Angell Treaty of 1880 also laid the groundwork for legislation adopted on May 6, 1882, most commonly known as the Exclusion Act of 1882. This was the first of a long series of congressional acts that specifically restricted and excluded Chinese immigration into the United States and regulated the travel of all Chinese to and from the country. In her introduction to The Chinese Must Go, Beth Lew-Williams notes that many historians miss the staged progression of Chinese exclusion, overlooking the Restriction Period (1882–1888) and lumping it in with the subsequent Exclusion Period (1888–1943). She argues that this distinction is critical to understanding “the radicalism of Chinese exclusion and the contingent history of its rise.”

The Act of May 6, 1882, focused almost exclusively on restricting the Chinese laboring class, defined by the act as “skilled and unskilled laborers and Chinese employed in mining.” Under this act, no new laborers were to be admitted into the United States for a period of ten years. Laborers already in the country at the time of the adoption of the Angell Treaty of 1880 could remain and were permitted to travel roundtrip to China as long as they obtained an identification certificate, which was given free of charge at the port of exit. Section 14, the penultimate section of the act, was sweeping and profound for the long-term interest of all Chinese living in the United States. It read in full: “That hereafter no State court or court of the United States shall admit Chinese to citizenship; and all laws in conflict with this act are hereby repealed.” This provision applied to all classes of Chinese immigrants. With these twenty-seven words, the United States effectively denied the right of citizenship to the more than 100,000 Chinese already in the country, and all future Chinese immigrants, based exclusively on their race. As a result, the ability of Chinese migrants who initially came to Oregon — to mine gold or build railroads — to remain in these rural outposts and create a sustainable future for themselves and their families increasingly diminished in comparison with that of other immigrant populations.

Through the Act of July 5, 1884, Congress sought to amend some of the perceived deficiencies of the 1882 act. For the first time, it defined and constricted the classification of one of the privileged classes: merchants. Under the act, “hucksters, peddlers, or those engaged in taking, drying, or otherwise preserving shell or other fish for home consumption or exportation” were excluded from the merchant class. The provisions of the act that covered fisherman were likely an outgrowth of an 1880 California law that sought to prohibit Chinese commercial fishing (it was later ruled unconstitutional). The success of U.S.-based Chinese fishing enterprises in domestic and international markets is likely the motivation for targeting the industry. In addition, departing merchants were now required to provide the same identification details as departing laborers and to “state the nature, character, and estimated value of the business carried on by him prior to and at the time of his application as aforesaid.” New, incoming merchants needed to provide the same details. All arriving members of the privileged classes furthermore needed to obtain a certificate provided by the Chinese government, or other country of residence, verifying to their right to enter into the United States.
The Scott Act of September 13, 1888, further restricted Chinese laborers and marks the formal transition from the Restriction Period to the Exclusion Period. The Scott Act targeted the previously “privileged” laborers who had been in the country when the Treaty of 1880 was enacted, denying their right of return from travel outside the United States unless they had a “lawful wife, child, or parent in the United States, or property therein of the value of one thousand dollars, or debts of like amount due him and pending settlement.”

The departing laborer was required to apply at least one month prior to the planned departure and to provide proof of their family or assets. The laborer must, with limited exceptions, return within a year to the same port from which they departed. This act was unsuccessfully challenged through the case that became Choe Chan Ping v. United States. The Supreme Court’s decision in that case created a precedent known today as the “plenary power doctrine,” granting power to the legislative branch and limiting the power of the judiciary in matters of immigration law and international treaties; this doctrine continues to affect U.S. immigration policy.

The additional travel restrictions placed on laborers had at least three effects: discouraging all but the wealthiest of laborers, or those with immediate family who could stay in country, from traveling abroad; limiting the ability of departed laborers to return; and encouraging laborers to become members of the privileged class — that is, merchants. Section 8 of the 1888 Act further complicated the lives of Chinese residents and visitors to the United States, by granting the Secretary of the Treasury the authority to make, change, and amend rules and regulations relative to the act. This administrative flexibility added new uncertainty and unpredictability to the lives of any Chinese person wishing to depart or enter the United States.

The Geary Act of May 5, 1892, extended the Chinese exclusionary restrictions for another ten years and required every resident Chinese laborer in the United States to register for, receive, and carry a certificate of residence within one year’s time. The Act of November 3, 1893, clarified certain parts of the 1892 act and added more refined, and confined, definitions for both Chinese laborers and merchants. This act defined laborers as “both skilled and unskilled manual laborers, including Chinese employed in mining, fishing, huckstering, peddling, laundrymen [emphasis added], or those engaged in taking, drying, or otherwise preserving shell or other fish for home consumption or exportation.” The merchant was now defined as:

*a person engaged in buying and selling merchandise, at a fixed place of business, which business is conducted in his name, and who during the time he claims to be engaged as a merchant, does not engage in the performance of any manual labor, except such as is necessary in the conduct of his business as such merchant.*

Although this act formalized the descriptions of laborers and merchants, further refinement and restriction came through the adoption of rules and regulations, and through legal and administrative decisions. Laundering was a well-established and profitable venture for Chinese immigrants, and the Geary Act’s classification of laundrymen as laborers directly affected Chinese Oregonians, including the partners in the Wing Hong Hai Company store in The Dalles.

The Act of April 29, 1902, extended Chinese exclusion indefinitely. Through a series of rules, approved from 1903 to 1906, clarity and consistency — as well as increased severity and rigidity — were added to Chinese exclusion practices. The Commissioner-General of Immigration issued standardized forms for the multiple contingencies faced by traveling laborers and merchants, with blank spaces left to be filled in by the travelers, their legal representatives, and immigration officials. Additional publications instructed immigration agents on how to obtain the testimony of non-Chinese witnesses, and to have photographs taken of the Chinese merchant stores suspected of harboring restaurants, laundries, or gambling establishments. Rule 27 placed the burden of proof on merchants to demonstrate business ownership, capital, and expenses along with their personal registered resident status. Many individuals recognized that “bona fide merchants,” the phrase often used in legal documents of the era, not only had to create a paperwork trail toward legitimacy but also were often being evaluated using “racialized markers of class that distinguished them from Chinese laborers.” Calloused hands or other physical remnants of manual work could be used against applicants, who would sometimes strive to distinguish themselves from the stereotyped “cheap, servile workers who competed with white workingmen” by presenting an idealized version of a benign businessman who would otherwise pose no threat to society.

