

“well and favorably known”

Deciphering Chinese Merchant Status in the Immigration Office of Astoria, Oregon, 1900–1924

CHINESE IMMIGRANTS in the United States faced unprecedented federal restrictions, beginning in the late nineteenth century, that created significant obstacles to immigration and settlement. The effects of those laws played out through ongoing, individual relationships in the immigration offices of places such as Astoria, Oregon. From 1900 to 1924, individual immigration stations held a significant amount of autonomy, allowing local officials to develop their own methods for evaluating applicants' requests to enter, leave, and re-enter the United States. In Astoria, evidence from 162 separate immigration files shows that immigrants and officials negotiated a system of racial and economic strictures under which Chinese were not only distinguished by class — as required by law — but also within classes.¹ Officials in Astoria sought to differentiate Chinese merchants and laborers in accordance with the specifics of the federal exclusion laws, but they also further separated alleged merchants according to the perceived strength of their claims to legitimate business involvement. Study of the case files reveals that Astoria officials implicitly constructed three categories for Chinese businesses. Those categories guided, to a degree, interactions between Chinese and officials in the local office. Local inspectors made heavy use of personal qualities and individual situations to categorize firms and individuals, and the rough process both reflected the merchants' standing in the community and affected the ease or difficulty with which they were able to conduct affairs in the immigration office.²



Chan Ah Dogg, a leading merchant of the firm Hop Hing Lung, is pictured here on travel documents maintained by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. A labor contractor with multiple business interests, Dogg became the company's president in 1915.

Chinese immigration practices in Astoria were extensions of national exclusion laws that evolved over many decades and peaked in the 1920s. The 1862 Anti-Coolie Law and the 1875 Page Law targeted Chinese slaves and prostitutes, but neither had the sweeping impact of exclusion acts passed between 1882 and 1904 that explicitly denied immigration to all Chinese who did not fit into certain non-laboring categories.³ The initial



Chinese men in Portland await deportation under the watchful eye of an immigration official (far left) in 1922. According to a November 13, 1922, Oregonian article, the men were deported for various reasons, including having entered the county illegally and having committed crimes in the United States. Immigration officials had the authority to deport Chinese (or to not allow their admittance) based on a series of exclusionary national laws dating from 1882.

1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, as historian Erika Lee has remarked, changed the United States into “a new type of nation,” one defined by immigration gatekeeping.⁴ Historian Najia Aarim-Heriot asserts that the act functioned as the “hinge on which all subsequent American immigration policy turned and the foundation of American immigration law.” The act was originally designed as a ten-year measure but was extended for another decade by the 1892 Geary Act — “the most draconian immigration law ever passed,” according to historian Sucheng Chan.⁵ Congress added ten years again in 1902, and then passed a permanent extension in 1904. Various other acts, such as the 1888 Scott Act and 1891 Immigration Act, also tightened restrictions on immigration eligibility and complicated the bureaucratic requirements for travel by Chinese already in the United States. The Immigration Act of 1924, where this study ends, instituted national-origins-based quotas for the

first time, brought Chinese exclusion to its pinnacle, and extended exclusion policy to include Asians in general.⁶ The year 1900 marks a convenient starting place for this study because immigration records before the turn of the century are much less prolific and the processing apparently was less meticulous. The exclusion paradigm stayed in effect until 1943.⁷

Under the exclusion laws beginning in 1882, Chinese laborers were not allowed to enter the United States. An anti-Chinese movement that began during the late nineteenth century singled out laborers specifically as a threat to the white population of the United States; a family-oriented, Euro-American-friendly merchant class was preferable to a large number of male workers who did not speak English well or otherwise conform to many social and cultural norms.⁸ Laborers were defined by their activity in certain occupations — a definition that expanded over time — and Chinese were generally regarded as laborers unless they could show that they were not. Those who arrived before November 17, 1880, could leave and return if they obtained a special certificate. The right to return was revoked in 1888; but an 1894 treaty provided for the legal return of laborers who could claim one thousand dollars in property or debts owed, or who had a wife, child, or parent living in the United States.⁹ Although new laborers were excluded from entering the country during the time under study here, performing manual labor was not illegal for Chinese. Merchants therefore could legally act as labor contractors. Doing so may even have brought positive assessment from immigration officials, because labor contracting supported canning, a significant local industry.

Merchants, their families, and other exempt classes of Chinese could obtain certificates that allowed them not only to immigrate but also to travel to and from the United States.¹⁰ After 1892, Chinese legally in the United States were issued certificates of residence, later called certificates of identity; those were precursors to the green card.¹¹ Inspectors would check the certificates in the immigration office, but the documents did not guarantee entry. Officials assumed fraud, and in most cases they personally determined admission and readmission into the country. In the absence of verifiable facts, approval largely depended on the consistency of testimonies from witnesses and the inspectors' impressions of the applicants' veracity during extensive interrogations.¹² Chinese frequently used the court system to appeal unfavorable decisions — with some success — until a 1905 U.S. Supreme Court decision took away their right to appeal.¹³

While policy changes made the immigration process progressively stricter until 1924, ongoing shifts in administrative structure forced continual change that affected immigration offices like the one at Astoria. The chain of command above local immigration offices reorganized at least six times between

1891 and 1913, and those reorganizations — in addition to policy changes every few years — kept officials constantly adjusting to their jobs.¹⁴ That lack of stability, added to the loose structure of immigration enforcement exacerbated by the immense distances between the federal office and its satellites in the West, left local inspectors with a large amount of discretion in their implementation of policy.¹⁵ Since Astoria's immigration office was also subordinate to that of Portland, correspondence between the two was often required for official decisions to be finalized. Meanwhile, turnover within the local immigration office was high; at least ten men filled the role of Chinese inspector in Astoria between 1900 and 1924. A variety of translators and stenographers during the period also added to the volatility of the office.

Chinese inspectors were the primary government agents for local enforcement of exclusion policy after 1900. Specifically assigned to handle Chinese cases by the U.S. Bureau of Immigration, inspectors held posts in major cities such as Seattle, Portland, and San Francisco; smaller offices were established in ports such as Sumas, Washington, and Astoria. The Astoria port's role in processing immigrants became less prominent during the late nineteenth century. Portland emerged as the regional hub instead, and Astoria's inspectors functioned as subsidiaries of the Portland office during the period under study. In a typical Chinese immigration case in Astoria, the local inspector would conduct an investigation and then write to the Portland inspector-in-charge with a recommendation for approving or declining the application. Astoria officials did not have authority to make final decisions on Chinese cases, but they were responsible for interacting with the applicants and producing the information necessary to make a decision.

Local Chinese merchants took part in an extensive international economic network with a long history. They acted as contractors, helping other Chinese find work and providing them with necessary resources such as lodging, work supplies, and imported goods from China. The English-language skills of wealthy Chinese often made them better able to communicate with members of the white community, including government officials, thereby increasing their business opportunities and successes. Despite the strength of their overseas entrepreneurship, however, Chinese immigrants during this time period were commonly labeled by newspapers and unions (and other anti-Chinese immigration groups) as a population of laborers. Today, there still is little writing devoted to Astoria's merchants.¹⁶ Historian Marie Rose Wong explains, for example, that "a Chinatown and its merchant-based support system for supplying Chinese goods and services never took firm hold in Astoria."¹⁷ Although it is true that Astoria did not sustain a Chinese business class numerically comparable to those in Portland and San Francisco, merchants there did manage some success. As Chris Friday has shown, local



Chinese workers apply labels in Astoria's Bon Bon Salmon Cannery. The local salmon-canning industry, which peaked in the early 1880s, was a primary source of employment for Chinese in the area from the 1870s well into the twentieth century, despite exclusionary laws intended to keep Chinese laborers out of the workforce.

