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A Life Cooking for Others

The Work and Migration Experiences of a Chinese Restaurant Worker in New York City, 1920–1946

HEATHER R. LEE

[Chop suey]¹ is no longer merely a casual commodity. It has become a staple. It is vigorously vieing [*sic*] with sandwiches and salad as the noontime nourishment of the young women typists and telephonists of John, Dey and Fulton Streets. It rivals coffee-and-two-kinds-of-cake as the recess repast of the sales forces of West Thirty-fourth Street department stores. At the lunch hour there is an eager exodus toward Chinatown. . . . To them the district is not an intriguing bit of transplanted Orient. It is simply a good place to eat.

Bertram Reinitz, "Chop Suey's New Role,"
New York Times, December 27, 1925

The kitchen in which I had to work was a very long one. There were six huge ranges in it each having two very deep and large fire boxes. . . . Since the ranges had to be gotten ready and kept at the highest degree possible of heat for the cooking of dinners for more than a thousand guests, I had to remain in front of the six sizzling hot ranges from four o'clock in the [morning] until seven-thirty in the evening. This was as you may well suppose most exhausting. My legs got so blistered from the intensity of the heat that I soon had to put on woolen underwear despite the fact that it was the Summer season. While it was uncomfortable nevertheless it did keep the heat from striking my bare legs and so they no longer got so painfully blistered. . . . As you can see this made a most strenuous ten-hour working day for me in that all too hot kitchen. At the close of each day I was too exhausted to desire to eat or even sleep.

Chin Lee, "Along the Way," unpublished memoir, ca. 1949

On December 27, 1925, *New York Times* columnist Bertram Reinitz published a special piece entitled “Chop Suey’s New Role.”² As the designated cultural and social commentator for this widely circulating newspaper, Reinitz used the approaching New Year to reflect on “the changes of character and custom that this sizable city has lately undergone.” “At the lunch hour,” he marveled, “there is an eager exodus toward Chinatown.” With the throngs of clerks, secretaries, and sales ladies descending on Chinatown, it seemed as if everyone had gotten the office memo on where to eat lunch. This curious trend of people streaming into Chinese restaurants caused him to ponder the place of Chinese food in the New Yorker’s diet. In his words, “[c]hop suey has been promoted to a prominent place on the midday menu of the metropolis.” By the 1920s, Chinese food was no longer the exotic cuisine of Chinese immigrants, as it was once regarded. Both the masses of people eating Chinese food and Reinitz’s commentary signaled that Chinese food was novel only because it had become so familiar. This depiction of Chinese food’s popularity among New Yorkers, who were among the earliest patrons of Chinese restaurants in the country, can be seen as an official declaration: New Yorkers could no longer live without Chinese food.

While Reinitz and the average New Yorker at a Chinese restaurant paid no attention to the people serving him or her, the army of cooks and waiters feeding the “eager exodus” demands explanation, because so many of them worked illegally in the United States. In the 1920s, each of the three hundred Chinese restaurants in New York City maintained a Chinese staff of five waiters and four and a half cooks to deliver piping hot plates of chicken chop suey, beef chow mein, and Chinese roasted pork. In all, 307 Chinese restaurant owners and 3,275 cooks and waiters worked in the state of New York. These are astounding figures, given that Chinese workers were officially barred from entering the country.³ Between the enactment of anti-Chinese legislation in 1882 and its repeal in 1943, only international businessmen, students, teachers, and diplomats could legally pass through America’s gates. Despite these restrictions, the Chinese managed to recruit workers from China to staff the hundreds of restaurants operating in the city. Once the workers reached the United States, the work for them was physically demanding. Cooks worked ten or more hours over stoves that were kept at the “highest degree possible” so that food orders could be made in an instant. After working under these conditions for seven days a week, the cook quoted at the beginning of this chapter felt “too exhausted to desire to eat or even sleep.” Focusing on the experiences of one Chinese restaurant worker over his lifetime, this chapter shows that Chinese

restaurants were not just palaces of consumption, as Reinitz presumed, but were also sites of a complex network of chain migration, labor, and familial obligation. I follow Chin Shuck Wing through his years as a wage laborer in New York City's service industry.⁴ Between his arrival in the United States in 1935 and his death in 1987, Shuck Wing worked at a variety of restaurants, cooked for the U.S. Air Force, and briefly operated Jim Lee's Laundry on Manhattan's Upper West Side. During these fifty years, Shuck Wing never returned to China to see the wife and children he left behind, although he maintained a financial and emotional relationship with them through remittances and letters. From his experiences, we learn that Chinese restaurant workers led dual lives—toiling in the United States while dreaming of China.⁵

Shuck Wing provides a case study for understanding how the Chinese endured horrible work experiences like those described by the line cook. Like so many Chinese immigrants, Shuck Wing came to the United States because he put his family before himself. He worked in small, family-run businesses that turned a profit only because the owners paid themselves and their relatives very little. When Shuck Wing discovered the hard life ahead of him, he turned to his relatives for emotional support. Through regular letters to one another, the Chin family persuaded Shuck Wing and the other Chin men in the United States to persevere for the sake of their families. By compelling Chinese immigrants like Shuck Wing to accept untenable work conditions, the transpacific Chinese family networks were able to secure cheap laborers who put Chinese food on customers' tables.

Leaving Home: How Did Chinese Restaurant Workers Get Here?

For men like Shuck Wing, coming to the United States was as natural as getting married, fathering children, or dying. For generations, the Chin family had been sending young, able-bodied men from Dragon Village, a small village on the southern coast of Guangdong Province in China, to Southeast Asia, Canada, and the United States. In North America alone, Shuck Wing had forty-seven relatives and friends in fourteen cities—most of whom ran family businesses in San Antonio, Texas, and Tucson, Arizona (see map 3.1). In fact, Shuck Wing followed in his own father's footsteps. When Shuck Wing left Guangdong in 1935, he had reached the right stage in his life to take his father's place in the United States. He was twenty-four years old and had gained some business experience as clerk in the village grocery store.⁶ He was married and had young children to clothe, feed, and educate. Shuck Wing knew from his elder relatives that he could support his young family better as a laborer



Map 3.1. The Chin family in North America, 1935–1946. Source: Bachelor's Apartment, 111 Mott Street Collection, Museum of Chinese in America, New York, NY. Map by the author.

in America than as a clerk in China.⁷ Moreover, his father, the family head and breadwinner, had passed away abroad, and his remains were en route to Dragon Village.⁸ Since Shuck Wing's older brothers, cousins, and uncles were already in the United States, it was time for Shuck Wing, the family's next youngest male, to take this well-worn path overseas.