The following profiles of the Chinese merchants in The Dalles and Ashland are largely compiled from newspaper articles and Chinese Exclusion Act case files. While these sources are primary documents, created at the time of the historical events under study, they are also clearly biased, as their creators each had their own agendas. Although case files include interviews with Chinese immigrants, these official interactions were performative and tailored to comply with immigration laws and produce a desired outcome that was often different for the two parties. Unvarnished firsthand accounts, opinions, feelings, and perspectives of the Chinese are mostly missing from this data. Nonetheless, the existing sources can provide insight into how members of the Wing Hong Hai Company of The Dalles and the Wah Chung and Company of Ashland served their respective communities as they navigated the perilous waters of exclusion.
THE WING HONG HAI COMPANY AND THE DALLES

The Wing Hong Hai Company Store was established in 1894 and located at what was once the center of a small but thriving and vibrant rural Chinese community in The Dalles, Oregon. The store building remains, but the business that once occupied it is long gone. The Dalles was a major supply hub along the Columbia River, serving the inland Northwest via its connections to wagon roads, railroads, and river boats. Many localized, rural industries recruited and attracted Chinese migrants to The Dalles. The Chinese came to work on the local railroad construction, on fruit orchards and ranches, in logging, and, beginning in 1896, by providing reliable, seasonal labor for the Columbia River salmon canneries. The first census of The Dalles, in 1860, lists four Chinese residents. As the town grew, so did the Chinese community. It reached its height of 117 people (approximately 5 percent of the population) in 1880, and held steady at roughly 80 people for the next thirty years. The aging population began to fall rapidly by 1910, and by 1940, just 9 individuals remained. The precipitous decline in the Chinese community in The Dalles came as a direct result of the intentional exclusion of new Chinese immigrants and the pressures that this exclusion placed on a community that could not renew itself. The 2020 U.S. Census reported a population of 16,010 residents in The Dalles, with only 1 percent identified as Asian.33

Laundries were originally the dominant Chinese-owned and -operated businesses in The Dalles and were primarily found along First Street, the main business street fronting the river and railroad. Following the exclusion acts, merchandise stores replaced laundries, and the Chinese community became concentrated along the south side of a single block of East First Street. This modest Chinatown eventually had up to five Chinese mercantile stores operating simultaneously to serve the local community, including its Chinese residents. While laundries or restaurants were often more profitable than merchandise stores, the privileged-class benefits provided to merchants under the exclusion acts offer an explanation for the dominant position of these stores in The Dalles and throughout the West.

From 1894 until 1913, Lee Yuen Hong (李元享) and his partners were the proprietors of the Wing Hong Hai Company Chinese Mercantile store, located in a leased brick building at 210 East First Street. Lee Yuen Hong came to the United States in 1882, at the age of seventeen, from San Gan Village, Sun Ning District (now Taishan County, Guangdong). A year later, he moved to The Dalles. He worked for a time as a cook and janitor for the French family, prominent local bankers, whom he would eventually entrust with all his savings and banking transactions. In 1894, he traveled round-trip to China, returning as a merchant connected to the Yee Hop Company. Soon after his return, he opened the Wing Hong Hai Company Store and

the Yuen Hai Laundry in partnership with his older brother Lee Yuen But. By 1901, he was also the proprietor of the New York Restaurant in The Dalles.38

Over the years, other Lee brothers and their cousins joined the company, although the exact relationships are sometimes difficult to determine. In the immigration files, Lee Yuen But, Lee Wing (李永), Lee Dick (李迪), and Lee Yip Tai are referred to as Lee Yuen Hong’s brothers, while Lee Sang is described as a cousin. The relationship of partners Lei On, Lee Chew, and Lee Hing is not recorded, but they are likely from the same qiaoxiang and had a family connection to Lee Yuen Hong. A partnership was essential for the management and operation of this type of store. Typically, one or more partners managed the store, while the other partners visited China or pursued other types of work. Although no official partnership book existed for the Wing Hong Hai store, testimony in Exclusion Act case files indicates that while partners joined or left and relationships changed, Lee Yuen Hong remained as the stable presence, serving as manager and head of household. The informal and fluid nature of the store partnership was both a liability and a feature that could be exploited. Partnership shares

THE WING HONG HAI COMPANY STORE, pictured here in 2020, operated out of this building from 1894 to 1912, now located at 210 E. First Street, in The Dalles. The Dalles was a major supply hub along the Columbia River and attracted Chinese migrants seeking work.
could be bought, sold, and listed as an asset for partners traveling under a laborer certificate, and partners could accrue profits during their absence. When Lee Yuen Hong’s older brother and original partner Lee Yuen But was applying for permission to return from a four-year visit to China in 1899, Lee Yuen Hong stated that while he was in China, roughly $400 in profits from the store had been sent to him in “different small sums.” At that time, Lee Chew and Ah Wing were also listed as partners: “Each of the above named partners originally contributed $500.00 each to the capital stock of said firm and together with the accumulated profits remaining undivided these individual holdings are considerably increased.” The lack of a partnership book for the Wing Hong Hai store irritated and confused immigration inspectors, which likely complicated the partners’ travels to and from their family homes and villages in China. In 1911, immigration inspector John Sawyer complained that “the only evidence as to who have constituted the firm being the inexact and inconsistent statements of the manager.”

The 1900 census lists nine residents at the Wing Hong Hai store, with partner Lee Yuen Hong listed as a merchant, Lee Dick listed as a student, and Lee Wing listed as a laborer. The remaining residents include four other laborers and two cooks. Although profitable, the associated laundry business created problems for the Wing Hong Hai Company partners, who aspired to be “bona fide” merchants. Lee Yuen Hong initially operated the Wing Hong Hai store and the Yuen Hai Laundry in the same building. The 1900 Sanborn Fire Insurance map indicates the building was divided in half, with the laundry on the east side, the store on the west, and a washhouse and drying platform in the back. By 1906, the partners had invested heavily in the laundry, and immigration inspectors noticed that “while the stock of merchandise on hand in the store is quite small, the laundry is a large and well-equipped one.” At this time, Lee Yuen Hong asked if he could bring his wife and son from China. The answer was no; the laundry business made him a laborer. His lawyers, writing to the immigration inspector regarding his application to travel, reported “Hong is anxious to bring his wife back with him, but we have advised him that this is impossible inasmuch he is not exclusively a merchant.”

Although the laundry business compromised Lee Yuen Hong’s merchant status, the laundry equipment and the laundry-business profits counted toward his assets as a laborer, which qualified him for a laborer’s return certificate. His brother and partner Lee Yuen But did not have a laborer residence certificate and therefore likely would not have been allowed return entry from his trip to China in 1906. At the time of his departure, he stated that he worked in both the store and the laundry, and as a result, was not considered a merchant. In 1908, Lee Yuen But’s younger brother Lee Wing bought his stake in the partnership.