Chinese merchants in Astoria increased numerically between 1880 and 1910, and immigration records indicate that Chinese business networks maintained a significant presence and enjoyed financial success into the 1920s.¹⁸

Merchant status was central to, but also complicated by, the immigration process. Chinese merchants who performed no manual labor were privileged as a class under exclusion laws — along with students, teachers, tourists, and government officials — but Astoria officials grew to see differences among merchants and treated them accordingly. Based on that varied treatment, we can draw out three merchant categories created and implemented by local immigration officials: those in good standing, those in poor standing, and those in the middle who remained ambiguous. Merchants of respected firms (those in good standing) tended to have relatively fewer application complications, characterized by amiable, short interrogations and favorable comments from inspectors. Members from suspect firms (those in



Chinese merchants in Astoria conducted business in the Federal Customs House and Post Office — the tall building at the center of this 1898 photograph. Many Chinese people lived in the blocks between the office and the river. The Immigration Service was housed in the Page Building a few blocks away.

poor standing) tended to have more applications denied and to be treated with greater suspicion than those from respected firms; nevertheless, some had high success rates in the immigration office. Ambiguous firms were a blend. In cases concerning individuals associated with ambiguous firms, inspectors could not rely on company affiliation as a helpful indicator of how to proceed.

Astoria's officials divided Chinese firms into the three categories, largely based on what they knew about firms' attempts to evade the law as well as on the firms' financial status and success. Categorization by the immigration office rested on a firm's business reputation, its reputation in the community, and the composure and consistency of firm members' testimonies. "Good" companies did honest business and did not appear to be casting manual laborers as merchants or facilitating immigration on fake documentation. "Bad" businesses were either known or reputed to be involved in illegal immigration of some kind or thought to have existing members performing labor that negated their merchant status and thus their exclusion-defined right to

be in the country. Officials considered some such groups to be merely fronts for allowing Chinese laborers to falsely immigrate as merchants. Ambiguous firms were those that the federal Chinese inspectors could not firmly categorize; often, they involved merchants who were known as successful businessmen but not trusted as honest individuals.

Those three categories of Chinese firms existed only implicitly, but they had significant, real effects for individual Chinese as they attempted to do business, travel in and out of the country, and bring others from China to Astoria. Inspectors put a great deal of effort into delineating “good” and “bad” businesses and then used that framework as a guide for Chinese cases, which often lacked verifiable information. The framework provided the officials with a basis for action, but it also tied their decisions to precedent and hearsay. For Chinese, the categories made investigations easier for members of respected businesses and more difficult for those of suspected ones. It also elevated the practical importance of impressing individual inspectors over the need to actually comply with exclusion law. More broadly, the officials’ willingness to create categories and treat Chinese accordingly suggests a complex relationship between the Chinese and the enforcers of exclusion policy, one in which officials opposed some Chinese but supported the endeavors of others in ways not easily defined by the federal laws that predicted their relationship. The following case studies explore that relationship, allowing us to see how the categories affected individual lives as well as the broader business and immigrant communities in Astoria.

ONE OF ASTORIA’S MOST SUCCESSFUL Chinese firms was Hop Hing Lung, a longtime contracting and importing business that had been buoyed by an influx of cannery labor that began during the 1870s. Labor contracting provided the company’s major revenue stream, and Hop Hing Lung supplied laborers to as many as eighteen canneries. “They are the largest contractors on the coast,” affirmed Samuel Gordon, a cashier at First National Bank, in 1914.¹⁹ Hop Hing Lung also had a company store that sold imported goods to local Chinese, and at least one of the firm’s members received commissions for selling Canadian Pacific Railway tickets to Chinese workers.²⁰ Boarders, probably seasonal cannery hands, rented bunks above the store. Overall, it was a profitable endeavor. Secretary Ing Wong estimated in 1909 that the firm imported goods to Astoria worth \$30,000 annually; by 1920, the firm was trading close to \$60,000 per business year, equivalent to roughly \$10 million in 2011.²¹

Hop Hing Lung’s core members comprised a lineup of well-connected merchants who were both familiar and respected in the immigration office. Members of the firm were so highly regarded that local inspectors filled

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
IMMIGRATION SERVICE

Office of Immigrant Inspector,

Port of Astoria, Oregon,

April 21, 1927, 191

To E. A. Dueber
Chinese and Immigrant Inspector

Astoria, Oregon.

Sir: It being my intention to leave the United States on a temporary visit abroad, and to depart and return through the Chinese port of entry of Seattle, Wash., I hereby apply, under the provisions of Rule 15 of the Regulations of the Department of Labor, for preinvestigation of my claimed status as a lawfully domiciled merchant



I submit herewith the names of two (or more) "credible witnesses other than Chinese" who can testify of their own knowledge that for at least one year immediately preceding the date of this application I have been engaged in the occupation of merchant, and have not performed any manual labor except such as was necessary in the conduct of my said occupation. I am prepared to appear personally and to produce before you at such time and place as you may designate the said witnesses and (if a merchant) the partnership or other books of the firm in which I claim membership.

The names and addresses of my witnesses are:

S. S. Gordon, Astoria, Oregon.

D. P. Belcher, Astoria, Oregon.

TO BE FILLED OUT IF MERCHANT

The firm in which I claim membership is known as Hop Hing Lung Co.,

Address No. 328 Bond St. City Astoria State Oregon.

My partners in said business are as set forth in the partnership list of our firm filed with U. S. Immigration office, Astoria, Oregon

My interest therein amounts to \$ 7500.00 and was acquired in \$6000.00 on 2/30/11 \$1500.00 on 8/1/23, 19 . It is not my intention to dispose of such interest while absent from the United States. During the entire year last past I have performed no manual labor other than that necessary to the conduct of the said mercantile business.

TO BE FILLED OUT IF TEACHER OR STUDENT

I have been engaged during the entire year last past in the occupation of teaching or studying (name branches taught or studied)

at the following place or places _____ and during the said time have not engaged in the performance of manual labor.

Signature in Chinese 陳亞錄

Signature in English Chan Ag Dogg

Address 328 Bond St., Astoria, Oregon.

Height 5 feet 5 1/2 inches

Physical marks or peculiarities Scar on left cheek.

Subscribed and sworn to before me, this 22nd day of April, 1927,

191
E. A. Dueber
Chinese and Immigrant Inspector.

Respectfully forwarded to _____, 191
COMMISSIONER OF IMMIGRATION or INSPECTOR IN CHARGE, Port of _____
accompanied by triplicate hereof, transcripts of testimony and report, in accordance with Rule 15.

Chan Ag Dogg, an entrepreneur with the Hop Hing Lung Co., traveled to China and returned to the United States several times during the early decades of the twentieth century, often without incident. The witness listed here as "S.S. Gordon" may have been Samuel Gordon, who testified on behalf of Hop Hing Lung as early as 1914.

their case files with high praise — in contrast to the suspicion and cynicism typically found in reports on other firms. Besides the economic benefits that high regard probably entailed, Hop Hing Lung’s good relations with local officials also paved the way for international travel and family immigration. The firm’s most prominent merchant was Chan Ah Dogg, an entrepreneur who rose to vice president and then president of the firm by 1915.²² A respected labor contractor, Dogg also owned property in downtown Astoria and held interest in such ventures as the Portland-based Ong Hing Company, the Quong Yick Land Company, and a steamship business running between San Francisco and China. According to Gordon, Chan personally conducted \$150,000 in business during 1916, a figure that increased to exceed \$250,000 only three years later. The bank loaned him as much as \$10,000 at once without security.²³

In the process of his wealth-building, Dogg traveled to China at least every four years. His trips were facilitated by the local inspectors’ glowing recommendations as well as their apparent reluctance to scrutinize the details of his activities, making his file a model of the leniency afforded successful and prestigious merchants. When Dogg’s departure by way of Seattle in 1914 prompted that city’s immigration commissioner to order an investigation, Portland Inspector-in-Charge John H. Barbour pondered: “What is the purpose in subsequently investigating the case of Chin Ah Dogg when it appears of record that he holds a certificate of residence showing his right to be and remain within the United States, whatever be his occupation?” Inspector Raphael P. Bonham followed suit in the Portland office. After Dogg’s next trip eastward in 1916–1917, Seattle once again requested



Courtesy Victor Kee

Sing Hee (left) was a prominent barber in Astoria, famed from her arrival in the early 1920s. Low Lin Yow (right), the well-known wife of Chan Ah Dogg, had significant business interests of her own.

