A REPORTER AT LARGE

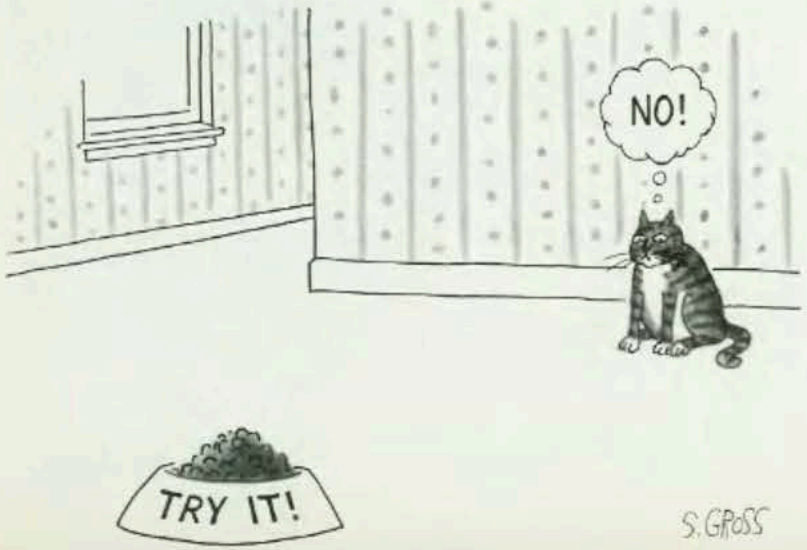
CHINATOWN—II

IN the last twenty-five years, New York City's Chinatown, near the foot of Manhattan, has burgeoned. It has pushed into the Lower East Side and across the East River into Brooklyn and Queens. Its main businesses—garment factories, jewelry stores, and restaurants—turn over at least five hundred million dollars a year. The neighborhood's boom is due primarily to a huge influx of Asian immigrants since 1965, when restrictive immigration laws were replaced by a generous quota system for Eastern Hemisphere countries. Chinatown has also become the center of Chinese organized crime in the United States. Half the heroin smuggled into this country passes through the hands of people involved in Chinese organized crime, which is, according to the Justice Department, the principal rival of the Cosa Nostra.

Low faan, or "barbarians"—as white people have been called since the community's beginnings, more than a century ago—see only the touristy façade of Chinatown. Few Chinese speak to outsiders; their silence is a legacy of Chinese xenophobia and of discrimination in this country. Only by wandering for months through Chinatown's streets did I come to know any of the new immigrants, who are from Taiwan and the People's Republic of China, and also from the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Cuba, and South America. Many of the people I met had never spoken to a white person before.

Chinatown is largely first-generation: eighty per cent of its residents are foreign-born. They come to the United States to make money, and their conversation is filled with references to "big money," "American money," "easy money." Unmarried peddlers and entrepreneurs rise the quickest; many live cheaply in *gong si fong*—squalid apartments partitioned with plywood into small bedroom cubicles, for ten or fifteen people—and are able to save sixty, sometimes eighty, per cent of their earnings. In several years, they have enough to open small businesses, and can afford to move to the outer boroughs or to the suburbs. Many immigrants with families, however, slave long hours in restaurants and clothing factories while struggling to fulfill their Confucian duty to support their relatives. These immigrants become prisoners of Chinatown, and never leave it. Gambling is Chinatown's chief pastime. Every weekend, hundreds of Chinatown residents take buses to Atlantic City, and in Chinatown's illegal parlors hundreds of thousands of dollars are gambled daily, as workers seek to become rich overnight, and gain "big face."

In the eighteen-seventies, when Chinese fleeing racist mob violence and lynchings in the American West settled in Mott, Pell, and Doyers Streets, Chinatown was mostly a community of laborers and laundrymen. The Exclusion Act of 1882 barred any more Chinese laborers and their wives from entering the United States and stripped the ones who were here of their right to become naturalized citizens. New York's Chinatown, like the nation's other Chinatowns, became a tenderloin, ignored by white America. Family associations, made up of people with the same family name, provided newcomers with jobs and loans. District associations, which were composed of people from the same region of China, settled disputes between members, for Chinese did not use American courts. Tongs, Chinese fraternal associations, provided police—though they also committed most of the crimes. They controlled prostitution, opium rackets, and gambling parlors, and carved up Chinatown into business districts, where only their members could open up shop. Some tong members were hatchet men who fought bloody proxy wars.



These institutions which sprang up in the nineteenth century to protect Chinatown against American racism still dominate it and still isolate it. The family associations, more than forty strong, are the social fibre of the community. The Chinese-American Planning Council and other social-service groups that came out of the Asian-American pride movement of the late nineteen-sixties and the nineteen-seventies offer more sophisticated services—job training, legal advice, health care, day care, translation services—but the family associations remain influential, because they provide the Chinese equivalent of social security, a system to care for members in distress and in old age.