When Lee Yuen Hong returned to The Dalles in 1908, he began to “perfect” his merchant status by separating himself from the laundry business. In doing so, he lost the steady and reliable income that came from the laundry, but he regained the privileged merchant status and, with that, the ability to bring his wife and children to The Dalles. He moved the laundry operation next door and sold it to Lee Bing Wa in 1909. He removed the dividing wall between the former laundry and store and stocked the entire storefront with merchandise. The connecting doorway remained between the two adjacent buildings. While the three laundrymen were still living at the Wing Hong Hai store in 1910, the businesses were carefully delineated.

When Lee Yuen Hong made his last application to travel and return with his fam-
ily as a merchant in 1911, the laundry had a completely separate entrance.\textsuperscript{51} Nonetheless, the immigration inspector denied return certificates to both Lee Yuen Hong and his partner and brother Lee Wing. The immigration service had begun to scrutinize Lee Yuen Hong and the Wing Hong Hai partners prior to their travel requests. Immigration officials discovered that Lee Yuen Hong had been arrested that January in San Bernardino, California, where he reportedly had traveled to “recoverate” from an illness.\textsuperscript{52} Lee Yuen Hong was caught “piloting three contraband Chinese” with “a number of old identification papers, for which he could have had no proper use, and the business card of a Chinaman in Tia Juana, Mexico” in his possession. Police confiscated the identification paper of younger brother and partner Lee Dick during the arrest and released Lee Yuen Hong to return to The Dalles.\textsuperscript{53} The confiscated document, previously accepted as legitimate, had allowed Lee Dick entrance into the United States at Port Townsend as a merchant in 1897.\textsuperscript{54} Its legitimacy was now tainted. This document serves as a tangible reminder of the immigration challenges faced by Lee Dick and the variety of strategies the partners employed to evade, circumvent, or facilitate the restrictive immigration process.

In various immigration documents, Lee Yuen Hong testified that he had four brothers who were partners in the Wing Hong Hai: Lee Yuen But, Lee Wing, Lee Dick, and Lee Yip Tai. The Exclusion Act case files for the latter three brothers illustrate the confusing, and perhaps purposefully fluid, identities that the partners shared. At times, both Lee Wing and Lee Yip Tai were also known as Lee Dick. Lee Dick (a.k.a. Lee Yip Tai) claimed in 1913 that he had returned from China to The Dalles as a merchant and partner in 1897, then allegedly went to China on short notice without pre-investigation in 1909 and was still there in 1911. Lee Wing, the youngest brother, also called Lee Dick or Dick Hong, was living in The Dalles and was planning to accompany Lee Yuen Hong to China on the 1911 trip. When questioned, Lee Wing gave conflicting answers — including an unsubstantiated claim that he was born in Portland — to explain why he did not have a resident certificate.\textsuperscript{55} Edward French, the banker, described Lee Wing as Lee Yuen Hong’s “troublesome” younger brother: “When Lee Yuen Hong was running his laundry, Dick worked in it; then he worked as a cook or dishwasher in restaurants; then back to the laundry; then out of town and back again.”\textsuperscript{56} The similarities in the names and in the photographs of Lee Wing and Lee Dick suggest that the identities may have been shared by two partners, or that one partner used different identities depending on the situation.

By 1913, immigration officials were sharing and combining files so they could compare and expose inconsistencies.\textsuperscript{57} So, when Lee Dick arrived in Seattle from China in December 1912, and sought entry to the United States as a merchant with the Wing Hong Hai Company, officials detained and questioned him. He eventually confessed “that in 1897 he was admitted upon a returning ‘merchant’s’ paper which ‘my older brother fixed for me,’ and that he had not previously been within the United States before 1880.”\textsuperscript{58} That “old merchant paper” specifically included the claim that Lee Dick arrived before 1880, which, prior to the 1888 Scott Act, would have qualified him for admission under the terms of the Angell Treaty.\textsuperscript{59} In addition, his arrival in Port Townsend, specifically, may also have been purposeful, as word may have reached Lee Yuen Hong and Lee Dick about an interpreter at Port Townsend known to have helped other Chinese immigrants gain entry.\textsuperscript{60} Lee Dick’s case was not successful, and he was subsequently deported.

While immigration officials regarded Lee Yuen Hong with suspicion, residents of The Dalles considered him a likeable, successful businessman. When he died in an automobile accident in 1912 at the age of forty-five, The Dalles Chronicle headlined “Popular Local Chinaman Killed” and described his “pleasing personality,” noting that he could “read and write English” and “had accumulated a considerable amount of money through his excellent business ability.” The Dalles Band led his funeral procession to the cemetery, while incense burned outside his door in Chinatown. Instead of burial, he was embalmed, and his remains were shipped to his family in China.\textsuperscript{61} Lee Yuen Hong left no will, but he had over $2,000 cash and approximately $270 worth of goods in stock, including furniture, tableware, Chinese groceries, tea, rice, oil, preserved vegetables, Japanese oysters, canned goods, liniments, sauces, whiskey, wine, cigarettes and cigars, firecrackers, candles, aprons, and Chinese shirts and shoes. Lee Yuen Hong’s family was living in Hoy Yen, Sun Ning District. He was survived by his wife Sue Shee, his son Toy Duck, daughter Coon Shue, and an unnamed four-year-old daughter. His widow decided to retain Lee Yuen Hong’s one-quarter interest in the store so that their son could come to the United States and run it when he got older.\textsuperscript{62} This did not happen, as the loss of Lee Yuen Hong marked the end of the business.

WAH CHUNG AND COMPANY STORE, ASHLAND, OREGON

Established in 1891, the Wah Chung and Company was the heart of Ashland’s small Chinese community.\textsuperscript{63} Whereas The Dalles had a Chinatown for decades, most Chinese in southern Oregon were originally drawn to the area by mining opportunities and largely dispersed in rural camps or based in Jacksonville’s Chinese quarter prior to the arrival of the railroad in 1884. By the late 1860s, Chinese migrants controlled much of the mining occurring in southwestern Oregon. As gold mining waned and agriculture became the leading economic driver in the Rogue Valley, the town of Jacksonville, along with its Chinese community, waned as well. The railroad bypassed
the town in 1884, and four years later, a fire destroyed the northern portion of the Chinese quarter. While a small number of Chinese residents remained in Jacksonville and the surrounding areas, discriminatory business fees and laws prohibiting property ownership, paired with the economic decline in the region, prompted the bulk of the population to relocate by the 1880s.