The Chin family sent its men abroad to find stable work because working the land in China no longer provided a secure livelihood. Shuck Wing came from an area in southern China that had been shaken by an agricultural crisis. Although the land was neither abundant nor fertile enough to feed its population, the population of Taishan County had quadrupled between 1838 and 1920, placing a heavy burden on the unproductive farmland. Indeed, the county needed 60 percent more land to meet Taishan's basic needs, which meant that its farmers produced only half the grains needed for local consumption. The dire situation forced these farming people to seek work off the land. In 1890, 100,000 Taishanese were full-time farmers; 300,000 were part-time farmers and also worked in commerce or industry; and 200,000 engaged in commerce and industry exclusively.⁹ "A farmer lives a strenuous life and

makes little money,” stated a man from northern Guangdong, who repeated a common local aphorism: “A business man usually makes more money, especially if he has luck and is helped out by relatives or friends.”¹⁰

Like their neighbors, the Chins decided that farming alone would not suffice. Although the family held on to its farmland, they left the actual farming to landless tenants who shared their harvest with the Chins.¹¹ Freed from the land, the Chin family went into trade, purchased more land, and funded young men to travel abroad for work.¹² Of all the ways the Chins diversified their economic ventures, sending young men overseas had the largest impact on the family income. During Shuck Wing’s first year abroad, he sent home \$134.50, or about two months’ salary for a cook, which in 2012 would be worth \$2,161.¹³ The Chins’ neighbors also benefited from their men working overseas. In 1935, the year that Shuck Wing left for the United States, more than one-fourth of the entire Taishanese population worked abroad and, on average, contributed 81.4 percent of their families’ annual incomes.¹⁴

U.S. immigration laws (Chinese Exclusion Laws) prevented Chinese immigrants like Shuck Wing from entering the United States legally, however, reducing Chinese immigration for sixty years, during which only merchants, teachers, tourists, students, U.S. citizens of Chinese heritage, and some of their wives and children, could travel between the United States and China. Shuck Wing got past immigration officials in San Francisco by posing as the son of a U.S. citizen because his uncle, Chin Ton in Tucson lied on his behalf. As an American citizen, Chin Ton had the right to sponsor his children to join him in the United States. In January 1935, Shuck Wing initiated this illegal process by sending a letter of request to his uncle and six identical head shots of himself for Chin Ton to use when filing immigration papers. That Shuck Wing knew to include the photographs signaled that he understood the immigration process and was prepared to face the challenges and dangers of coming to America illegally.¹⁵

Sending for Shuck Wing was an expensive and time-consuming process that Chin Ton, a successful and generous businessman, undertook in fulfillment of his familial obligations. By the time Shuck Wing’s letter arrived in Tucson in February 1935, Chin Ton had already brought three sons to the United States and taken three return trips to China. Upon receiving Shuck Wing’s letter, he informed the Chins in San Francisco that Shuck Wing was coming as his son. He then hired Oliver P. Stidger and Lewis A. Root to file immigration papers for Shuck Wing at the Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay. Meanwhile in Arizona, Chin Ton drew up several sets of affidavits for him and his sons that claimed Shuck Wing, “now living in China [and desiring] to

come to the United States . . . is the natural son of . . . Chin Ton.”¹⁶ On September 9, 1935, Samuel Wright, an immigration agent at the Texas Immigration Bureau in El Paso, interviewed Chin Ton to verify his citizenship status. Next, Edward L. Haff, the district director of immigration in San Francisco, and the American consul general in Hong Kong received transcripts of this interview and Chin Ton’s affidavits for their evaluations of Shuck Wing’s application.¹⁷ In a letter dated October 2, 1935, Chin Ton told Shuck Wing to start saying his good-byes. “[Since] you are so anxious to join us I am sending you the affidavit together with Hongkong [*sic*] bank draft amounting to \$250 through the On Lung Co. You can start your journey any time you desire.”¹⁸ Ten months, multiple transpacific letter exchanges, and several hundred American dollars later, Shuck Wing had secured the proper documents and overcome the first obstacle en route to the United States.

With his immigration papers in order and a small allowance in hand, Shuck Wing started the long and arduous journey to America. In November 1935, he bade farewell to his wife, children, mother, and extended family at the gates of Dragon Village and left on foot with a suitcase and folded mattress.¹⁹ After walking one and one-quarter miles to the Ng Hip railway station, he boarded a train to Bok Gai and, from there, traveled by steamship to Hong Kong. He went to the American consulate in Hong Kong for a health inspection and vaccinations, as well as to present Chin Ton’s affidavit. Cleared to board a U.S.-bound steamship, Shuck Wing wrote Chin Ton one last time before the SS *President Coolidge* set sail on November 30, 1935.²⁰ Nineteen days later, Shuck Wing landed at Angel Island Immigration Station, the main processing center for Chinese immigrants.²¹ The immigration bureau detained Shuck Wing on Angel Island for thirty-three days while deciding whether he was Chin Ton’s son. As Shuck Wing waited in the Chinese barracks, Samuel Wright interrogated Chin Ton and his sons for two days in Tucson about the Chin family and Dragon Village, hoping to detect evidence of fraud. On January 20, 1936, the Board of Special Inquiry ruled in Shuck Wing’s favor: “The testimony is in general agreement. . . . I believe that the evidence of record should be accepted as reasonably establishing the relationship claimed between the applicant and Chin Ton.”²² After six weeks of travel and another four and half weeks of detention, Shuck Wing had earned the right to join the Chin men in America.

Dishing Out Chop Suey: What Was It Like to Work in a Chinese Restaurant?

Because Shuck Wing spoke no English and was now an ocean away from Dragon Village, the Chin family in North America helped him settle into his new life. The day the U.S. Immigration Bureau released Shuck Wing from its custody, he rode the *Jeff D. Milton* ferry from the detention center on Angel Island across San Francisco Bay.²³ His friends and family awaited him at the Chin family clubhouse in Chinatown at 150 Waverly Place. A four-story building, the family headquarters housed Tsui Gee Chong and Co., an all-purpose trading company, on the ground floor and new arrivals and passersby on the fourth floor. On the middle two levels, the Chin men socialized, exchanging news about people in China and information about business opportunities in the United States. Through these fellow wanderers, Shuck Wing heard about jobs in New York City and booked a ticket east through Tsui Gee Chong and Co. As he planned his next move, he received a disheartening letter from an uncle back in China. The Chins had lost their bid to buy a fertile plot of land in Dragon Village, and the family was not earning enough to make ends meet, so his uncle had decided to leave for Southeast Asia. Motivated by news of this hardship, Shuck Wing continued eastward to pursue job leads in New York.²⁴

In New York, the first Chinese restaurants date to the 1870s and catered almost exclusively to the city's early Chinese immigrants. Located in the triangular intersection of Mott, Pell, and Doyers Streets known as "Chinatown," a half dozen Chinese eateries served the everyday food of rural, southern China to Chinese laborers and "lower classes of white people."²⁵ For special occasions, Chinese merchants threw large banquets for their clansmen at one of New York's "high-class" Chinese restaurants. Ordered several days in advance, these extensive meals included as many as forty courses. Guests savored these indulgent repasts in lavishly appointed dining rooms, on whose walls hung scrolls of Chinese poetry and maxims. "Chinese lanterns are suspended in reckless profusion from every available point," commented Louis J. Beck, a journalist who wrote a book on New York's Chinatown. "The most gorgeously decorated and illuminated buildings in Chinatown are those occupied by these restaurants."²⁶ Located in the heart of Chinatown on Mott and Pell Streets, these eight high-end restaurants were busiest on Sundays when "the Chinese laundrymen of New York and neighboring cities come in [to Chinatown] for a general good time."²⁷ In the United States, Chinese laborers earned decent wages and could afford to eat foods that had been too expensive for them in China. On their

days off, Chinese laundrymen indulged in food and the company of their peers at the same restaurants as Chinatown's business elite.²⁸ While some Americans also patronized these restaurants, these early restaurants did "not cater to any other trade than [the] Chinese," because other customers added little to the restaurants' bottom lines. Wong Chin Foo, a writer and contemporary of Louis Beck, deduced that Chinese restaurant keepers paid no heed to white customers because "[the] Chinaman frequently orders two-dollar and three-dollar dishes, while the American seldom pays more than fifty or seventy-five cents for his Chinese dinner."²⁹ Moreover, Chinese patronage of Chinatown restaurants indirectly supported a diverse array of food businesses throughout New York State. Farmers in the Bronx, Queens, and Long Island supplied fresh produce, and Chinatown grocers imported preserved foods to feed a growing population of Chinese immigrants who craved a taste of home.³⁰