an investigation in Oregon. Bonham ignored the directive for nine months before forwarding it to inspector Earl T. Gooch in Astoria, who responded five days later in Dogg's favor without adding any testimony to the record. To the Seattle office, Bonham nonchalantly explained that "an earlier report would have been submitted, but through some inadvertence your letter was filed and the matter overlooked."²⁴ When authorities actually investigated Dogg in 1919, there was no shortage of respectable witnesses; testimonies touched on his business ventures, uprightness, and good standing in the community. Dogg also had a family in Astoria, and the files for his wife and daughter are likewise full of highly positive remarks.²⁵

Immigration case files for other partners at Hop Hing Lung evince similarly good relations with the white elite, suggesting that affiliation with a reputable company influenced the social standing of individual Chinese. Two members may have been relatives of Chan Ah Dogg: Chin Shing Gee, and Chin Back, *Chin* and *Chan* being two names that were often interchanged by English-speaking Americans. Chin Shing Gee served as an interpreter in the immigration office, and the case files indicate that he was also an influential capitalist. He did not join Hop Hing Lung until 1915, when he purchased Wong Hong Bong's share, but he had been working in the United States for twenty years before a 1917 visit to China, which he made to bring his wife and daughter to the United States. That immigration application seems to have gone entirely in the applicant's favor as Shing Gee secured testimony from a white cigar maker, druggist, and tailor, as well as from Dogg. When inspector Gooch became shorthanded during the investigation, he opted to abbreviate the questioning rather than delay the process; shortly thereafter he issued a favorable recommendation. Shing Gee later adopted a boy, adding to his family status. Notably, his family resided outside the Chinese district, which could suggest (among other causes) acceptance from the white community or Chinese disdain for those who took employment with the Immigration Service. Either way, the relative ease with which Shing Gee was able to bring a family into the country supports the notion that he had ties to Astoria's white power-holders and also points to a bias in favor of successful Chinese merchants, particularly those of Hop Hing Lung.²⁶

Chin Back's case, twelve years before Chin Shing Gee's, indicates a similar relationship with immigration officials. Back had arrived in Astoria in 1884 at age twenty-seven and worked as a laborer for fourteen years. Then, in 1898, he became an original member of Hop Hing Lung, a palpable rise in status. He was granted a merchant's return without delay or problem in 1903 by Inspector George W. Lerner and again in 1907 by Inspector Bonham. Before his second trip, Back testified that he was an active member of Hop Hing Lung, an important distinction because many shareholders in Chinese firms

did not actually work for the business, and some even occupied themselves as laborers, the targets of exclusion law.²⁷ By most accounts, Hop Hing Lung carried around twenty shareholders before the turn of the century; but in 1907, Chin Back mentioned only Chin Fook Sing, Ng Wong, Leong Yip, and Dogg as active members besides himself, out of twenty-two total attributed to the firm.²⁸ This means that the other seventeen shareholding individuals were not directly involved in the business operations of Hop Hing Lung and likely were performing some type of manual labor, perhaps in a distant locale. Technological limitations made it difficult for authorities to keep track of each member's whereabouts, much less his economic habits, and inspectors depended heavily on testimony from parties, like Chin Back, who were deemed reliable sources of information. Back had secured influential witnesses, including Dogg, Charles Page, and Charles Brown, and being an original member of Hop Hing Lung probably also worked in his favor.

Other important members of Hop Hing Lung carried the Ing and Wong names. Ing Fook and Ing How were both founding members of Hop Hing Lung, and it seems likely that Ing Wong, How's brother, was in the original group as well. It is not clear from the immigration files what sort of work Ing Fook performed, but he claimed in both 1907 and 1920 to be an active member, and Low Lin Yow affirmed that he worked in the company store in 1910. Given his proficiency in English, it is likely that he dealt with non-Chinese customers and business contacts.²⁹ Fook claimed American birth, as did Ing How, who was born in Portland in 1874. Two separate immigration files were produced for How, one in 1908 and one in 1914, and though neither developed much detail, there is evidence of How's good status. No hint of controversy manifested in his travels, even in 1914, when he completely disregarded immigration protocol and exited the country without notice. Chan Ah Dogg's explanation, along with inspector Bonham's own personal familiarity with the departed applicant, made the hurried trip a cordial non-issue.³⁰ Interestingly, though Wong and his two relatives claimed American birth, none used citizenship as a means of returning to the country. The inspector even asked Wong why he bothered to apply for a merchant's return when he could travel as a U.S. citizen; Wong replied that he had traveled as a merchant before and now wanted the same. Further questioning revealed that Fook and Wong did not actually possess birth certificates. Fortunately for Wong, his prevalence in testimonies as the Hop Hing Lung secretary and store manager, the strength of the company's reputation, and his acquaintance with the inspectors sufficed to conveniently smooth his immigration process.³¹

Ing Wong is also noteworthy because, while he belonged to the Ing clan, he also shared the Wong name. The Wongs were notable contributors to Hop



Ing Wong, another successful merchant on good terms with local officials, is pictured here in an immigration photo.

Hing Lung, individually and collectively, and their involvement in Astoria's Chinese merchant economy rivaled that of any other Chinese clan in the city. In the Hop Hing Lung firm, Wong Sang worked as a foreman, Wong Ngui Gen was a clerk, and Wong Joe became the manager, all shortly before or after 1920.³² Sang and Joe also managed to each bring a wife and children from China, and Joe served as a trustee for the estate of Wong Wing Sing, another Hop Hing Lung merchant, who died suddenly in 1920, leaving his family with a small fortune — nearly \$26,000, the equivalent today of almost \$1.5 million.³³

Perhaps the most accomplished Wong in Hop Hing Lung was Wong Fook Lam. He reported the same birth year and location as Ing How, and at age thirty-three in 1907 was living over the company store. He did not apply for merchant status that year — he was approved for merchant status in later years — though he was wealthy enough to make a trip to China as a shareholder in both Chan Ah Dogg’s Quong Yick Land Company and Hop Hing Lung. Already a labor contractor in 1907, by 1910 Fook Lam was the foreman at the Kinney cannery in downtown Astoria. Bonham attested in 1907 that Fook Lam was “well and favorably known to many white people here, has the reputation of being well to do, and his connection with the canneries is unquestioned.”³⁴ Various testimonies refer to Fook Lam as both manager and treasurer of Hop Hing Lung, and by 1920 he sat as president and



Courtesy National Archives, Seattle

Wong Fook Lam, Chan Ah Dogg’s successor as president of Hop Hing Lung Company, also grew wealthy as a merchant and was “well and favorably known to many white people” in Astoria.



Wong Lam (far left) and family take a trip to China. It was common for merchants, once they had enough funds, to travel back to their homeland to visit relatives, conduct business matters, and help others immigrate to the United States.

was a principal shareholder. Together with his wife Grace Wong Lam, he raised ten children; he also lodged a younger cousin, Wong Hong Bong, who he helped to return from a trip across the Pacific in 1921.³⁵ Fook Lam later turned exclusively to labor contracting in a profitable partnership with his old friend Dogg, for which the latter deposited funds in excess of \$160,000 in 1926.³⁶

While concentrating his business interests helped Wong Fook Lam to become wealthy, another Hop Hing Lung member, Leong Yip,

spread his investments across several local firms, with mixed results. Yip also held shares in the Yee On Company and the Hop Yick Shing Kee Company, and it appears that his role in Hop Hing Lung was limited to that of a shareholder (rather than an active partner). Still, his presence in the firm is curious as he was the only Leong in the business, and the other companies he associated with differed markedly from Hop Hing Lung in terms of reputation. Yip was something of an elder statesman in Chinatown, testifying frequently for his compatriots, and his closeness to cases and companies involving illegal immigrants illustrates the difficulty that immigration officials faced in separating trustworthy and suspect Chinese. Although records indicate that no legal action was taken against Yip, inspector Larner of Astoria confessed a propensity to “look askance at any case in which he is particularly interested.”³⁷ Yip’s connection with Hop Hing Lung was thin and evidently did not mar the company’s solid image, but his presence as a disreputable character adds an element of uncertainty to the firm’s otherwise impeccable reputation.