Meanwhile, the arrival of the railroad to southern Oregon employed hundreds of Chinese workers in its construction and provided ongoing economic opportunity for the Wah Chung and Company, which served as a labor brokerage for the Southern Pacific Railroad and operated both a brick-and-mortar store and a traveling store from the 1890s well into the twentieth century. Wong Quon Sue (黃官仕), Wah Chung and Company’s majority shareholder and manager, described the business as selling “groceries, Chinese goods, such as rice, fire-crackers, noodles, dried fish, canned goods; we also sell vegetables, hogs, tea, shoes, everything gangs use out on the tracks.” Wong Quon Sue operated the company along with several other partners. The main business was located at 282 A Street in Ashland’s railroad district, and it supplied the remote work camps by stocking railroad cars provided by the Southern Pacific Railroad Company. In addition to the Ashland-based business, there was an affiliated Los Angeles, California, branch of the Wah Chung and Company. Wong Quon Sue was a shareholder, but the business was managed by Wong Sha Lim, who also used it to help funnel labor to the work crews in Oregon.

Wong Quon Sue worked for the railroad for over forty years, and his business ventures expanded to include a laundry, restaurant, and gold mine, among other assets. According to census and immigration records, Wong Quon Sue immigrated to the United States around 1870 from Chun Lock Village (長樂村) Sun Ning District. He left a wife in China, Lee Shee, who reportedly died in 1906. There were no children from this union. Wong married California-born Jin Shee, or May King, in 1901. The couple adopted Loi Tai, who was known locally as Jennie Wah Chung, around 1907, when she was four or five years old. Records indicate she was born in Happy Camp, California, to Wong Bo, but do not otherwise provide the circumstances surrounding her adoption. The couple went on to have two additional children: a daughter named Ah Hai or Gin Tie, who died when she was about one year old, and a son, Gim Ming, known locally as Samuel “Sammy” Wah Chung.

In 1901, Wong Quon Sue built a “neat, two-story frame building” to house his growing family. The family maintained a fishpond and raised a garden that featured a variety of vegetables, those common both in the local area and in China. In 1915, a sample of the garden products, including beans and cucumbers “originating in the flowery kingdom,” were put on display to the delight of the Ashland community. This garden is also described in immigration files by witnesses, who were careful to note the distinction between household chores such as watering the garden and activities that would classify one as a laborer.

The entire family supported and participated in community events, had floats in local
parades, and attended local weddings and Christmas parties, and the children were popular in school. Many Ashlanders recalled Wong Quon Sue’s sharing Chinese culture with the community by delivering lily bulbs in December, stating they will bring “happiness and prosperity” to those whose plants blooms under their care. Newspaper accounts describe the Wong family’s hosting lavish dinners showcasing traditional Cantonese cooking at the Chinese New Year, complete with fireworks. The Wongs also invited the larger community to participate in the festivities, as newspapers reported: “trays of sweetmeats, nuts and queer candies are placed where all may partake in the Wah Chung Store, and feasts are nightly occurrences.”

While Wong Quon Sue and his family made their mark in the documentary record of Ashland, the lives of Wong’s partners have been harder to discern. What little we do know about these men and their families has almost entirely been recovered from immigration files. Over time, at least fourteen men were listed as partners in the Wah Chung and Company, which reported between four to six partners at any one time. Some of these partners were clearly legitimate and some were questionable, based on the available records. When asked why he had so many partners, Wong Quon Sue answered, “I am out on the road a good deal. I am a Chinese contractor for the Southern Pacific Co. and then we have two store cars on the road all the time to supply Chinese section gangs.” While this may have been true, the partnership model was also a common Chinese businesses practice.

There was no known partnership book for the Wah Chung and Company store, and there are several inconsistencies in regards to who was listed as an active partner in the company over the years. These company snapshots can be found in various immigration files, which may be factual but are clearly tailored to suit the needs of the current immigrant. In addition to majority shareholder Wong Quon Sue, several men were firmly associated with the business for decades. These include: Wong Ock Jung, who was affiliated with the firm from roughly 1900 into the 1920s and was primarily engaged with managing the railroad crew and traveling store; Wong Kan How, who joined the firm in about 1902 and served as a bookkeeper and general assistant into the 1920s; Wong Park You, who joined in 1905 and managed a second railroad crew and traveling store until the 1920s; and Wong Sha Lim, who helped with labor recruitment from roughly 1908 through at least 1913 and was based in the Los Angeles branch of the company. Several other men were listed as being affiliated at one time or another. Wong Youe, Wong Wa Fon, and Wong Buck Yee are all mentioned as being members around the turn of the twentieth century. Wong Tie Man returned to China and remained a partner before selling his share to Wong Mah Chow in 1905; and Wong Sai Tong is listed as affiliated with the company starting in 1922.

The immigration records listed above indicate that, like Wong Quon Sue, many of these men were from Chun Lock Village. In 1921, Wong Quon Sue brought his adopted son Wong Kim Won to Ashland. Wong Kim Won was reportedly the son of Wong Quon Sue’s brother Wong Sue Din, who died in 1904. The boy was cared for by Wong Quon Sue’s first wife Lee Shee until her death in 1906. Wong Kim Won was then raised by his older brother, with the financial support of Wong Quon Sue. Wong Quon Sue stated that he was motivated to bring Wong Kim Won at this time so he could be educated and help with the store. This was his second attempt to bring Wong Kim Won to the United States, the first being in 1912. At that time, Wong Kim Won’s statements were inconsistent with the affidavit provided by his uncle, and the inspector testified that he “doubted if he was the boy for whom the affidavit had been intended.” While the 1921 immigration file does not provide a photograph of young Wong Kim Won, there are enough discrepancies in the two accounts to suggest that there were two different individuals and that one or both of the boys was a paper son—a term used to describe an individual born in China and brought into the United States under fraudulent circumstances, usually by pretending to be the descendant of a legal resident. Wong Kim Won brought his wife Lum Shee to join him in Ashland in 1923. Other partners used their privileged merchant class to bring over family as well. Wong Kan How brought over his wife Eng Shee and son Wong Youk Sing in 1922, and in 1927, Wong Sai Tong brought over a son, Wong Quock Tung. Although these men enjoyed privileged merchant status, bringing their families to Ashland was not always easy. At its height, this process was so onerous that all immigrants could find barriers to entry.
regardless of whether they were barred or accepted according to the various exclusion acts.84 Wong Quon Sue retired from the Southern Pacific Railroad Company in 1926, after forty-two years of service, and died in Portland in 1927.85 His son Samuel died from an accidental drowning in the Willamette River a few months later.86 While it is unclear what happened to the Wah Chung and Company at this point, it likely dissolved without Wong Quon Sue.

PAPER MERCHANTS, BONA FIDE MERCHANTS, AND THE POWER OF THE PRIVILEGED CLASS

The Wing Hong Hai and the Wah Chung and Company stores each played an important role in the establishment and maintenance of Oregon’s Chinese diaspora community. On the surface, these businesses bought and sold goods and services to the residents of The Dalles and Ashland, Oregon; in reality, these transnational establishments did so much more. While urban Chinatowns might have had the populations needed to allow merchandise stores to thrive in their own right, in rural areas, the opportunity to demonstrate being a merchant on paper — a “bona fide” member of the privileged class — was the real value of these enterprises.