Within twenty years of New York's first Chinese restaurants, some Chinese entrepreneurs had established a specialized set of restaurants to serve New Yorkers who were curious about the city's "Chinese colony."³¹ During the late nineteenth century, newspapers like the *New York Times*, the *New York Tribune*, and the *New York Sun* regularly published articles on New York's Chinese, a fascinating topic to readers because the Chinese were still considered recent and exotic arrivals to the city.³² Bertram Reinitz's predecessors who wrote for major New York newspapers taught their readers to dine at Chinese restaurants. In their articles about New York's intriguing newcomers, they promoted Chinese food as exciting and delicious and helped readers through their first experiences with a cuisine they probably found intimidatingly different from their usual fare. Journalists published the addresses of tourist-friendly restaurants, described and evaluated the dishes, and gave instructions on using chopsticks. Enough New Yorkers accepted these invitations to try Chinese food that tours through Chinatown grew into a specialty business. Former policemen and English-speaking locals organized tours of "slummers" or "rubberneckers"—as tourists were called—to see the Chinese temple, hear a snippet of Chinese opera, gawk at opium addicts, shop at a knickknack store, and, finally, to dine at a Chinese restaurant.³³ Of all the items on a Chinese restaurant menu, "slummers" relished chop suey. Cantonese for "different pieces," chop suey is made of bite-size pieces of meat and vegetables in a brown gravy and is served over rice or noodles. This simple dish originated in southern China, where most Chinese immigrants, including Shuck Wing, came from. A series of prominent articles on a Chinese diplomat who preferred chop suey to Anglo-American foods during his goodwill tour of the United States ignited a "chop suey craze" in New York. By the 1920s,

as Reinitz observed, chop suey had become an American staple. “Chop suey joints,” small restaurants specializing in the dish, opened all over New York. In 1925, George Chappell, a contributor to *Vanity Fair*, noted that these restaurants were “naturally somewhat Americanized” because “their patronage [was] largely American and not Chinese.”³⁴

In 1936, Shuck Wing easily found work at an Americanized Chinese restaurant because the vast majority of New York’s Chinese restaurants were small, family operations in need of labor. During the 1920s and 1930s, three relatives started a restaurant by pooling together a few thousand dollars.³⁵ The partners divided the roles of manager, accountant, and head chef, so that each person assumed the duties for which he was best qualified. The manager was the most charismatic and spoke the best English of the partners. As the public face of the restaurant, he greeted customers, interacted with vendors, and mediated interpersonal conflicts among staff members. The accountant had sufficient math, reading, and writing abilities to manage the business records, which included paying employees and suppliers and keeping the company balance sheet. The head chef needed to be physically robust, since running the kitchen was the most physically taxing and dangerous duty.³⁶

Clearly, a staff of three could not possibly feed the “eager exodus toward Chinatown” that Reinitz described, so the partners counted on their countrymen to fill the labor gaps. In New York City, the average Chinese restaurant crew was 42 percent kitchen and 42 percent wait staff, with the partners making up the remaining 16 percent of the workforce. During the Great Depression, 248 restaurants were in operation, employing more than 2,400 Chinese restaurant wage workers, which constituted a significant portion of New York City’s Chinese population.³⁷ Even during the Depression, newcomers like Shuck Wing could land a job in a Chinese restaurant because of the robust demand for Chinese food.

In this line of work, getting the job was the easy part; *doing* the job was the hard part. For two years, Shuck Wing was employed “to prepare and cook chop shuey [*sic*] and other chinese [*sic*] dishes.”³⁸ Line cooks worked “a most strenuous ten-hour” day over “sizzling hot ranges.” Many Chinese restaurants around Times Square stayed open late to catch post-theater diners and had two shifts of workers. Owing to scheduling or management errors, line cooks in these restaurants sometimes worked back-to-back shifts. Moreover, some cooks worked for “dictators” who believed verbal insults and bullying were “the only way to get things done correctly.” The “dominating type” of manager “even tells [their cooks] how a dish should be prepared.” When the abuse became unbearable, the “chef changed his working clothes and

left.”³⁹ Managers treated their kitchen staff disrespectfully because many of them believed that cooking was an unskilled occupation. In the words of one Chinese, “A person who knows how to prepare a dish of chow mein or chop suey or any other Americanized version of a Chinese delicacy is not considered a chef by the Chinese.”⁴⁰

Like the kitchen staff, waiters “felt exploited” by their bosses, who made unreasonable demands of them.⁴¹ One waiter oversaw four to five tables, each of which seated two to six people. During the mealtime rush, waiters received orders from customers, headwaiters, and cooks in “rapid succession.” A waiter had to scribble on his waiter’s pad or memorize a string of orders: “Olive and celery—shrimp cocktail—soup—tea—chow mein—steak—coffee—pie—ice cream—water.”⁴² He had to get the orders to the kitchen and the food to the right table in the correct sequence of courses. This task was made harder by the fact that Americanized Chinese restaurants served both Cantonese and American dishes. Therefore, waiters had to learn the American foods their restaurants served and also how their customers liked them. While meals in China were also organized into courses, American meals followed a different logic, which waiters were obliged to understand when serving their customers.⁴³ The dizzying mess of demands and commands made one inexperienced waiter so confused that he was literally “run[ning] around in circles.” On top of all this, new waiters received no training. Anyone who asked for help often got the cold shoulder from his colleagues. One waiter, who was looking for coffee cups, was told he “should have been there an hour earlier to find out where the different things were kept.” This was especially true if a waiter needed something from the kitchen, whose staff was working under constant pressure and in extreme heat to get the food cooked and plated as fast as possible.⁴⁴

A Collective Bargain: Did Chinese Restaurant Workers Demand Better Work Conditions?

For all their sweat and toil, Chinese restaurant workers were among the lowest-paid workers in the food service industry, which included a broad spectrum of full-service restaurants and partial-service establishments. New York’s Chinese restaurant workers made 30 percent less than the average food service employee. According to the 1930 U.S. Census, the average eating establishment spent twenty-four dollars on staff wages for every hundred dollars earned in sales. In contrast, the Rice Bowl Restaurant, a popular Americanized Chinese restaurant in New York’s Chinatown, spent seventeen dollars on wages for

every hundred dollars earned in sales.⁴⁵ Chinese restaurants were full-service businesses, meaning that customers were waited on at their tables from the beginning to the end of their meals. Yet the staff in Chinese restaurants earned wages comparable to those of workers in lunchrooms and cafeterias, which streamlined the service to provide cheap meals. If Chinese restaurant workers as a whole made 30 percent below the national average, Chinese cooks and waiters fared even worse owing to the hierarchy of pay in their restaurants. Each partner took home a hundred dollars a month, which was padded by a 10 percent dividend on their investment. A talented and hardworking cook might earn as much as a partner, although most line cooks earned between sixty and seventy dollars a month. Headwaiters earned sixty dollars, and waiters, about fifty dollars a month, tips included. Most Chinese restaurants were too small to hire busboys or dishwashers, so the entire staff pitched in to clean up the restaurant at the end of the workday.⁴⁶ Newcomers like Shuck Wing fell into the lower end of the Chinese restaurant pay scale.