Immigration records paint Hop Hing Lung as the most highly regarded Chinese firm in Astoria. By building a reputation for success, cooperation, and honesty, its members established an exceptionally amicable relationship with the immigration office and, as a result, they had no noticeable problems traveling overseas or importing family members. “It is so seldom,” inspector Bonham reported in 1919, “that we have found in our years of handling Chinese cases a firm who has never attempted, in so far as we know, to impose

upon this service in the way of bringing in fictitious members that I feel it due this applicant and his firm to state that, since the establishment of this office, the firm of Hop Hing Lung Co. has maintained a clear record.”³⁸ In an era of heightened anti-Chinese suspicion, such an unqualified endorsement lent exceptional freedom to the firm’s members, and may even have contributed to their collective business success. Firms such as Hop Hing Lung not only depended on the importation of goods and labor, but also stood to gain potential clients in the white community.

Other Chinese companies built positive images as well; firms such as Lum Quing, Wah Sing, and the Astoria Restaurant all cultivated an air of respectability that put them on good terms with authorities, allowing their members to travel and bring relatives from overseas with reduced scrutiny and to conduct business with the inspectors’ stamp of approval. Although they conducted a variety of business activities, their merchants amassed immigration records similar to those of merchants associated with Hop Hing Lung.³⁹



Courtesy Johnny Lum Family

The owners of the Lum Quing Grocery Company pose for a family photo in 1925. The firm — named Lum Quing & Brother when siblings Lum Quing and Lum Sue founded it in 1906 — was held in high regard by both local white merchants and immigration officials.

NOT ALL CHINESE FIRMS in Astoria maintained good relations with the immigration officials, and problems usually stemmed from what inspectors saw as Chinese attempts to evade legally defined class boundaries, either by not honestly reporting their work activities or by simply entering the country illegally. Inspectors generally gave leeway to firms that they knew practiced good business, but inspectors did not automatically assume that such trust was deserved or that Chinese associated with those firms were acting legally or reporting truthfully in regard to class and immigration. As officials grew familiar with the immigrant population, certain Chinese also accumulated reputations for dishonesty, often due to conflicts in testimonies given for immigrant applications. Those conflicts were noted in official correspondence through which inspectors cautioned each other. Outright lies were rarely uncovered but condemning when found, such as in the case of Lum Ah Quinn, who confessed to falsely testifying for Wong Hing Fow, a fake merchant.⁴⁰ Though Quinn had previously worked as an interpreter in the immigration office, his dishonesty eventually led to his deportation. A firm called Wing Yuen was also highly suspected by officials. In 1910, one firm member testified that of his twenty-one partners, only one resided in Astoria and worked in the business; the rest were engaged in various activities across the Pacific Northwest and in China.⁴¹ It was common for Chinese to support a claim to merchant status by buying into a firm, and then pursue whatever work they could find regardless of how it legally affected their class standing.⁴²

Smuggling of undocumented or falsely documented Chinese was also known to take place in Astoria. It was difficult to monitor, so officials had to be constantly wary. Wong Kee, who inspector Bonham introduced as “one of the shrewdest equivocators among the Astoria Chinese,” testified in multiple cases that were deemed fraudulent on investigation.⁴³ As a result, and despite Kee’s prestige as a successful merchant, his involvement drew suspicion in immigration cases. Such suspicion was also common for other people and companies considered untrustworthy.

One firm especially suspected in the immigration office was the Yee On Company. Its name was a red flag in any applicant’s case. In 1914, Leong Shing, a laborer boarding with Yee On, sought to replace a lost certificate of residence. Leong Hong, a respected, elderly laundryman, testified for Shing, as did Leong Yip; in the end, Shing’s application was denied based on his inability to provide vital information that matched official records. Such a case could very well have cast doubt on the character of the witnesses, but for whatever reason, Hong at least seems to have maintained a good standing with Immigration.⁴⁴ The poor status of a firm, therefore, could be an obstacle for certain affiliated individuals, yet did not necessar-



The Lum Quing Grocery (far right building with awning) sat on the corner of Sixth and Bond streets. One of the few Chinese families to remain in the area today, the Lums now operate Lum's Auto Center in nearby Warrenton, Oregon.

ily override the good image of someone who already had an upstanding reputation. In this case, Hong's status as a "good" merchant preponderated over his involvement with Shing, while Shing's status as a laborer offered no assistance in dealing with the inspectors and left him vulnerable to the suspicion attached to Yee On.

The Quong Yin Kee Company was founded in Astoria in 1883, thanks at least in part to Leong Yip; in 1894, its name changed to Yee On.⁴⁵ Because of its members' long history in the community, the firm was well-connected by the 1900s, and members were able to call on numerous witnesses both Chinese and white, including grocer and supplier Irvin Morrison, landlord and former butcher Isaac Bergman, and ship captain E.P. Parker, who hired cooks from Yee On.⁴⁶ That support did not impress Bonham, who complained in 1910 of the "reprehensible methods too often resorted to in Chinese cases in this city" involving "leading citizens" signing affidavits with little concern for the truth.⁴⁷ Trouble with the firm had first been recorded in 1905, when Leong Hong and Leong Ling simultaneously applied for laborers' return certificates for overseas travel. Both applications failed for the same three reasons: insufficient proof of having met the travel requirements for laborers; previous applications with spurious merchant claims on file; and the inspectors' general distrust of the Yee On Company.⁴⁸ Little

commentary was attached to either case, but inspector Larner made it clear that he distrusted Yee On.

Larner's suspicions about Yee On were corroborated four years later when the firm was implicated in smuggling immigrants across the border from Mexico.⁴⁹ In 1907, Bonham confided that a number of Yee On men were in fact laundry workers, "several of whom have been found to be recalcitrant, and untruthful," but the inspector initiated no move against the firm, as he believed Yee On to be operating a legitimate trade aside from its more questionable pursuits.⁵⁰ He was also waiting to collect more evidence of the members' illegal activities, which took about two more years. In 1909, Yee On's alleged bookkeeper Fong Hong was reported to be working in a nearby laundry, and Bonham investigated leads on several others, including Leong Chee and Leong Wing. Chee, a Yee On co-founder and former member, had already been denied a merchant's return in 1907, and on a tip that he had returned anyway against the law, Bonham paid a visit to the laundry where Chee worked. Caught by surprise, Chee botched an attempt to secretly pass an address book to a friend, prompting Bonham to search Chee and his room. The book was filled with addresses from Mexico, and Bonham's search produced about twenty-five incriminating letters between people in Mexico and the United States, indicating that Chee had indeed entered the country on the sly, as had many others, from Ensenada, a port town in Baja California. The letters depicted Ensenada as an uninhibited gateway to the United States where virtually no inspection of immigrants' documents took place and Chinese could cross the border "via any way they wanted." Some letters detailed specific trains to take in order to cross the border without being apprehended by authorities. "It is my opinion that the Chinese at the Yuen Chung laundry and those of Yee On Co. have been more or less associated with those implicated in bringing Chinese fraudulently and surreptitiously into the country," Bonham asserted.⁵¹ Leong Wing, another suspect, had also been spotted at the laundry during Chee's arrest, but he fled immediately. Astoria's officials could do little about all of this besides maintaining extra vigilance toward Yee On and businesses like it. The company did not last much longer; it went bankrupt around 1916. In 1920, You On, one of the "few bona fide merchants" of Yee On, sailed for China with no intention of returning, marking the end of the firm in Astoria.⁵²

That Yee On and other firms embraced smuggling and related activities makes sense for several reasons. First, smuggling people across the U.S. border during this era was relatively easy. Monitoring the borders, and every individual within them, was impossible in the American West. The 90 percent fraud rate that federal officials estimated for Chinese immigration cases also suggests that, in Astoria, where a large percentage (around 81 percent) of

the cases reviewed for this study were approved, illegal ventures enjoyed a high success rate.⁵³ Moreover, high fraud rates suggest wide acceptance of the practice among Chinese immigrants. Because it seemed in the best interests of their compatriots to come to the United States, merchants such as Lum Ah Quinn and Wong Kee were not necessarily conflicted about breaking the law. Scholars including Madeline Hsu, Yong Chen, K. Scott Wong, and others have emphasized the strong connection that Chinese overseas migrants generally maintained with their homeland, one in which loyalty to relatives and fellow Chinese held a higher moral imperative than obedience to a foreign government.⁵⁴ That attitude was further justified by the federalization of the anti-Chinese movement, with the Chinese Exclusion acts and related laws serving as legally encoded testaments to the U.S. government's offensive stance against Chinese immigrants. Even in cases of cordial personal relations, all Chinese immigrants faced the core antagonism of federal policy.