A partnership in an established business was needed to claim merchant status; however, making a living often required outside income to sustain the business and its dependents. A mercantile store selling imported goods and targeting the local Chinese population had a limited customer base in a small town, but laundries and restaurants, whose proprietors the laws explicitly defined as falling within the laboring class, appealed to the broader community and could be far more profitable.87 Members of both companies owned or were associated with laundries, restaurants, and other enterprises, and the bulk of the Wah Chung and Company’s profits undoubtedly came through its role in supplying men and goods to build and maintain the railroad. Scholars recognize labor contracting as one of the most lucrative ventures for Chinese immigrants at this time.88

While the privileged status of a merchant provided opportunity and greater control of movement and personal choice, laborers could also obtain a laborer’s return certificate using cash — at least $1,000 in assets — as a means to travel to China and return to the United States. Ng Len On (伍安) obtained a laborer’s return certificate in 1913 because he had reportedly loaned Wah Chung and Company partner Wong Kan How $1,000, as did Lee Cheung (李隆), a local cook who was owed $1,000 by Wong Quon Sue in 1912.89 Whether these occasions reinforce the assertion that outside capital was needed to support struggling merchant stores, reflect informal banking, or were a strategy for gaming the system is unclear, but the terms of the loans are decidedly nebulous considering the large amount of money involved.90 When immigration officials asked Mr. Ng or Mr. Lee for details about the transaction, both parties gave vague statements that the loans carried a percent interest and assured the inspectors that they were not to be repaid until their return. Traveling as a merchant ensured reentry and could provide the opportunity to bring family members to the United States, but traveling with a laborer’s return certificate might have been less of a hassle. Wong Ock Jung, longtime partner in the Wah Chung and Company, chose to obtain a laborer’s return certificate for a 1923 trip to China despite being a legitimate merchant.91

In addition to serving as an anchor within the Chinese community, businesses such as the Wing Hong Hai and Wah Chung and Company also facilitated interaction and collaboration between Chinese Oregonians and their white neighbors. By 1892, the Geary Act required a white individual to serve as a witness for a Chinese person as part of the required immigration documents. This was an attempt to ensure the legitimacy of an immigrant’s status, as white individuals were considered to be credible by default.92 In The Dalles and Ashland, these witnesses included friends, neighbors, business associates, and customers. Lee Yuen Hong relied on his established relationship with prominent banker Edward French and bank cashier J.C. Hostetler, both of whom regularly vouched for him. The proprietors of the nearby drug store, lumber store, and freight office also served as witnesses for the Wing Hong Hai merchants. White lawyers in The Dalles prepared documents and wrote letters and telegrams that helped merchants such as Lee Yuen Hong and his partners arrange for travel and comply with immigration requirements.93

Immigrants to Ashland relied on Wong Quon Sue’s extensive social capital, and witnesses commonly included postmen, an American Express agent, white merchants, and a woman who lived next door.94 While testimony supports lengthy friendships or repeated business interactions in many of these instances, it is also possible that money was informally exchanged for these services. In addition, Chinese informants have admitted that forgeries often included signatures of prominent community members such as postmasters and mayors, as their position could influence an inspector’s view, in particular in remote areas where it was difficult to confirm testimonies.95

While Lee Yuen Hong and Wong Quon Sue worked hard to facilitate passage to the United States for their partners and extended families, they were undoubtedly receiving financial gain from their efforts. All aspects of the migration process were commodified: “False papers, medical inspections, visas, witnesses who would claim to be your uncles and brothers, paper families, and old ladies who knew you as a babe in arms in San Francisco could all be bought, sold, and exchanged.”96 This practice involved a complex mix of generosity, kinship, altruism, subversion, and exploitation, and it...
could ultimately be quite profitable to sponsors such as Lee Yuen Hong and Wong Quon Sue, who controlled these resources and opportunities. Historian Madeline Y. Hsu argued that this defiance of bureaucracy “demonstrates the viability and adaptability of traditional structures of family, clan, and native-place networks in an industrializing, often hostile, modern world.” In some instances, profiteering was happening on both sides — with corrupt officials financially benefiting from illegal immigration even as they worked to stem it.

Documents indicate that as Wong Quon Sue became an influential member of his adopted community, he also remained a powerful ally in his hometown. His story therefore illustrates the transnational experience of Chinese immigrants, who were often negotiating the social, political, and economic realities of two distinct communities. And while the Wah Chung and Company was an important resource for residents of both Chun Lock and Ashland, it also tied these communities to the larger Chinese diaspora in Oregon and California. As part of his business with the Southern Pacific Railroad, Wong Quon Sue and his partners traveled extensively across Oregon and California, maintaining a network that stocked the store and railroad gangs with groceries and workers. This complex web of supplies, support, and social connection was a key factor in the resilience and survivance of rural Chinese communities during the Exclusion Era.

In addition to providing merchant status, documented assets, or family affiliation to would-be Chinese immigrants, Lee Yuen Hong also outright resisted participating in the oppressive immigration system by aiding in the smuggling of Chinese individuals across the Mexican border. This strategy, which avoided the exhaustive U.S. immigration process altogether, was another approach for circumventing Chinese exclusion by providing a “surreptitious entry through the ‘backdoor’ of Canada or Mexico” and thereby making Chinese immigrants what legal scholar Emily Ryo defines as “this country’s first ‘illegal immigrants’.” Illegal entry of Chinese immigrants was common all along the Mexican and Canadian borders, and Chinese merchant contractors held a notable role in facilitating cross-border traffic by expanding previously established supply routes to include “the new trade in human contraband.” Lee Yuen Hong may have turned to smuggling to help his brothers or potential partners who lacked the required certificates enter the United States. Not only did Mexico have a long, porous border, it also had liberal immigration policies for Chinese laborers who were desired for the construction of the Southern Pacific Railroad, mining, ranching, and other types of work. Some estimate a minimum of 17,300 Chinese illegally crossed borders into the United States between 1882 to 1920. Smuggling was aided by Chinese social societies as well as individual white and Chinese businessmen, and it included a network of boarding houses in Mexican border towns as well as brokers selling Chinese labor certificates. Chinese migrants were concealed in trains, arrived in small boats, traveled by road hidden in vehicles, or walked. Some Chinese crossed over disguised as Mexicans. Brokers such as Wong Quon Sue and Lee Yuen Hong found profitable niches through exploiting their trans-pacific connections, and the impact was twofold: in aiding an immigrant’s passage they might help their families and communities, but their ability to facilitate the movement of human bodies (labor) and goods across borders also made them powerful middlemen in the process of imperialism and settler colonialism.