Whereas many wage workers turned to unions to address their workplace grievances in the 1930s, Chinese workers could not benefit from membership in American labor unions because of their racially exclusive policies. In 1891, the American Federation of Labor formed the Hotel Employee and Restaurant Employee Union (HERE) to improve the hours, wages, and benefits of workers in the hospitality industry. Struggling through its first ten years, HERE became “a permanent fixture in the industry” and numbered 65,000 members by World War I.⁴⁷ Its membership, however, excluded “Chinese and Negro workers” who worked alongside whites or in racially segregated hotels and restaurants.⁴⁸ The Chinese and blacks were excluded from HERE because its parent organization, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), was formed to protect white male workers. In fact, the AFL organizers saw immigrant, black, and Chinese workers as competitors they wanted to eliminate from the field. Samuel Gompers, the AFL’s founder and longest sitting president, lobbied the U.S. Congress to pass legislation that ended free immigration to America. In 1902, Gompers wrote a caustic pamphlet entitled *Meat vs. Rice: American Manhood against Asiatic Coolieism*, which portrayed Chinese immigrants as parasites eating away at white working-class masculinity. When the Chinese Exclusion Laws were due to expire in 1892 and 1902, union organizers used this rhetoric to persuade American policymakers that the “Chinese Must Go!” in the name of defending the white male breadwinner.⁴⁹

HERE tackled poor labor conditions in Chinese restaurants by pressuring their owners to hire unionized white workers. Throughout the 1920 and 1930s, HERE mounted a series of successful strikes in New York that raised

the minimum wage to twenty dollars a week, excluded tips from wages, and limited the workday to nine hours for waiters. HERE negotiated these changes with the New York Restaurant Keepers Association and the National Restaurant Association, neither of which represented Chinese restaurant owners. In 1935, the union won a major ruling from the Industrial Commissioner of New York State to raise the state's minimum wage for food service employees.⁵⁰ Emboldened by this victory, HERE tried to force Chinese restaurants to comply with state regulations. The AFL picketed the Merry-Go-Round Restaurant, a large Chinese restaurant in Greater New York, and several other Chinese restaurants in Brooklyn, demanding that the management hire HERE members. Merry-Go-Round's owners, Harold Stern and his Chinese partner, conceded to the AFL's demands by hiring unionized waiters at five dollars a day and giving cooks a raise of five dollars a month. Since few of the union workers were Chinese, it is very likely that racial conflict between the management and employees was responsible for this experiment failing. In 1937, the New Fulton Royal Restaurant opened at Merry-Go-Round's old address with a nonunionized, Chinese staff.⁵¹

Racial exclusion alone does not explain the failure of the labor movement to redress exploitation in Chinese restaurants. Even when the AFL tried to organize Chinese food servers, it failed because the primary conflicts transpired between Chinese restaurants rather than within them. In 1939, after the Merry-Go-Round experiment, AFL leaders approved Local 211, a racially segregated branch for Chinese workers. The mission of Local 211 was to unionize Chinese small business employees, promote solidarity between Chinese and Americans, fight racism against the Chinese, and "eliminate mutual distrust between workers and employers."⁵² The last plank of this agenda shows how little the AFL leadership understood the Chinese restaurant industry. While union organizers correctly recognized ill feelings between employees and their employers, they mistakenly interpreted them as the result of class conflict. The vast majority of Chinese restaurants were small family partnerships staffed by friends and relatives. In other words, everyone was invested in the restaurant's success for the good of the family. Even the Chinese Left, which was sympathetic to the AFL's efforts, recognized that union organizers falsely characterized employee-employer relationships. Responding to the AFL's unionization drives, Chu Tong, the English-language secretary for the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance, and Zhao Jiansheng, a writer for the progressive newspaper *China Salvation Times*, pushed for trade guilds instead of unions as the more appropriate solution to the problem of exploitation that stemmed from competition among Chinese businesses. Unions represented employees before

employers, whereas trade guilds mediated between businesses and treated everyone working in one business as generally sharing the same interests.⁵³

Long before the AFL and HERE took an interest in Chinese restaurant workers, the Chinese established their own organizations to regulate the food industry. Founded in 1932, the Chinese Restaurant Association negotiated with government agencies on behalf of the Chinese over regulatory changes, whose confusing and discriminatory nature threatened to undermine the Chinese restaurant industry.⁵⁴ Serving a similar purpose, the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance formed in 1933 to battle a municipal ordinance in New York that would have financially crippled Chinese laundries with a twenty-five-dollar licensing fee and one-thousand-dollar security bond.⁵⁵ Both organizations believed they represented their employees and employers equally in their efforts to defend Chinese small businesses. After the formation of Local 211 by the AFL, the Chinese Restaurant Association changed its name to the Chinese Restaurant Workers and Merchants' Association to reflect its commitment to workers who had been members since its formation. Another Chinatown organization, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), resolved conflicts among restaurants, the major point of contention among them being territorial claims to city blocks.⁵⁶ This two-tiered organizational structure protected the Chinese restaurant industry from threats that emanated from both inside and outside the Chinese community.

Tensions existed between restaurant employees and owners even if they were not based on class antagonism. Chinese restaurants were collective enterprises. Many restaurant owners helped relatives come to the United States with immigration papers and loans. Shuck Wing's journey from Taishan to New York is just one example of how much immigrants and their relatives invested in the expensive and time-consuming process of immigration. As established immigrants, restaurant owners granted jobs in their restaurants to their brethren, who in turn provided cheap and reliable labor. This chain of favors bound restaurant employees to employers. Moreover, Confucian notions of obedience reinforced these new immigrants' sense of debt. In rural agricultural societies like Taishan, the family hierarchy organized people into positions of power and deference, in which the older males held authority over young males, women, and children. In Chinese-run businesses in America, this social order shaped workplace relationships to resemble family relationships in China: elder male relatives were employers and in positions of authority, while young relatives were employees and subservient to their elder relatives.⁵⁷ Restaurant workers who suffered through years of low pay, long hours, and hard work out of deference to their employers also grew to resent their superiors. Shuck

Wing and his relatives had plenty to gripe about, though they were too polite and too political to vent their frustrations openly. Instead, the Chin men made veiled complaints in their letters to one another about having “no free time,” earning too little, and being in poor health.⁵⁸ The close world of dependence among the Chins, however, necessitated that the employees of Chin family businesses keep their mouths shut in front of their superiors. The bonds of family complicated relations between employer and employee, thereby making conflicts in Chinese restaurants qualitatively different from those in a workplace of strangers.

The tensions simmering just below the surface of a Chinese-run restaurant erupted when employees wanted to form their own restaurants. In some ways, conflict was inevitable because the aspirations of employees and the wishes of employers were at odds with each other. While restaurant owners desired cheap labor for their restaurants, the workers saw their jobs as a means to an end. Newcomers like Shuck Wing migrated to the United States because they dreamed of showering their loved ones in China with luxury, and many hoped to achieve wealth by operating a restaurant. But there was not enough room in the restaurant industry for every aspiring cook and waiter to have his own restaurant. Established Chinese entrepreneurs realized this and created organizations that protected the industry from becoming oversaturated. One of the major functions of the CCBA was to minimize competition among restaurants. As the “general authority and great power” in Chinatown, the CCBA regulated the restaurant industry by forcing all major business transactions to go through it, or “the deal [would not be] recognized by the Association as legal.”⁵⁹ The CCBA arbitrated disputes and stipulated the distance between restaurants, with the intent of protecting the industry for the greater Chinese community. To some Chinese, the CCBA was the strong arm of the Chinese elite, and it certainly behaved that way by sending hired men to bully the Chinese who refused its dictates. Its executive board mediated the turf wars from a broader vantage point, however, than did those personally involved in interbusiness disputes.⁶⁰ Often times, these goals clashed with the ambitions of the Chinese thinking of a future for themselves and their families in China.