AS MUCH AS IT MADE SENSE for Astoria's Chinese to subvert U.S. law in matters of immigration, it remained expedient for them to maintain good relations with local government agents. Firms that succeeded in reconciling this tension, or ones that blatantly failed, were relatively easy to deal with, in that officials could use the company context as a clear directive in individual cases. In between were a number of firms whose status was ambiguous; files on those firms' members defy strict categorization. That ambiguity created large amounts of paperwork at the immigration office as officials tried to make sense of who they were dealing with. Inspectors commented with delight on firms like Hop Hing Lung that caused little or no trouble and complained in disgust over companies like Yee On that participated heavily in unlawful activities. In contrast, they remained silent on the apparent duplicity of firms with one foot inside the law and one foot outside, as if that stance was taken for granted. So, even while the Chinese assumed some antagonism on the part of the U.S. government, federal officials also assumed antagonism on the part of the Chinese, probably adding some superfluous stress to the relationship but not preventing the continued attempts of each camp to further its own goals through cooperation.

Down the street from Yee On were Hop Yick Shing Kee and Mee Gin John, two companies with ambiguous reputations. Both seem to have been actively involved in the illegal entrance of Chinese into the United States, yet they managed to avoid the status of Yee On and companies like it. Hop Yick Shing Kee organized in 1899 and, under the management of the elderly and well-connected Leong Yip, catered to a largely Chinese clientele, boarding workers and vending the standard rice, tea, oil, and assorted merchandise from Asia. During the first two decades of its existence, Hop Yick Shing



Young Chinese men pose in front of the Hop Yick Shing Kee Company, a store specializing in imported Asian merchandise. The company was managed by Leong Yip, an active businessman whose varied merchant interests often brought him to the attention of immigration officers. As a result, Hop Yick Shing Kee Co.'s reputation in the immigration office was ambiguous.

Kee appears in a series of case files as alternately an active, well-respected business and a shady collection of conspirators. Much of the responsibility for this likely falls on Yip, who, as the man in charge of the company, “seemed to be the entire thing” to at least one white businessman.⁵⁵ Aside from his managerial duties, Yip exercised influence in the community as a labor contractor with the Canoe Pass Packing Company cannery in Alaska and probably also for the Union Fisherman’s cannery, where he purchased work boots for the laborers.⁵⁶ He also testified for a number of colleagues and relatives, overlapping categories since nearly all the firm belonged to the Leong clan. Yip’s influence, however, burned less brightly in the immigration office, where he was regarded as a bona fide merchant but not an honest man.⁵⁷ It was a precarious situation for both sides, one that highlighted the tension between legality and practicality. It also showed the remarkable lack of information in the immigration office, a deficit the additional members of Hop Yick Shing Kee did little to fill.

Inspectors conceded the legitimacy of the company’s trade, and a reputation as “real” merchants helped Hop Yick Shing Kee members find approval

in a majority of their immigration cases. Established merchants of the firm who might otherwise warrant close questioning found little resistance to their travels; interrogations were brief, questions non-confrontational, and processing quick. The inspectors were so accommodating that when one member left without proper documentation, his return was easily granted based on Yip's explanation that the member's home in China had been hit by a cyclone.⁵⁸ New, incoming members of Hop Yick Shing Kee, generally the younger ones, were in a theoretically less secure position with the immigration office, as they were less well known to the officials; but they did not always experience problems, either. Leong Yick Duck, for example, was an original member of the firm, having joined at the age of seventeen. "The Boy," as he was called by one white merchant, claimed to have been born in San Francisco, was orphaned at the age of six, and was then brought to Astoria by Yip, his father's cousin.⁵⁹ After working in the canneries for a period, Yick Duck joined Hop Yick Shing Kee as a bookkeeper and salesman. There, he built a reputation as an upstanding citizen, even registering for the army when America mobilized for World War I. Despite his lack of a birth certificate, he did not encounter any problems with the inspectors and was granted a nativity certificate in 1925 on the testimony of Chinese witnesses and the strength of his own good standing.⁶⁰

Yick Duck's track record with the law was salient among the younger generation of Hop Yick Shing Kee. Leong Som Tuck, who was likely a founding member of the business, and as co-manager and treasurer in 1910 handled much of the firm's transactions, brought a son, Leong Yok Lun, to the United States in 1913.⁶¹ The young man was admitted without delay initially, but his case file began drawing suspicion from inspector Gooch in 1919.⁶² Another alleged firm member applied for a merchant's return as Leong Fay in 1903, saying he had immigrated as a student several years before, but his obvious unfamiliarity with the town of Astoria made it clear he did not actually work at Hop Yick Shing Kee. The witnesses who testified for him did not even recognize his face, plumbing contractor T.J. Sculley admitting that he had only come at the request of his good customer, Leong Yip.⁶³

In 1908, Leong Yip brought his own son into the country. Officials' satisfaction with his claim to legitimate merchant work preponderated over their reservations regarding his other activities, and the benefits attached to his merchant status extended to other immigrants. His son, Leong Gim Lin, entered the country in 1908 on testimony from witnesses including the boss of the disreputable Yee On Company. Yip's notoriety spurred an investigation into Gim Lin's identity. The case proceeded in surprisingly mellow fashion, however, and Gim Lin was approved without delay in 1908 and again on a 1911 trip to China, which he made on merchant status.⁶⁴ It is difficult to assess the



Leong Yick Duck became the youngest founding member of the Hop Yick Shing Kee Company at its creation in 1899. He became an upstanding member of the Astoria community and eventually obtained a nativity certificate in 1925 despite lacking documentation for his declared birth in San Francisco.

significance of Gim Lin's successful immigration without some insight into his real status. He may have been Yip's actual son. In that case, Yip showed a willingness to work within the law to his own advantage, and the inspectors showed enough restraint to let the case stand on its own merits rather than

condemning the applicant for his questionable affiliations. There is also a good chance, however, that Gim Lin was not Yip's progeny, illustrating a fact commonly known among the Chinese: that proper testimony, not actual blood ties or economic status, was the key to approval at the immigration office. In either case, sound testimony coupled with whatever credibility Yip possessed from his strong business resume sufficiently counterbalanced the suspicion aroused by his occasional efforts to evade the law, so much so that he was allowed to bring family into the country with relatively little hassle.