In building a life for himself in the small town of Ashland, Wong Quon Sue both resisted and exploited his foreign status. The local paper described him as “one of the ‘whitest’ men to be Chinese that ever existed.” Although he successfully negotiated life as a Chinese man in a sometimes-hostile climate, there is no indication that his goal was to achieve the “whiteness” of his neighbors. Despite his local prominence, Wong Quon Sue was known as “China Jim” or, more commonly, as “Wah Chung,” after his business. Many of his local friends did not even know his real name, and some accounts suggest all members of the business were called Wah Chung. Whether this was annoying, insulting, or acceptable to Wong Quon Sue is unknown, but when asked for his wife’s name on his wedding day, he declared she was “Mrs. Wah Chung now!” At face value, not acknowledging an individual’s given
name can appear to be yet another way that the white majority marginalized members of the Chinese community; however, it was just as likely one of the shrewd strategies employed by the Wah Chung and Company.

Under the Act of November 3rd, 1893, the definition of merchant was refined to include “a person engaged in buying and selling merchandise, at a fixed place of business, which business is conducted in his name.” This wording was initially strictly interpreted, resulting in returning merchants being denied reentry if their name was not part of their firm’s name. Clarity and flexibility were eventually provided through a March 31, 1894, opinion by the Secretary of the Treasury. The opinion stated that “an actual partner indicated by the word ‘Co.’ is entitled to enter as ‘merchant’ engaged in business ‘conducted in his name’,” and it allowed for multiple partners to be accommodated within a single business name.

Newspapers and other documents indicate that Wong Quon Sue and his family fully embraced the Wah Chung moniker in their dealings with the Ashland community, and it is possible that other partners did as well, to a lesser extent. Whether an intentional tactic or cultural prejudice, white witness testimony inferred that Wong Kan How and Wong Ock Jung were also both known as “Wah Chung” but were fully understood to be distinct from Wong Quon Sue. The store name Wing Hong Hai (sometimes written Wing Hong Tai) strategically contains the names of several of the business partners: Lee Wing, Lee Yuen Hong, and Lee Yip Tai.

A 1928 article in The Dalles Daily Chronicle makes no mention of the merchant stores that served as anchors to the community, and instead describes the residents of the “Once Prosperous” Chinatown as engaged as cooks and laundrymen, noting that others “sawed wood and made their gardens, all honest, profitable occupations.” Many Chinese living in rural communities during the Exclusion Era straddled the line between honest labor and bona fide merchant, adopting whichever label helped them achieve their goals. Frank B. Sargent, Commissioner General of Immigration, observed that “no matter how trustworthy and honorable a Chinese merchant or laborer may be in the conduct of his daily business, he seems to have no compunction whatever in practicing deceit concerning matters in which the Government is interested.” The U.S. immigration process was a forceful demonstration of the lengths the government would go to “obstruct the desires of individual Chinese, probe their bodies, measure them, evaluate them, label them, humiliate them, detain them in dirty sheds, and treat them like criminals” under the façade of the rule of law. Both sides attempted to assert their moral prerogative over the process, but the deception needed to enter Oregon during the Exclusion Era haunted many Chinese Americans and threatened their sense of safety and belonging for years and, in some cases, for generations.

Lee Yuen Hong, Wong Quon Sue, their partners, and others registered, testified, filed for permits and certificates, produced witnesses and proof of assets, and endured investigations and interrogations to meet Exclusion Act requirements, but they also exploited or disobeyed what they believed were unfair rules when it was pragmatic or profitable to do so in order to make a living, grow a business, and provide for their families. Wong Quon Sue succeeded and thrived in Ashland and provided opportunity for the residents of Chun Lock Village for decades. Although Lee Yuen Hong was less successful by comparison, his story may typify the experiences, strategies, struggles, and aspirations of many Chinese in small towns across Oregon.

NOTES

9. Most Chinese women who migrated to California during the 1860s and 1870s were second wives, concubines in polygamous marriages, or prostitutes.
11. Lee, At America’s Gates, 43; Lew–Williams, Chinese Must Go, 45.
under and in pursuance of the provisions of said articles, and prescribe the form of the record of such certificate and of the proceedings for issuing the same, and he may require the de- posit, as part of such record, of the photograph of the party to whom any such certificate shall be issued.”

32. The Chinese residents of The Dalles came from eight villages in Taishan District and four villages in Xinhui District.

34. This main thoroughfare was initially named Main Street; however, it was also called Front Street before the eventual name change to First Street, which was made after the main business district shifted south to Second and Third Streets.

36. Chinese names are provided as available. Article XV, section 8, of the Oregon Constitution of 1859 reads: “No Chinaman, not a resident of the state at the adoption of this constitution, shall ever hold any real estate, or mining claim, or work any mining claim therein. Testimony taken by R.E. Hussey, December 1, 1906, Examination by H. Edsell August 21, 1908, Lee Yuen Hong Case File 971.
37. List of Outside Chinamen Applying for Admission at Portland Oregon from July 4, 1893. Merchant and Exempt Classes (accessed on ancestry.com) lists the Yee Hop Co at 30 First Street, The Dalles, Oregon. Admitted partners were Lee Toy, November 4, 1893. Low Tai, January 28, 1894. Guumme Gin, January 28, 1894; and Moon Wing, April 24, 1894. Lee Yuen Hong is not listed as an admitted partner in what may have been a short-lived company established to give merchant status to multiple partners. The authors have not found any documents from Lee Yuen Hong’s 1894 arrival. Pre-investigation by Inspector John B. Sawyer, May 12, 1911, RG 85, Chinese Exclusion Act case file [hereafter CEA case file], Lee Yuen Hong, case file 1009/83 [hereafter Lee Yuen Hong CEA case file 1009/83], National Archives and Records Administration, Seattle, Washington [hereafter NARA-Seattle]. Testimony taken by R.E. Hussey, December 1, 1906, and examination by H. Edsell August 21, 1908, CEA case files, case file 971 [hereafter Lee Yuen Hong CEA case file 971], NARA-Seattle.