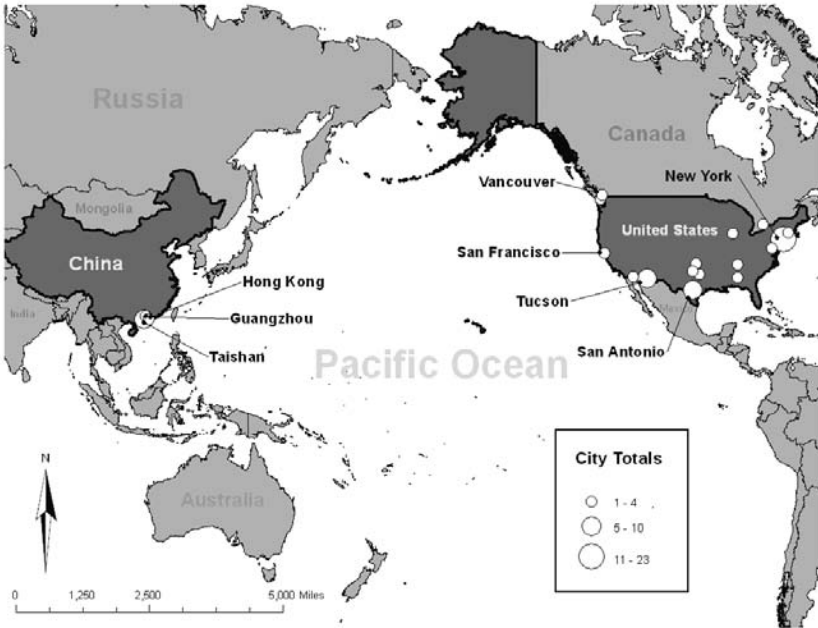
Ironically, it was Shuck Wing’s family, rather than the CCBA, that blocked his path to self-employment. Throughout his time in the United States, Shuck Wing considered opening his own business on several occasions, but the end of World War II presented an especially big window of opportunity. He regarded the war’s end as his ticket out of the U.S. Air Force, into which he had been drafted. He and one of his brothers were looking for a restaurant “on

a big main street” in downtown San Antonio, Texas. On December 10, 1945, Guang Yan wrote that he had found a “chop suey restaurant” that its owner was willing to sell for \$6,000. He invited Shuck Wing to “come take a look” and decide if they were “getting a good deal” for the business.⁶¹ Shuck Wing, however, never bought this restaurant and never moved to Texas. Instead, he returned to New York after the war and worked in various service industry jobs until he grew too old, dying at a boarding house at 111 Mott Street in 1987. There is no document to explain what stopped Shuck Wing from opening a restaurant, although we do know that important figures in his life opposed this venture. Upon learning about Shuck Wing’s intentions, his mother asked him to be cautious: “I advise you to fully investigate your opportunities . . . so that you avoid being tricked by other people.” His brother Guang Lin also opposed Shuck Wing’s plans, ordering that his professional ambitions “should wait,” reminding him that his greatest contribution to the family came from respecting commands from his elders. Or in the words of his mother, “work hard and come home soon”—ask for nothing more and do nothing less.⁶²

Life beyond the Kitchen Doors: Why Did the Chinese Endure Such Hard Work?

The family dispute over Shuck Wing’s intended restaurant was a classic conflict of the individual versus the collective. The twist in this story is that Shuck Wing sought to serve the Chin clan by opening a restaurant, a move that key relatives regarded as selfish and damaging to family harmony. Indeed, the Chins reacted strongly to Shuck Wing’s plans because allocations of any family member’s capital and labor affected the entire family and, therefore, needed to be carefully measured. During this era, the Chinese in China and the United States survived through collective action. This concept of “interdependence” motivated people like Shuck Wing to migrate to and make a living in the United States. Da Chen, a sociologist working in both the United States and China during the interwar period, described this commitment: “The peasant in South China is not an individualist. He feels himself bound to his sires and to his progeny by a blood relationship that involves both duties and benefits.”⁶³ That is, the Chinese viewed the world and their place in it through the needs of the entire family. Reality, however, did not always conform to this ideal. As a result, the Chins sought ways to keep the family intact through challenges that shook the delicate ties spanning vast geographies.

Shuck Wing’s family faced the difficult challenge of being scattered throughout North America and southern China (see map 3.2). To maintain a sense of



Map 3.2. The Chin family in China and North America, 1935–1946. Source: Bachelor's Apartment, 111 Mott Street Collection, Museum of Chinese in America, New York, NY. Map by the author.

family unity, the Chin men regularly wrote to one another about both mundane and extraordinary events in their lives. While Shuck Wing served in the U.S. Air Force, he wrote or received one letter a week, which amounted to 186 letters over 161 weeks.⁶⁴ The Chins benefited from the U.S. government's investments in mail delivery during World War II to ensure that its military personnel stayed in touch with their loved ones. After 1937, because the Japanese occupation had made communication with Taishan very difficult, the Chins relied on the U.S. postal service to relay news from China in their letters to one another. Shuck Wing's male friends and relatives in New York and Washington, DC, sporadically got bundles of mail from relatives in China. In total, they forwarded twenty-four letters that were meant for Shuck Wing to Tarrant Airfield in Fort Worth, Texas, where he was stationed. Shuck Wing's mother managed the household in his absence and needed his consent about decisions regarding schooling and marriage for his children. Unable to read or write, she counted on her educated nephew to send her wishes to Shuck Wing through the transpacific letter network. The role of men in this communication network should be striking to us today, because these men assumed the

duties of women in Western cultures. In short, the Chin men held the transpacific family together through their correspondence.⁶⁵

Shuck Wing embraced letter writing as his form of expression. He had attended the village school for two years as a young boy in Taishan but lacked the skills to write confidently as an adult.⁶⁶ As a result, even though Shuck Wing owned only a dozen books, two-thirds of them were on writing, including several dictionaries—both Chinese to Chinese and Chinese to English—and a letter-writing manual. Careful with his wording and calligraphy, he drafted letters before committing to a final version for the people listed in his little green address book.⁶⁷ His family would have understood the generosity of such gestures because they knew how precious his personal time was while he served in the military. In one letter, Shuck Wing openly lamented that “it [was] a hard life working as a cook in the barracks,” rising at 4:30 A.M. to bake fresh bread and retiring after midnight when the cleaning was done.⁶⁸ In addition to “being worked harder than beasts of burden,” the Chinese in the military faced “racial discrimination” and other forms of “unfair treatment” from white peers and superiors.⁶⁹ Correspondence with his family and friends, then, gave Shuck Wing temporary respite from the work, harassment, and loneliness he endured while in the military. Because the letters were his only line of contact to life beyond the barracks, he eagerly engaged in the regular exchange of letters with the other Chins in North America.