The inspectors might have given Leong Yip more trouble had it not been for the company across the street, Mee Gin John, whose merchants were busily moving family members internationally at one of the highest rates in the city. Led by Lum Lop Wy, who attempted to bring at least three sons from China, Mee Gin John affiliates approached Astoria's immigration office with at least seven such applications between 1907 and 1918. In a pattern similar to that of Hop Yick Shing Kee, Mee Gin John developed a record of illegal immigration practice but also managed to gain the inspectors' approval in a high percentage of applications.⁶⁵

No real doubt existed concerning the legitimacy of Mee Gin John as a business establishment, which may account for its success in immigration applications. One of the city's oldest Chinese firms with a history dating back to at least 1872, it thrived on an almost exclusively Chinese customer base, using a company truck to wholesale vegetables, meat, and sometimes wheat — largely the produce of a rented farm six miles up Young's River. The company was well known and respected, not only in business circles but also within the immigration office.⁶⁶ Kong Sai Get, the middle-aged, wealthy entrepreneur and federal interpreter, was associated with Mee Gin John, while manager Lum Lop Wy's household enjoyed an unusually close relationship with that of white merchant August Spexarth, each habitually visiting the other on the men's respective cultural holidays.⁶⁷ Spexarth was part of the local business elite, and his prominence in the case of Lop Wy's son is significant not only because of Spexarth's status but also his absence from other Chinese files, indicating he did not testify for just anyone.⁶⁸

Despite Mee Gin John's economic vigor, exceptional connections, and overall high success rate in immigration cases, there was only one documented instance in which a merchant secured a return certificate for himself, a family member, or an associate and was approved without suspicion. In almost every other case involving the Mee Gin John Company, its members were regarded with suspicion but nevertheless approved by inspectors. Inspectors weighed their doubts against the merchants' legitimacy. In a case that appeared fairly straightforward, for example, Lum Dock applied for a return as a Mee Gin John merchant in 1913 with all white witnesses,

but Dock was absent in the company partnership book. The application was re-inspected at Bonham's request. No incriminating evidence could be found, and Dock received his papers.⁶⁹ A merchant named Lum Sin Yuen was able to make two trips abroad, in 1909 and 1910; and while inspectors regarded his travels as relatively innocuous, an earlier case involving Sin Yuen's son, Bok Sun, cast doubt on his honesty. Inspectors had reason to believe that the younger Lum had been working in the canneries. Lum Yoke, another Mee Gin John man who served as one of the key witnesses in Sin Yuen's case in 1909, also carried a reputation of dishonesty. Holes in the main testimonies arose, casting further doubt on Sin Yuen's legitimacy. Finally, a coaching letter from Sin Yuen to his alleged son was intercepted during the investigation, and the entire case was thrown out.⁷⁰ When Sin Yuen hastily left the country later that year without bothering to apply for the proper immigration documentation, the inspectors had reason to question his surreptitious movements. Ostensibly, Sin Yuen had gone to British Columbia for business purposes, and his lawyers had advised that the recent Lum Bok Sun case was sufficient to forego additional investigation of his father. It is not clear why Sin Yuen did not plan ahead and secure the papers he needed to get back into the country, especially if he believed that no real investigation would take place, but the inspectors showed no real interest in Sin Yuen's activities, proving his lawyers correct and keeping his file thin.⁷¹ As long as an application appeared aboveboard, Chinese regarded as "legitimate" merchants from ambiguous firms (as opposed to "bad" firms) would not necessarily draw very much suspicion from inspectors. Sin Yuen had already established his merchant status in 1908.

No file at all appears for Lum Lop Wy, who nonetheless was present in most Mee Gin John cases, including several involving illegal activity or suspicion thereof. While his son Lum Chack had an easy time with the immigration office in 1912, his next two sons were either less fortunate, less prepared, or less honest in their applications — or some combination of the three. Lum Foon at age twenty-five applied in 1915 as an American-born Chinese, although he had spent the past sixteen to seventeen years in China. Lacking a surefire method for determining the applicant's identity, inspector Bonham made an effort to judge the case based on photographs of an eight-year-old Foon, comparing facial features and showing the prints to witnesses. At least ten witnesses later, it seemed that Foon might indeed be Lop Wy's son. Foon himself, however, proved unable to identify anyone when presented with an old picture of his own family; when told what he was looking at, he did provide a few names, but the inspectors subsequently learned that those individuals were identified in Chinese writing on the photograph. Bonham and his colleagues admitted Foon in the absence of



This photograph of the interior of the Lum Quing store demonstrates the abundant and varied goods the family sold. Unlike some Chinese grocers, the Lums catered primarily to the white population, and their enterprise was so prosperous that they had opened a second store by 1919.

absolutely certain incriminating evidence, but they did not forget him. Two years later, when Foon testified for a brother, Lum Pak Quan, to enter the country, the application was rejected. Foon was arrested in 1918 along with an illegal immigrant named Leong Fouie, near the Canadian border, where Foon had headed in hopes of escaping the wartime draft.⁷²

Lum Lop Wy's success in bringing two of three sons into the United States is a notable testament to the strength of his influence as a merchant, because he already had gained attention through connection to irregular cases. Additional cases that did not revolve around Mee Gin John or its trade indicate a trajectory of Lop Wy's connections and interactions that did not set him squarely within the law. Two, for example, include Lem Chan and Lum Kai Ngon — men who either lost or did not arrive with proper documentation. They each cited Lop Wy as someone involved or who could provide documentation. In the Chan case, officials resorted to using a chicken oath — a Chinese practice that involved beheading a bird for the witness to swear on — while the Kai Ngon application was simply

denied.⁷³ Fortunately for Lop Wy, and for other merchants such as Leong Yip and Wong Kee, it was possible to succeed as a Chinese merchant in Astoria without a perfect relationship with the immigration office.

These interactions imply a complicated relationship between Chinese and whites that requires an enlarged concept of the relationship between immigrants, often racial minorities, and Euro-American society, as represented by federal officials. That relationship extended far beyond racial and economic binaries. Although Chinese-exclusion policy aimed to restrict immigration and agents in Astoria made vigorous attempts to enforce that policy, Astoria's files show Chinese as not just parts of a racialized economic system but as people who maintained complicated relationships that led to a wide range of results. Certain Chinese formed mutually beneficial relationships with white business owners and government officials, on both professional and personal levels. Historical scholarship suggests that officials in larger ports such as San Francisco and Seattle were generally more hostile; but understanding the alliances made in Astoria helps shed light on the often confused process of Chinese immigration during the exclusion era.⁷⁴

CASES LIKE THAT OF LUM LOP WY emphasize the careful balance that existed between reputation and merchant status for Chinese immigrants. Merchant status and personal reputation could overlap, but did not necessarily coincide. Individuals worked to shape both identities in the immigration office. Merchant status often informed personal reputation and vice versa, affecting results of the immigration process and further complicating the officials' procedures. The influence of businessmen from suspect firms reinforces the presence of a class bias among the inspectors that amplified the importance of merchants in the Chinese community. Officials showed leniency toward well-respected merchants even when circumstances warranted suspicion, and individuals like Leong Yip and Lum Lop Wy leveraged that advantage to assist the travels of less prestigious Chinese. Certain merchants lost credibility by being dishonest; and while inspectors came to see some firms as generally untrustworthy, business prestige could also aid immigrants connected to them. Evidently, evading the truth was more forgivable than evading alleged merchant status. This pattern of positive relationships between successful merchants and immigration officials characterizes the strictures carried out in Chinese immigration cases in the 1910s and 1920s as a campaign against foreign labor — specifically, a continuation of the economically defined exclusion policy that had begun in the 1880s, rather than solely or even primarily a matter of race or ethnicity.

Merchant status had a mutually impactful relationship with the reputations of individuals and business entities, producing some of the nuanced

IMMIGRATION OFFICIALS in Astoria between 1900 and 1924 used various criteria to determine the status of Chinese immigrants. The author's study of the case files indicates that officials divided the Chinese men into unofficial categories — good, bad, and ambiguous — according to their business associations and success and their history with the immigration office. The files are archived in the Portland District Office, the Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, in the National Archives and Records Administration–Pacific Region, Seattle, Washington. (Compiled by the author.)