38. “New York Restaurant, L.Y. Hong, Proprietor, First-Class in Every Respect, Meals at Reasonable Prices,” The Dalles city, Oregon, https://www.loc.gov/resource/g4294dm.g4294dm_g073481900/?sp=8r&f=480,495,0,328,0,189,0 (accessed November 9, 2021).
40. “Lee Yuen Hong intimated to Inspector Hussey . . . that he was willing to supply a certificate of deposit for any amount necessary to bring his property valuation up to $1000.” Letter from J.H. Barbours to Huntington and Wilson, Attorneys-at-Law, December 4, 1906, Lee Yuen Hong CEA case file 1009/83, NARA-Seattle.
41. “Both myself and said Lee Yuen Hong have carried on said mercantile business and said laundry business, and that each have labored in said laundry to a greater or less extent.” Affidavit of Lee Yuen But, October 20, 1908, Lee Yuen Hong CEA case file 971, NARA-Seattle, “Concerning the case of Lee Yuen But who has no certificate of residence, I desire you to inform said Chinese is prevented from securing a return certificate by virtue of Rule 17 of the Regulations.” Letter
from J.H. Barbour to Huntington and Wilson, Attorneys-at-Law, November 10, 1906, Lee Yuen Hong CEA case file 1009/83, NARA-Seattle. There are no documents indicating Lee Yuen Hong returned from China to any of the Northwest ports.

47. Affidavit of Lee Yuen Hong, May 12, 1911, CEA case file, Lee Wing, case file 2406 [hereafter Lee Wing CEA case file 2406], NARA-Seattle.

48. The term “perfect” was used by J.H. Barbour, Inspector in Charge, of the U.S. Immigration Service in Portland.

49. Sworn statement by Lee Yuen Hong to Inspector R.E. Hussey, July 31, 1912. “There was formerly a laundry connected with my business but I took it out when I got back from China in September 1908.” CEA case file, Lee Yip Tai, case file 2809 [hereafter Lee Yip Tai CEA case file 2809].

50. Lee Yuen Hong CEA case file 1009/83, NARA-Seattle. Letter from Office of Inspector in Charge, Portland, Oregon, to Commissioner of Immigration, Seattle, Washington, January 21, 1913, CEA case file, Lee Dick, case file 13610 [hereafter Lee Dick CEA case file 13610], NARA-Seattle: “It appears to have been taken from the personal effects of Lee Yuen Hong at the time of his arrest.”

51. Sworn testimony by E.H. French in reply to questions by Inspector Sawyer, May 13, 1911, Lee Wing CEA case file 2406, NARA-Seattle.

52. He arrived in November 1912, a month after Lee Yuen Hong died, but was detained and later deported after an unsuccessful appeal. Lee Wing CEA case file 2406, NARA-Seattle.

53. Lee Dick Denison Map depicts a laundry at the rear of the building and one next door to the east with a connecting door. 1910 United States Census of The Dalles, lists three men living at the store as “Laborer, laundry.”

54. “About a year and a half ago . . . he sold out the laundry and at about that time an entrance into the laundry from the street was built whereas previously the entrance to the laundry had been through the door.” Sworn statement from E.H. French of the French and Co. Bank to Inspector Sawyer, May 13, 1911, Lee Yuen Hong CEA case file 1009/83, NARA-Seattle.

55. Affidavit of Lee Yuen Hong, May 12, 1911, Lee Yuen Hong CEA case file 1009/83, NARA-Seattle. The authors could not find additional information or newspaper accounts of Lee Yuen Hong’s arrest, or why he was released.

56. Sawyer related: “His demeanor under oath was artful and evasive.” Letter released.

57. He arrived in November 1912, a month after Lee Yuen Hong died, but was detained and later deported after an unsuccessful appeal. Lee Wing CEA case file 2406, NARA-Seattle.


59. Lee Dick CEA case file 13610, NARA-Seattle.

60. Lee, At America’s Gates, p. 193, states that interpreter Carleton Rickards at Port Townsend was involved in landing illegal Chinese immigrants from 1896–1897. Lee Dick landed in 1897, but there is no evidence Rickards was involved.


63. Wong Quon Sue Testimony, 1913, CEA case file, Wong Park Yew, case 3502 [hereafter Wong Park Yew CEA case 3502], NARA-Seattle.

64. The Chinese quarter was largely vacant and dilapidated by the 1880s, but some residents persisted in the area into the twentieth century. Chelsea Rose, “Burned: The Archaeology of House and Home in Jackson- ville,” Oregon’s Chinese Quarter: Chinese Diaspora Archaeology in North America, eds. Rose and Kennedy, 163–87; Chelsea Rose and Katie Johnson, Rising From the Ashes: Jackson- ville Chinese Quarter Site (35-A/189) Data Recovery Excavations, 2016, Report to the Oregon Department of Transportation, White City, from the Southern Oregon University Laboratory of Anthropology, Ashland, Oregon.

65. Wong Quon Sue Testimony, 1913, Wong Park Yew CEA case 3502, NARA-Seattle; Wong Youe Affidavit, 1899, CEA case file, Wong Youe, case 15598 [hereafter Wong Youe CEA case 15598], NARA-Seattle.


68. Ibid.; Wong Kan Soo, Wong Quon Sue Testimony, Wong Kan How CEA case 2412, NARA-Seattle.


73. Ashland Tidings CHINESE NEW YEAR MINUS FIRECRACKERS January 29, 1917, p. 2

74. Wong Quon Sue Testimony, 1913, Wong Park Yew CEA case 3502, NARA-Seattle.

75. Ashland Tidings CHINESE NEW YEAR MINUS FIRECRACKERS January 29, 1917, p. 2

76. Wong Quon Sue Testimony, 1913, Wong Park Yew CEA case 3502, NARA-Seattle.


78. Affidavit, 1899, Wong Youe CEA case file 15598, NARA-Seattle. Wong Wa Fon is described as having sold his interest in the business to Wong Park. Wong Quon Sue Testimony, 1909, Wong Ock Jung CEA case 510/308, NARA-Seattle; Wong Buck Yeu sold his interest to Wong park You prior to returning to China, where he reportedly died in 1909. Wong Quon Sue testimony (page 2), 1913, Wong Park Yew CEA case 3502, NARA-Seattle.

79. Wong Quon Sue Testimony, 1909, Wong Ock Jung CEA case 510/308, NARA-Seattle; Wong Quok Tung, 1927, CEA case file, Wong Quok Tung, 6140/5-4, NARA-Seattle.