These exchanges served the greater social purpose of carrying on Chinese cultural traditions. At Christmas and Chinese New Year, Shuck Wing received cards and gifts of money from friends and relatives across North America. While Shuck Wing was stationed at Tarrant Airfield, he received nineteen holiday cards from friends and family, which, in total, contained \$95, which in 2012 would be worth \$1,270.⁷⁰ The money-stuffed cards were adaptations of Chinese red envelopes, gifts of money given during holidays and important life-cycle moments. In China, money trickled down the social hierarchy, from married to unmarried and from older to younger individuals.⁷¹ The Chins in North America embraced this practice, with elder or more established relatives and friends sending Shuck Wing holiday cards while he was in the military. It is unclear to whom and how much Shuck Wing himself gave, since his money cards do not survive, though the unused holiday cards that he left behind suggest that he, too, observed this custom.⁷²

The Chins also used letters to control the actions and behaviors of family members who threatened to break from the cycle of “duties and benefits.” Away from the village and the close watch of relatives and friends, those living in North America had more freedom to live for themselves than they had ever

experienced before. Loneliness and hard work pushed some men to find pleasure in gambling and extramarital affairs.⁷³ Shuck Wing was not immune to such temptation. In 1939, Shuck Wing met Vera Bartlow while working at Jim Lee Laundry, and the two began a relationship that continued through some of his time in the air force. Bartlow was a white sales clerk and lived just around the corner from the laundry. While Shuck Wing was stationed at Tarrant Air Field, they exchanged letters every few weeks and met during his furloughs. Shuck Wing occasionally supported her financially.⁷⁴ When news of his relationship with her spread through the family grapevine, his relatives intervened to remind Shuck Wing of his obligations to the Chin family. Guang Lin, his older brother in Washington, DC, pressured him to end the relationship:

I can tell [what's going on] without you saying anything—concealing is very difficult because the rocks can be seen when the water is clear. In my opinion, why not confess. It's better than hiding the truth. . . . I have some words of advice for you—in this society, you should know the way to deal with people and things. Being unethical, immoral, and unappreciative . . . you must then correct what you have done in the past, cleanse your heart, and determine to be a man; to study should be the order of your life as well as the establishment of a sense of obligation. Be cautious of becoming a prideful, arrogant, and selfish man.⁷⁵

To Guang Lin, Shuck Wing needed to renew his commitment to the family. Extramarital relationships with local women were not uncommon and sometimes tolerated as a consequence of families sending men to work abroad.⁷⁶ They were unacceptable, however, if they interfered with men's abilities to financially support their families in China. At the time of Guang Lin's reproach, Shuck Wing was unable to send money home and unwilling to maintain communication with his mother, behaviors that threatened to dissolve the social pact that bound him to China. If he abandoned his family in China, another male relative would have had to assume Shuck Wing's responsibilities. Therefore, his relatives had a stake in convincing him to maintain his duties as a son, husband, and father.

As a means of maintaining family cohesion, letter writing was an imperfect tool for keeping people in the fold because it also occasionally alienated them from the family network. During his first ten years (1937–1946), Shuck Wing remained true to his purpose for coming to the United States. He received twenty-two requests for money from relatives in China and sent back money on sixteen occasions. In 1939 alone, not long before communication to Dragon Village was cut off, Shuck Wing sent home \$250, which in 2012 would be

worth \$4,129.⁷⁷ He also participated in the cultural life of the village by doing favors for relatives, who in turn helped his mother with family affairs. Shuck Wing improved his family's social standing among the seventeen families in Dragon Village by sending gifts of cash and goods from the United States to elders in China.⁷⁸ Local power brokers returned the favors with small loans when his family was in need. But in 1946, Shuck Wing abruptly cut off contact with people in China. He stopped writing and sending money, and eventually his family quietly disappeared from his life. In the last surviving letter, dated June 24, 1946, his daughter wrote to thank him for the money she had received and to describe how she had spent it. She reminded him that Mrs. Chin, her grandmother and Shuck Wing's mother, had a birthday soon and wished for her father's return.⁷⁹ As far as we can tell from the records, Shuck Wing neither replied nor returned to China. He lived out the remainder of his life separated from his family and working wage jobs in New York City. After ten years, Shuck Wing had broken away from the transpacific social network that had embraced him so tightly.

Conclusion

The transpacific family network that sustained the Chins through years of separation was a delicate web. Letter writing imperfectly extended a culture of obligation into the everyday lives of wage earners who worked for their relatives in small family businesses across the United States. As a Chin family wage worker, Shuck Wing felt his relatives' disapproval when he made plans that might have severed his overseas ties. Chins from across the globe sent letters that guided Shuck Wing away from opening his own restaurant and persuaded him to end his relationship with Vera Bartlow, the white sales clerk. His relatives meddled in Shuck Wing's life because he played a critical role in the Chin family's collective struggle for success. The family had invested much time and money in bringing Shuck Wing to the United States, which his relatives believed obligated him to accept a life of sacrifice for the family. His service to the Chin family as a dutiful laborer was essential to making the Chin family businesses in North America profitable. Accordingly, he was asked to surrender himself to the collective and to become one of thousands of Chinese workers who cooked and served Chinese food to American consumers. In death as in life, Shuck Wing was just another worker.⁸⁰

As a man who cooked for others, Shuck Wing provides a case study for understanding Chinese restaurant operations during the era of Chinese Exclusion. My examination of Chinese restaurant life puts a face and name to the

anonymous and forgotten masses whose labor built the Chinese restaurant industry into what it is today. Given that the Chinese restaurant industry continues to grow and that the Chinese can easily find work in it, Chinese of all backgrounds—from educated professionals to semiliterate manual laborers—share the experience of cooking over sizzling stoves or waiting on disgruntled customers. Yet the information about this prevailing experience is limited to autobiographical or literary portraits of restaurant life and statistical reports on Chinese occupations. As a close study of one Chinese restaurant worker in New York, I hope to have sharpened our historical understanding of this common Chinese American experience by humanizing the work of feeding the “eager exodus toward Chinatown.” By studying the barely articulated and unquantifiable aspects of the experience for Chinese restaurant workers, we learn that these anonymous bachelors who dished out chop suey day in and day out have histories and aspirations that crisscross the Asia Pacific and the continental United States.

Notes

My thanks to the K-Team Writing Group for nurturing this work through many drafts and for picking through it with a fine comb in its final stages. I am deeply indebted to my dissertation committee for guiding me through the hurdles I faced while researching and writing. I wish honor to my family, especially my mother, whose love and support made this research possible. Mom, your patience and dedication to the ones you love are bottomless, and I am infinitely grateful to be on the receiving end.

1. *Chop suey* is the Chinese term for “different pieces” and is the name for stir-fried hash served over rice or noodles.
2. Bertram Reinitz, “Our Town and Its Folk: Chop Suey’s New Role,” *New York Times*, December 27, 1925.
3. I calculated these restaurant statistics from business information in the Chinese Exclusion Case files for New York City. I examined 115 of 225 files on Chinese immigrants who listed restaurant work as their primary occupation. From these 115 files, I gathered information on assets, gross receipts, purchases, and expenses. The restaurants included in these calculations operated in the 1920s and 1930s. These statistics calculated from these records are cited as Chinese Exclusion restaurant business data, 1920–1939. See Shepard Schwartz, “Mate-Selection among New York City’s Chinese Males, 1931–38,” *American Journal of Sociology* 56, no. 6 (1951): 563.
4. For the remainder of this chapter, I refer to Chin Shuck Wing as Shuck Wing to distinguish him from his brothers who share the last name Chin. I chose this romanization of the Chinese characters 甄灼榮 because he used this transliteration in his legal documents. I refer to one of his uncles by his legal English name and to his mother as Mrs. Chin. In all other romanizations of Chinese names, I use pinyin phonetics and place the family name first.
5. Madeline Y. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882–1943* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 16–18.