GOOD (56 NAMES)

Lo Lin You
 Ing Wong
 Ing Fook
 Lum Sing (two individuals with same name)
 Chan Sing
 Ju Gong
 Jun Hee and Go Kin Jew
 Chin Yee Quan
 Leong Bing Kee
 Lum Gook Hin
 Chew Sick Chee
 Ing How
 Wong Fook Lam
 Low Lin Yow
 Lum Quing
 Lum Yick Hen
 Lum Lin Oey
 Lum Foo
 Lilly Lum On
 Lum Wui
 Wong Sang
 Merle Wong Lam
 Wong Sue Chung
 Herbert Wong and siblings
 Wong Ngui Gen
 Wong Kai Quong
 Wong Yuen
 Lum Sue
 Wong Hong Bong
 Wong Gong
 Wong Dew
 Leong Do
 Leung Hong
 Seid Yuen
 Chin Shee
 Jeu Jung
 Chin Back
 Chan Ah Dogg
 Jung Jow Tow
 Chin Oey Dogg
 Toy Sam Hing
 Yip Fun Sue, Kim Ho, and Chin Ying
 Low Lin Wong
 Ng Gum
 David Lee Lum On
 Lilly Lum On
 Chew Kong
 Lee Ying
 Ah Lee
 Ho Fook
 Ho Chin
 Eng Moe
 Ju Wai

Hong Quan
 Chan He Tong Sing

BAD (27 NAMES)

Fong Chin Chong
 Wong Tong
 Lam Quinn
 Wong Hing Fow
 Go Chow
 Go Yong King
 Go Howe
 Lum Yook
 Fong Hong
 Lum Low
 Wong Hop
 Wong Gum Yuen
 Wong Kee
 Wong Lung
 Leong Hong
 Leong Ling
 Leong Chee and Leong Wing
 Leong You
 Hong Bun
 Leong Shing
 You On
 Go Bing Kee
 Yow Gook
 Low Gun
 Ko Hing
 Leong Yit and Dong Tock

AMBIGUOUS (35 NAMES)

Leong Som Tuck
 Wong Fie
 Lum Bock Sun
 Lum Sin Yuen
 Lum Chew
 Lum Dock
 Lum Chack
 Lem Cheong
 Lem Chan
 Lam Sur
 Lum Foon
 Lum Ah Seung
 Po Lum
 Lum Fong
 Kong Sue Chong
 Wong Iu Tsun
 Wong Shee and You Toy
 Leong Yick Duck
 Lee Wah Wong
 Leong Nang
 Leong Yette
 Leong Yok Lun
 Leong Fay
 Leong Gim Lin

Leong For
 Leong Yip
 Fong Young
 Lee Wah Sing
 Chew Lai and Yu Town
 Jung Jow Tow
 Lee Sit Gong
 Ah My
 Seid Tong
 Low Fay
 Dung Hing

UNCLEAR (41 NAMES)

Koh Lai
 Wong Yick
 Leuie Jeung
 Ho Fook
 Go Leong
 Wong Yu Yung
 Ah Lim
 Lum Quan Woo
 Lum Lap
 Lum Ging
 Lum Jock
 Ah Goey
 Wing Chung
 Wong Non
 Wong Shee Moy
 Wong John
 Wong Sing Chong
 Wong Shee and Dong Gin Hon
 Leong Way
 Leong Wah
 Leong Chin Fook
 Chew Lai
 Chan Gee
 Leong Tom
 Wo Hing
 Yee King
 Young Sing
 Dong Gin Hon, Wong Shee, and Dong Hing Loy
 Law Lun
 Fong Kim
 Wing Chung
 Gem Lung
 Seid Yuen
 Fung Kwong Yin
 Li Ping Yow
 Louis Higen
 Lum Seid Jong
 Lum Wing
 Chew Ah Dock
 Chiu Yau Siu
 Fred Wing

gradations of class categories in the Chinese immigrant community. Recognizing those distinctions gives us a better idea of how merchant status affected both immigration matters and race relations. Understanding that not all Chinese benefitted equally from merchant status also allows us to more carefully describe the nature of Chinese exclusion on the whole. Specifically, it sheds light on Chinese success in America during the first decades of the twentieth century, allowing us to see how some Chinese obtained benefits by gaining favor with white officials, a process that happened within the parameters of, but was not dictated by, exclusion law. Additional sources may help us discover just how, exactly, certain Chinese built those good relations, both in Astoria and elsewhere. In addition, we now have insight into the attitudes of immigration officials that favored certain Chinese over others. Thanks to the inspectors' notion of class-based respectability, it is apparent that the semblance of legitimate merchant status could override suspicious behavior in some cases. Understanding that immigration officers seemed to view capitalist endeavors as an indicator of respectability and trustworthiness can provide a clue in deciphering how Chinese were able to successfully relate with officials. The equation of business conduct and adherence to law helps explain some of the immigrants' success in evading Chinese exclusion. The different levels of merchant status point to the ability of some Chinese laborers to find allies in the immigration office as well. There is some evidence that laborer status may not have affected all Chinese equally, either. It is possible that inspectors categorized laborers like they did merchants. In Astoria, for example, officials seemed to show favor to the workers who ran the Hong Sing laundry.⁷⁵ Given the centrality of merchant status in Chinese immigration cases, we might expect a similar fashion of treatment for all laborers, but it is evident that this was not necessarily the case. This is another topic that merits further exploration to clarify the history of Chinese exclusion.

NOTES

1. Case files are drawn from the Portland District Office, Chinese Exclusion Acts Case Files, 1891–1943, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration—Pacific Region, Seattle, Washington [hereafter RG 85, NARA]. The files largely consist of immigration documents, interrogation transcriptions, and official correspon-

dence among various immigration officials in Astoria, Portland, and other nearby ports such as Seattle.

2. Marie Rose Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 76.

3. Chinese exempt from exclusion included merchants, teachers, students,

government officials, and tourists. Laborers already in the United States could also leave and return, provided they obtained proper documentation.

4. Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882–1943* (Chapel Hill: University of N. Carolina Press, 2005), 6.

5. Sucheng Chan, ed., *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882–1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 18.

6. For a more thorough consideration of the Immigration Act of 1924, see Mae M. Ngai, “The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924,” *The Journal of American History* 86:1 (1999): 67–92.

7. Najia Aarim-Heriot, *Chinese Immigrants, African Americans, and Racial Anxiety in the United States, 1848–82* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), xi.

8. The 1882 Exclusion Act begins by stating: “The coming of Chinese laborers to this country endangers the good order.” The text is available online at <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=47&page=transcript>. See also: Sucheng Chan, “The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1870–1943,” in *Entry Denied*, 138. “Free Versus Slave,” *Weekly Astorian*, February 27, 1886.

9. Lucy Salyer, “‘Laws Harsh as Tigers’: Enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Laws, 1891–1924,” in Chan, ed., *Entry Denied*, 60. Madeline Y. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882–1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 64–66.

10. Other exempt Chinese included government officials, teachers, students, and tourists.

11. Lee, *At America's Gates*, 42.

12. As the exclusion administration developed, interrogations became much longer in the 1910s and 1920s compared to earlier years. See Estelle Lau, *Paper Families: Identity, Immigration Administration, and Chinese Exclusion* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University

Press, 2006), 47, 51, 71.

13. Lee, *At America's Gates*, 68.

14. Lau, *Paper Families*, 18–20, 103–104; Wong, *Sweet Cakes*, 76–78. The Treasury Department's Customs Service handled immigration before 1900. The Office of the Superintendent of Immigration formed in 1891 and became the Bureau of Immigration in 1895. It assumed exclusion duties apart from the Customs Service in 1900. Chinese exclusion administration duties were consolidated with general immigration in 1903 when the Bureau of Immigration moved to the Department of Commerce and Labor, and then to the Department of Labor in 1913. The Bureau of Immigration became the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization in 1906; and in 1913 it split to make the Bureau of Immigration and Bureau of Naturalization. For simplicity's sake, and because the Astoria personnel did not usually change with changes in organizational structure, I have made general references to the government's administrators of immigration policy rather than specifying the exact agency names and titles.

15. An example of the Astoria office lagging behind changes made in Washington can be found in “Wong Gum Yuen,” Case File 2102, box 9, RG 85, NARA.

16. For several references to the earlier history of overseas Chinese economic activity between 1400 and 1800, see Andre Gunder Frank, *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 62–63, 102–104, 113–14, 180–81, 218–19.

17. Wong, *Sweet Cakes*, 156.

18. Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian-American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned-Salmon Industry, 1870–1942* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 72–75, 197.

19. “Ing Wong,” Case File 4024, box 30, RG 85, NARA.

20. It is not clear whether Go Lung Kee was selling rail tickets under the banner of Hop Hing Lung (or for another firm) or simply working independently. In any case, Hop Hing Lung's members were well connected and represented a variety of business interests.