Yuen Hong, when describing the Wing Hong
NARA-Seattle. [hereafter Lee Cheung CEA case 30,227], 1913, CEA case file, Lee Cheung, case 30,227
Len On, case 31,480 [hereafter Ng Len On

Early Northwest America (Seattle, Wash.:
March 1, 1899. a partner who does the cooking for the firm is
95, 953; to reenter,
house servant before departure is not entitled
1894; merchant working occasionally as a
that restaurant keepers are not merchants; Op. Atty. Gen., 575; A restaurant keeper who received
his name is not a part of the firm’s name. In re Quan Gin 61 F, 395; and In re Yee Lung 61 F. 641; Interest of merchant in firm must be real,
but not necessary that his name appear in
firm name. United States v. Lee Kan, May 21,
1894 62 F, 914; Office of the Solicitor of the Treasury,
108. Ibid., 39; Op. S.T., March 21, 1894;
a person whose name is not part of the firm
name is not a “merchant” within the acts, 21
person, though a partner, can not reenter if
his name is not a part of the firm’s name. In re Quan Gin 61 F, 395; and In re Yee Lung 61 F. 641; Interest of merchant in firm must be real,
but not necessary that his name appear in
firm name. United States v. Lee Kan, May 21,
1894 62 F, 914; Office of the Solicitor of the Treasury,

110. The proprietors of two other Chinese
merchandise stores in The Dalles were known
by their store names, even on official
documents. Lee Ho of the Dock Sing Company was
married in 1888 in The Dalles, using the name
Dock Sing, and early immigration documents
for Wong Chung of the Chew Kee Company
name him as Ah Chew Kee. Ah Chew Kee,
1899–1902, CEA case file, Ah Chew Kee,
file R51773. NARA-Seattle. Dock Sing Marriage
Certificate is from the State of Oregon, Wasco
County, May 26, 1888, in the marriage of Dock
Sing and Hen Lee, copy held by the authors.
111. Esther Thomson, “Chinatown, Once
Prosperous Section, is Nearly Deserted,” The
Dalles Daily Chronicle, May 26, 1928
112. Report of the Commissioner General
Frank B. Sargent quoted in the March
1908 “Proceedings of the Asiatic Exclusion
League.” 113. McKeown, Ritualization of Regula-

Yuen Hong CEA case 1009/83, NARA-Seattle.
Inspector of Immigration regarding Lee Yuen
Hong’s and Lee Wing’s applications to travel,
April to May 1911; Law Offices of Huntington
and Wilson prepared papers and wrote letters
to the Portland immigration inspector for Lee
Yuen Hong in 1906 and 1908. Lee Yuen Hong
CEA case file 1009/83, NARA-Seattle. J.T.
Peers, lumberman, and O. Kinnemers, drug store
proprietor, served as witnesses for Lee Yuen
But in 1899, Lee Yuen CEA case RS14989,
Lee Yuen CEA case file 154989, NARA-Seattle.
George F. Ross, chief clerk of the
freight office of the Oregon Railway and
Navigation Company, served as witness for
partner Lee Sang in 1900, CEA case file, Lee
Sang, case 15888 [hereafter Lee Sang CEA
case 15888], NARA-Seattle.
94. Constable M.N. Long, merchants PW
Paulson and G.W. Vaupel, and postmaster
W.H. Bunk all served as witnesses for Wong
Youse in 1897, Wong Youe CEA case 15598,
NARA-Seattle; American Express Agent D.A.
Applegate and merchant R.A. Minkler served
as witnesses for Wong Ock Jung in 1909,
Wong Ock Jung case 510/308, NARA-Se-
ttle; R.A. Minkler, Postman J.R. Casey, and
J.H. Provost served as a witness for Wong
Kan How in 1911, Wong Kan How CEA case
file 2142, NARA-Seattle; Postman John R.
Casey and candy store owner Charles R.
Rose served as witnesses for Wong Park
Yew in 1913, Wong Park Yew CEA case 3502,
NARA-Seattle; D.A. Applegate and retired
merchant C.H. Vaupel and served as a wit-
ness for Wong Kim Won in 1921, Wong Kim
Won CEA case 50118, NARA-Seattle; and F.F.
Whittle and Wah Chung and Co. neighbor,
Harriet Clark, served as a witness for Wong
Kim Won in 1923 when he brought his family
to the United States. Wong Kim Won CEA
case 5011207, NARA-Seattle.
95. Lee, At America’s gates, 201.
96. McKeown, Ritualization of Regulation,
397; Lee, At America’s Gates, 189.
97. Hsu, Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of
Home, 12.
100. Kornel S. Chang, Pacific Connections:
The Making of the U.S. Canadian Borderlands
(Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of Cali-
101. Ryo, “Through the Back Door,” p. 110,
cites several sources: the estimate of 17,300
is from Erika Lee, At America’s Gates, 149–50.
Luther C. Fry, “Illegal Entry of Orientals into the
United States between 1910 and 1920,” Jour-
nal of the American Statistical Association
23 (1928): 173–77, estimates 7,000–21,000 illegal
entries between 1910 and 1920; and Estelle
Lau, “Paper Families: Identity, Immigration
Administration and Chinese Exclusion.” (Ph.D.
diss., University of Chicago, 2000), p. 91, cites
a 1901 report estimating 20,000 illegal entries.
Ma Nguyen, The Lucky Ones (Boston and New
York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010), 137.
Contemporary newspaper accounts also sug-
gest that Chinese were being smuggled into
the U.S. from Mexico disguised as Japanese.
“Japanese Held as Smuggler of Chinese” Los
Angeles Herald, August 2, 1911, p. 7.
103. Letter from Marcus Braun, U.S.
Immigration Inspector to Frank B. Sargent,
Commissioner General of Immigration, Feb-
uary 12, 1907. "They come to Mexico with
no intention to remain there but because
they think they can enter the United States
in an easy way . . . I found them to cut their
pigtails and exchange their blue jeans and
their felt slippers to the most picturesque
Mexican dress,” quoted in Ryo, “Through the
Back Door,” 122.
105. “Wedding of Wah Chung,” Rogue
River Courier, September 19, 1901, p. 2.
106. Ibid.
107. Office of the Solicitor of the Trea-
ury, Digest of “Chinese Exclusion” Laws and
Decisions, 24.
108. Ibid., 39; Op. S.T., March 21, 1894;
a person whose name is not part of the firm
name is not a “merchant” within the acts, 21
person, though a partner, can not reenter if
his name is not a part of the firm’s name. In re
Quan Gin 61 F, 395; and In re Yee Lung 61 F. 641; Interest of merchant in firm must be real,
but not necessary that his name appear in
firm name. United States v. Lee Kan, May 21,
1894 62 F, 914; Office of the Solicitor of the Treasury,
Digest of “Chinese Exclusion” Laws and
Decisions, 24.
109. O.B. Turner witness statement, 1922,
Wong Kan How CEA case 2142, NARA-Seattle;
D.A. Applegate witness statement, 1923, Wong
Ock Jung CEA case 5011038, NARA-Seattle.
110. The proprietors of two other Chinese
merchandise stores in The Dalles were known
by their store names, even on official
documents. Lee Ho of the Dock Sing Company was
married in 1888 in The Dalles, using the name
Dock Sing, and early immigration documents
for Wong Chung of the Chew Kee Company
name him as Ah Chew Kee. Ah Chew Kee,
1899–1902, CEA case file, Ah Chew Kee,
file R51773. NARA-Seattle. Dock Sing Marriage
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112. Report of the Commissioner General
Frank B. Sargent quoted in the March
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