6. Chin Shuck Wing file, San Francisco, January 20, 1936, 35841/7-4, Chinese Arrival File, San Francisco, Records of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, RG 85, National Archives and Records Administration, Pacific Region, San Bruno, CA. Hereafter I refer to this archive as CAF, SF.
7. Da Chen, *Emigrant Communities in South China: A Study of Overseas Migration and Its Influence on Standards of Living and Social Change*, ed. Bruno Lasker (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1940), 86–89.
8. Letter from Mrs. Chin, China, to Chin Shuck Wing, USA, January 2, 1937, accession no. 2009.006.265, Bachelor's Apartment / 111 Mott St. Collection, Museum of Chinese in America, New York. Hereafter I refer to the Bachelor's Apartment / 111 Mott St. Collection as BA.
9. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold*, 21–23, 42.
10. Chen, *Emigrant Communities in South China*, 72.
11. Letter from Zhen Yong Han, Guangzhou, China, to Chin Shuck Wing, New York, May 3, 1937, Accession Number 2009.006.008, BA.
12. Letter from Zhen Yong Huai, China, to Chin Shuck Wing, USA, April 15 1936, accession no. 2009.006.078, BA; Letter from Mrs. Chin, China, to Chin Shuck Wing, USA, January 2, 1937, accession no. 2009.006.266, BA.
13. To make this calculation, I converted the total remittances Mrs. Chin received in 1937 to Hong Kong dollars and then to U.S. dollars. In 1937, HK\$1 was worth 2.116 Chinese yuan, and in 1939, US\$1 was worth HK\$5. In 1937, Mrs. Chin received 1,000 Chinese yuan and HK\$200 from Shuck Wing. I used an inflation calculator provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics to arrive at a 2012 U.S. dollar value for Shuck Wing's total remittances in 1937. Letters from Mrs. Chin, China, to Chin Shuck Wing, USA, April 28, 1937, accession nos. 2009.006.289, BA, 2009.006.265, BA, and 2009.006.266, BA; remittance from Chin Shuck Wing, New York, to Wu Shi Lian, Hong Kong, September 25, 1939, accession no. 2009.006.201, BA; available at http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm (accessed November 1, 2012).
14. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold*, 31, 43; Chen, *Emigrant Communities in South China*, 83.
15. Chin Shuck Wing file, CAF, SF; Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882–1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 111–16, 131–18; Lucy E. Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers: Chinese Immigrants and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 57–68.
16. Application for Certificate of Identity for Chin Shuck Wing, January 23, 1936; Letter from Edward L. Haff, district director, San Francisco, to Stidger and Root, San Francisco, December 20, 1935; affidavit of Chin Yee Kim, January 7, 1936; form 2508, December 20, 1935, Chin Shuck Wing file, CAF, SF.
17. Letter from R. A. Scott, inspector in charge, Tucson, AZ, to Edward L. Haff, district director, San Francisco, September 9, 1935; letter from Edward L. Haff, district director, San Francisco, to American consul general, Hong Kong, October 3, 1935, Chin Shuck Wing file, CAF, SF.
18. Chin Shuck Wing file, CAF, SF.
19. Ibid.
20. Chin Shuck Wing's health inspection card, Hong Kong, November 27, 1935, accession no. 2009.006.147, BA; Elizabeth Sinn, "Hong Kong as an In-Between Place in the Chinese Diaspora, 1849–1939," in *Connecting Seas and Connected Ocean Rims: Indian, Atlantic, and Pacific Oceans and China Seas Migrations from the 1830s to the 1930s*, ed.

- Donna R. Gabaccia and Dirk Hoerder (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 225–47; application for Certificate of Identity for Chin Shuck Wing, CAF, SF.
21. Erika Lee and Judy Yung, *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 9–15.
 22. Summary report by R. W. Hanlen, chairman of the Board of Special Inquiry, San Francisco, January 20, 1936, Chin Shuck Wing file, CAF, SF.
 23. Lee and Yung, *Angel Island*, 338, n. 7.
 24. Application for Certificate of Identity for Chin Shuck Wing, CAF, SF; letter from Zhen Yong Huai, accession no. 2009.006.078, BA.
 25. Louis J. Beck, *New York's Chinatown: An Historical Presentation of Its People and Places* (New York: Bohemia Publishing, 1898), 6–8, 48–49.
 26. *Ibid.*, 47, 49–54.
 27. Wong Chin Foo, “The Chinese in New York,” *The Cosmopolitan*, June 1888, 304.
 28. Michael Diehl, et al., “Acculturation and the Composition of the Diet of Tucson’s Overseas Chinese Gardeners at the Turn of the Century,” *Historical Archeology* 32, no. 4 (1998): 19–33; Renqui Yu, *To Save China, to Save Ourselves: The Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance of New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 27.
 29. Wong, “The Chinese in New York,” 305.
 30. “Chinese Farmers in Greater New York,” *New York Times*, August 4, 1901; Warner Montagnie Van Norden, *Who’s Who of the Chinese in New York* (New York, 1918), 33.
 31. “The Chinese within Our Gates,” *New York Times*, July 20, 1890.
 32. Arthur Bonner, *Alas! What Brought Thee Hither? The Chinese in New York, 1800–1950* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997), 33–40.
 33. Heather R. Lee, “The Chinese in New York: A Look at Popular Representations of the Chinese by American Writers from 1808–1940” (master’s thesis, Emory University, 2004), 74–113; Bonner, *Alas!*, 97–107; Andrew Haley, *Turning the Tables: Restaurants and the Rise of the American Middle Class, 1880–1920* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2011), 95–105.
 34. Renqui Yu, “Chop Suey: From Chinese Food to Chinese American Food,” *Chinese America: History and Perspectives* 1 (1987): 87–99; Andrew Coe, *Chop Suey: A Cultural History of Chinese Food in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 160–72; George S. Chappell, *The Restaurants of New York* (New York: Greenberg, 1925), 160.
 35. Chinese Exclusion Restaurant Business Data, 1920–1939; Bernard Wong, *Patronage, Brokerage, Entrepreneurship and the Chinese Community of New York* (New York: AMS Press, 1988), 116–18, 121–27.
 36. Fong Yee King file, New York, September 30, 1921, file 6/436; Samuel Meisler file, New York, October 13, 1921, file 6/436; Mui Tin Yuen file, New York, October 26, 1921, file 6/579, Chinese Exclusion Acts case files, New York, Records of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, RG 85, National Archives and Records Administration, Northeast Region, New York, NY; Wayne Wong, *American Paper Son: A Chinese Immigrant in the Midwest*, ed. Benson Tong (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 36–37.
 37. Chinese Exclusion Restaurant Business Data, 1920–1939; Louis H. Chu, “The Chinese Restaurants in New York City” (master’s thesis, New York University, 1939), 24; U.S.