21. Samuel H. Williamson, "Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1774 to present," *Measuring Worth*, available online at <http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/>. Amount calculated as relative share of GDP.
22. "Chan Ah Dogg," Case File 5009/201, box 60, RG 85, NARA. Also known as Chin Ah Dogg, he was commonly referred to as "Dogg."
23. *Ibid.* In 2011, the amount loaned to Dogg would be anywhere between \$2.5 million and \$48.2 million, depending on the conversion method as calculated by Williamson, "Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount."
24. "Chan Ah Dogg," Case File 5009/201, box 60, RG 85, NARA.
25. "Low Lin Yow," Case File 2154, box 10, RG 85, NARA; "Chin Oey Dogg," Case File 5017/64, box 86, RG 85, NARA.
26. "Yip Fun Sue, Kim Ho, Chin Ying," Case File 5011/21, box 75, RG 85, NARA.
27. "Chin Back," Case File 1009/94, box 41, RG 85, NARA.
28. *Ibid.* For examples of lists of Hop Hing Lung members, see the Chin Back file and "Low Leu Yow," Case File 4036, box 30, RG 85, NARA; "Ing Fook," Case File 5009/68, box 56, RG 85, NARA; and "Yip Fun Sue, Kim Ho, Chin Ying," Case File 5011/21, box 75, RG 85, NARA.
29. "Low Lin Yow," Case File 2154, box 10, RG 85, NARA; "Ing Fook," Case File 5009/68, box 56, RG 85, NARA; "Ju Gong," Case File 1009/16, box 39, RG 85, NARA.
30. "Ng How," Case File 3871, box 29, RG 85, NARA; "Ing How," Case File 1009/103, box 41, RG 85, NARA.
31. "Ing Wong," Case File 4024, box 30, RG 85, NARA.
32. "Wong Sang," Case File 4383, box 32, RG 85, NARA; "Wong Ngui Gen," Case File 5009/171, RG 85, NARA; "Wong Gong," Case File 5010/399, box 68, RG 85, NARA.
33. Williamson, "Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount." This calculation was made using the GDP per capita conversion. The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita conversion measures Ing's income relative to the earnings of the rest of the population. Converting his income in terms of purchasing power results in a sum about five times smaller; using his relative share of the overall GDP results in an amount roughly three times larger.
34. "Wong Fook Lam," Case File 5010/577, box 72, RG 85, NARA.
35. "Herbert Wong et al.," Case File 5017/92 - 97, box 85, RG 85, NARA. "Wong Hong Bong," Case File, 5009/207, box 60, RG 85, NARA.
36. Today's equivalent is about \$9 million using the GDP per capita conversion; "Chan Ah Dogg," Case File 5009/201, box 60, RG 85, NARA.
37. "Leong Yok Lun," Case File 5009/184, box 59, RG 85, NARA.
38. "Chan Ah Dogg," Case File 5009/201, box 60, RG 85, NARA.
39. For Lum Quing, see: "Lum Quing," Case File 2135, box 9, RG 85, NARA; "Lum Yick Hen," Case File 3011, box 20, RG 85, NARA; "Lum Lin Oey," Case File 5017/153, box 86, RG 85, NARA; "Lum Foo," Case File 5010/608, box 72, RG 85, NARA; "Lum Sue," Case File 5009/189, box 56, RG 85, NARA. For Wah Sing, see: "Chan Sing," Case File 5009/70, box 56, RG 85, NARA; "Chan He Tong Sing," Case File 5017/210, box 87, RG 85, NARA; "Fred Wing," Case File 5017/62, box 85, RG 85, NARA. See also Liisa Penner, "The Chan/Sing Family," *Cumtux* 25 (Fall 2005): 2–16. For Astoria Restaurant, see: "Wong Yuen," Case File 1010/38, box 42, RG 85, NARA.
40. "Wong Hing Fow," Case File 1505, box 2, RG 85, NARA.
41. "Fong Chin Chong," Case File 2200, box 10, RG 85, NARA.
42. Wong, *Sweet Cakes*, 106–108, 116–19; and Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold*, 71–73.
43. "Wong Gum Yuen," Case File 2102, box 9, RG 85, NARA.
44. "Leong Shing," Case File 3684, box 27, RG 85, NARA.
45. Also called the Quong Yuen Kee Company in "You On," Case File 1009/90, box 41, RG 85, NARA.

46. "Leong You," Case File 4836, box 36, RG 85, NARA; "You On," Case File 1009/90, box 41, RG 85, NARA.
47. "Fong Hong," Case File 1896, box 6, RG 85, NARA.
48. "Leong Hong," Case File 1010/22, box 42, RG 85, NARA; "Leong Ling," Case File 1010/23, RG 85, NARA.
49. "Leong Chee and Leong Wing," Case File 1902, box 7, RG 85, NARA.
50. "You On," Case File 1009/90, box 41, RG 85, NARA.
51. "Leong Chee and Leong Wing," Case File 1902, box 7, RG 85, NARA. From the confiscated letters it seems that Chinese were taking trains directly from Ensenada across the border, but it is not clear which trains they took or where exactly they crossed into the United States. See also Lee, *At America's Gates*, 158–59, describing a similarly unregulated situation at the southern border, which one official called "a joke, a hollow mockery."
52. "You On," Case File 1009/90, box 41, RG 85, NARA.
53. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home*, 68, 206; Lau, *Paper Families*, 69.
54. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold*, 9, 12–13; Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco: A Trans-Pacific Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 96–114; K. Scott Wong and Sucheng Chan, eds., *Claiming America: Constructing Chinese American Identities During the Exclusion Era* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 157.
55. "Leong Yip," Case File 2710, box 17, RG 85, NARA.
56. *Ibid.*
57. "Leong Gim Lin," Case File 1428, box 1, RG 85, NARA.
58. "Leong For," Case File 2115, box 9, RG 85, NARA.
59. "Leong Yick Duck," Case File 1009/85, box 41, RG 85, NARA. Claiming birth in San Francisco was convenient for many Chinese since all official records of Chinese births there before 1906 had been lost in the earthquake and subsequent fire. Of course, the size of the Chinese population in the Bay Area also made it likely for U.S.-born Chinese to hail from San Francisco.
60. *Ibid.*
61. "Leong Som Tuck," Case File 2241, box 11, RG 85, NARA.
62. Authorities eventually deported Yok Lun in 1931 for not properly upholding his merchant status. "Leong Yok Lun," 5009/184, box 59, RG 85, NARA.
63. "Leong Fay," Case File 4791, box 36, RG 85, NARA.
64. "Leong Gim Lin," Case File 1428, box 1, RG 85, NARA.
65. Specifically, five out of every six. The ratio is based on twelve case files at the National Archives that centered on a Mee Gin John merchant or merchant's son, with ten gaining approval and two rejected.
66. "Kong Sue Chong," Case File 5017/88, box 85, RG 85, NARA; "Lum Fong," Case File 5010/409, box 68, RG 85, NARA; "Lum Chack," Case File 3134, box 22, RG 85, NARA.
67. "Lum Chack," Case File 3134, box 22, RG 85, NARA.
68. Of the immigration case files I inspected at the National Archives in Seattle, only the Lum Chack case involved Spexarth in any way.
69. "Lum Dock," Case File 5009/107, box 57, RG 85, NARA.
70. "Lum Bock Sun and Lum Shin Yuen," Case File 1669, box 4, RG 85, NARA.
71. "Lum Sin Yuen," Case File 1820, box 6, RG 85, NARA.
72. "Lum Foon," Case File 4233, box 31, RG 85, NARA.
73. "Lem Chan," Case File 1016/38, box 44, RG 85, NARA. "Lum Ging," Case File 1635, box 4, RG 85, NARA.
74. According to Erika Lee, San Francisco had a reputation as the most difficult processing center for Chinese immigrants. Lee, *At America's Gates*, 51. For examples of Seattle's inspectors' strictness relative to Astoria's, see "Chan Ah Dogg," Case File 5009/201, box 60, RG 85, NARA, and "Yee King," Case File 3611, box 27, RG 85, NARA.
75. "Leong Do (Toe)," Case File 1010/25, box 42, RG 85, NARA; "Leung Hong," Case File 5010/108, box 62, RG 85, NARA.