- Bureau of the Census, *Sixteen Census of the United States*, vol. 2, *Population* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943), 157.
38. Chin Shuck Wing's Certification of Separation from the U.S. Army, September 29, 1945, accession no. 2009.006.149, BA.
 39. Chu, "The Chinese Restaurants in New York City," 41.
 40. *Ibid.*; Julia Hsuan Chen, "The Chinese Community in New York: A Study in Their Cultural Adjustment, 1920–1940" (master's thesis, American University, 1941), 55.
 41. Chu, "The Chinese Restaurants in New York City," 45.
 42. *Ibid.*; Chinese Exclusion Restaurant Business Data, 1920–1939.
 43. Chu, "The Chinese Restaurants in New York City," 45–48; John Jung, *Sweet and Sour: Life in Chinese Family Restaurants* (Los Angeles: Yin and Yang Press, 2010), 62–64, 80–81, 212.
 44. Chu, "The Chinese Restaurants in New York City," 45, 49.
 45. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*, Special Report, Retail Distribution (Trade Series), *Food Retailing* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1934), 23–25; Rice Bowl Restaurant account books, 1945–1948, accession no. 2006.003.648, Marcella Dear Chin Collection, Museum of Chinese in America, New York.
 46. Chinese Exclusion Restaurant Business Data, 1920–1939; Chu, "The Chinese Restaurants in New York City," 48, 49–50; Beck, *New York's Chinatown*, 54.
 47. Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 61–62.
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 49. Alexander Saxton, *Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 271–78; Fred Greenbaum, "The Social Ideas of Samuel Gompers," *Labor History* 7, no. 1 (1966): 42–44.
 50. "Sign Waiters' Agreement," *New York Times*, May 29, 1920; "2,000 Waiters Win All Wage Demands," *New York Times*, May 31, 1922; "Tips Not Wages, NRA Board Rules," *New York Times*, November 15, 1933; "To Set Hotel, Restaurant Wage," *New York Times*, November 25, 1935.
 51. Chu, "The Chinese Restaurants in New York City," 36–37; Peter Kwong, *Chinatown, N.Y.: Labor and Politics, 1930–1950* (1979; repr., New York: New Press, 2001), 88–90.
 52. Kwong, *Chinatown*, 89.
 53. *Ibid.*; Him Mark Lai, *Chinese American Transnational Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 84–88; Yu, *To Save China*, 158–59.
 54. Chu, "The Chinese Restaurants in New York City," 31; Thomas Chow, "Chinese Restaurateurs Association of Greater New York," March 22, 1937, Federal Writer's Project, WPA, New York City Unit, Racial Groups 1 Series, Microfilm Reel 66; Wong, *Patronage, Brokerage, Entrepreneurship*, 102–3.
 55. Yu, *To Save China*, 32–43.
 56. Wong, *Patronage, Brokerage, Entrepreneurship*, 137–42.
 57. Yuen-Fong Woon, *Social Organization in South China, 1911–1949: The Case of the Kuan Lineage of K'ai-p'ing County* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1984), 1–10.
 58. Letter from Zhen Guang Jian, New York, to Chin Shuck Wing, Fort Worth, TX, 1943, accession no. 2009.006.120, BA; letter from Zhen Yi Yu, San Francisco, to Chin Shuck

- Wing, Fort Worth, TX, June 23, 1943, accession no. 2009.006.045, BA; letter from Zhen Guang Lin, Washington, DC, to Chin Shuck Wing, Fort Worth, TX, April 19, 1943, accession no. 2009.006.005, BA.
59. Beck, *New York's Chinatown*, 19; bylaws of the CCBA, cited in Wong, *Patronage, Brokerage, Entrepreneurship*, 89.
 60. Wong, *Patronage, Brokerage, Entrepreneurship*, 84–90.
 61. Letter from Zhen Guang Yan, San Antonio, TX, to Chin Shuck Wing, Fort Worth, TX, December 10, 1945, accession no. 2009.006.114, BA.
 62. Letter from Mrs. Chin, accession no. 2009.006.265, BA; letter from Zhen Guang Lin, Washington, DC, to Chin Shuck Wing, Fort Worth, TX, September 3, 1945, accession no. 2009.006.109, BA; letter from Mrs. Chin, China, to Chin Shuck Wing, New York, December 11, 1939, accession no. 2009.006.264, BA.
 63. Chen, *Emigrant Communities in South China*, 123; Hazel Rose Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, "Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation," *Psychological Review* 98, no. 2 (1991): 224–53.
 64. While Shuck Wing was in the air force, he received ninety-three letters from friends and relatives in North America. To get this figure, I counted only those letters and empty envelopes in the Bachelor Apartment / 111 Mott St. Collection that originated in North America, were addressed to Shuck Wing, and were posted or dated while Shuck Wing was in the service. I did not count the letters from his girlfriends, his relatives in China, and his unsent correspondences. Shuck Wing's letters to friends and family have been lost. Assuming that he responded to each letter, I estimate that Shuck Wing exchanged a total of 186 letters over a 161-week period.
 65. For an example of letter forwarding, see the letter from Zhen Guang Yao, China, to Chin Shuck Wing, Fort Worth, TX, June 8, 1943, accession no. 2009.003.047, BA; Micaela Di Leonardo, "The Female World of Cards and Holidays: Women, Families, and the Work of Kinship," *Signs* 12, no. 3 (1987): 440–53.
 66. Chin Shuck Wing file, CAF, SF.
 67. Writing Guidebooks, accession nos. 2004.006.076, 2004.006.138, BA; dictionaries, accession nos. 2004.006.080, 2004.006.081, 2004.006.082, 2004.006.084, 2004.006.136, and 2004.006.137, BA; address book, ca. 1942–1945, accession no. 2006.003.083, BA; unsent letters from Chin Shuck Wing, accession nos. 2009.006.088, 2009.006.104, 2009.006.302, and 2009.006.303, BA; unused letterheads, accession nos. 2009.006.280–2009.006.283, BA.
 68. Letter from Zhen Guang Lin, accession no. 2009.006.005, BA; available at http://nisei.hawaii.edu/object/io_1160630003265.html (accessed July 27, 2011).
 69. Letter from Li Yuan, Camp Forrest, TN, to Chin Shuck Wing, Fort Worth, TX, October 25, 1943, accession no. 2009.006.069, BA.
 70. I estimate that each holiday card contained five dollars because of references to holiday gift money of five dollars in various correspondences. Holiday cards from Zhen Guang Lin, Washington, DC, to Chin Shuck Wing, Fort Worth, TX, December 19, 1943, accession no. 2009.006.066, BA; December 25 1944, accession no. 2009.006.138, BA.
 71. Kin Wai Michael Siu, "Red Packet: A Traditional Object in the Modern World," *Journal of Popular Culture* 35, no. 3 (2002): 103–25.
 72. Unused Christmas and New Year cards, ca. 1942–1945, accession nos. 2009.006.257, BA and 2009.006.308, BA.

73. Paul Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation* (New York: New York University Press, 1987), 227–49.
74. Letters from Vera Bartlow, New York, to Chin Shuck Wing, Fort Worth, TX, August 31, 1942, accession no. 2009.006.013, BA; November 16, 1942, accession no. 2009.006.030, BA; January 4, 1943, accession no. 2009.006.048, BA; February 19, 1943, accession no. 2009.006.044, BA; letter from Chin Shuck Wing, Fort Worth, TX, to Vera Bartlow, ca. 1942–1945, accession no. 2009.006.213, BA.
75. Letter from Guang Lin, accession no. 2009.006.120, BA.
76. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold*, 112–22; Adam McKeown, “Transnational Chinese Families and Chinese Exclusion, 1875–1943,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 18, no. 2 (1999): 73–110; Schwartz, “Mate-Selection among New York City’s Chinese Males,” 564–66.
77. Letters from Mrs. Chin, China, to Chin Shuck Wing, USA, November 19, 1939, accession nos. 2009.006.262, BA and 2009.006.264, BA; Bank of China remittance receipt, September 25, 1939, accession no. 2009.006.201, BA.
78. Letters from Mrs. Chin, China, to Chin Shuck Wing, USA, February 8, 1937, accession nos. 2009.006.015, BA and 2009.006.289, BA; letters from Ma Guang Shuo, China, to Chin Shuck Wing, USA, April 28, 1937, accession no. 2009.006.269, BA; May 29, 1942, accession no. 2009.006.050, BA.
79. Letter from Zhen Zhu, China, to Chin Shuck Wing, New York, June 24, 1946, accession no. 2009.006.312, BA.
80. Shuck Wing passed away in 1987 with no living friends or relatives to care for his things, so the tenants who replaced him at 111 Mott Street moved his possessions out of the way and forgot about them. A decade later, people working for the Museum of Chinese in America—located a few blocks away from Shuck Wing’s old apartment—salvaged his belongings from the dumpster. The museum staff called them the “Bachelor’s Apartment Collection,” since his identity was unknown at the time. These personal belongings are the accumulated effects of a man who worked in Chinese restaurants and laundries from his arrival to the United States in 1935 until his death more than four decades later.