The two largest family associations are those of the Chens and the Lees, and they are boisterous rivals. About twenty-five thousand Lees live in metropolitan New York, making their association, which is housed in a modern six-story white marble building on Mott Street, a power in Chinatown. (About a hundred and fifty thousand Chinese live in Chinatown; another hundred and fifty thousand live in the

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outer boroughs.) M. B. Lee, its elder and a former president of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association—the informal government of Chinatown—is a kingmaker who bridges old and new Chinatown.

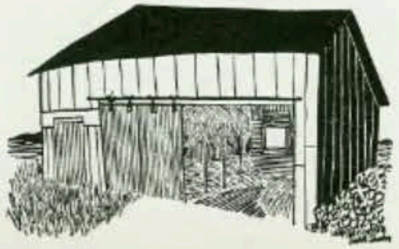
The fifth floor of the Lee association's building is a modest place. There are tables with a few dilapidated chairs, which, on the afternoon I visited, were occupied by sleepy old men. One pretended to read a Chinese newspaper; one was motionless, ash accumulating on the end of his cigarette. In front of a window with some desiccated palm plants on the sill, a man blew dust off his desk before sitting down at it. The wall above him was papered with fluttering orange slips representing donations received from members at New Year's. Lee, a courtly sixty-five-year-old, came out of his office and invited me to sit down at one of the tables. He nodded toward the slips, and said, "We get about sixteen thousand dollars, almost enough for general expenses. This is a clearing house. We can tell you where your cousins are. You new, you don't know, you come here. We locate them. We still occasionally settle disputes in community. Also we chip in money to bury members." Lee explained that since the founding of the People's Republic the association no longer disinters the bones of members, in a ceremony called *jup gum*—"the picking of the gold"—and sends the remains, polished by professional bone polishers, to China for burial. That custom, which kept a dead person's ghost from sorrowing in an alien land, has faded because immigrants refuse to be buried in Communist soil. "If there is money left over from the collection, we send it to that person's relatives in China," Lee said. Unlike the Chens, the Lees do not have their own cemeteries, so every April, in observance of Qing Ming, the ancestor-worship ceremony, Lees drive to municipal cemeteries to tend the graves of their relatives and pay their respects with offerings of food and "ghost money." "If you don't do this before Easter, they may come out and give you trouble," Lee said. "You don't take care of them, of course they get upset." He smiled.

Lee is also the treasurer of the association's credit union. He explained that because many Chinese don't use banks and frequently underreport their income, they lack credit ratings and therefore often turn to their family association. Over the years, such funds have enabled many Chinese workers to become entrepreneurs, without the aid of "outside" banks. "You go to the bank and try to borrow, you have all that red tape. Here I know the borrower and the guarantor."

A stylish young man in a leather jacket entered the room, followed by a young woman with teased hair and high heels. Lee said, "This fellow is paying an installment on a twenty-thousand-dollar loan to start a car-courier service in Brooklyn. Car services are popular new businesses among Chinese. They serve the corporations and law offices, go to Atlantic City. Most people borrow to open restaurant, garment factory, or for bridge loan. To open factory, cost you over one hundred thousand dollars. You buy the floor, renovate, put in heavy machinery. Initial investment is forty thousand to sixty thousand dollars. Rest is installment. And, of course, people need small amount, ten thousand to fifteen thousand dollars, to go back to China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong to get married. New immigrants go back for their sweethearts."

As of March of 1991, the credit union had five million seven hundred and eighty thousand dollars in assets. Last year, the fund made three hundred and twenty loans, totalling nearly two million dollars. Since the fund began, in 1965, it has made some twenty-three hundred loans, totalling thirty-two million dollars, and has charged off just over one per cent of them as bad debts. This is a better record than other credit unions attached to district or family associations. In the nineteen-seventies, the funds of three Chinatown associations were embezzled.

Accompanied by a Chinese friend, I visited Lung Kong Tin Yee, on Division Street. The name means the Four Brothers Association, but it is actually a multifamily organization, representing the Liu, Quan, Chang, and Chao families, whose ancestors, according to legend, made a famous pact in a peach garden about 200 A.D. in a vain attempt to save the Han dynasty from collapse. Ning Fun Quan, a small man in glasses, wearing a dark suit, who is one of four co-presidents of the association, led us up past the second floor, where there was a mah-jongg parlor, to the third floor. There, he unlocked a door and took us on through an antechamber into an imposing room. A long, central table, like a banquet table, capable of seating fifty, dominated the room. Around the walls, thirty teak chairs with mother-of-pearl inlay on the arms were ranged side by side. Several men were seated at the enormous table, talking in Cantonese and flicking cigarette ashes into a large stone ashtray. Behind them was an elaborate, flag-decked golden shrine. On one wall, an oil painting showed the four ancestors who had made the long-ago pact; they were surrounding the Han emperor, clad in imperial yellow. On another wall, a giant black-and-white scroll proclaimed the four classic Chinese virtues: honesty, loyalty, kindness, bravery.



"I have never been up here. See, you are very special!" my friend exclaimed. "This is No. 1 Chinese association, this is tops! You see this! I never knew they had such a beautiful room."

"Our association more than one hundred years old," Quan said proudly, in clipped English. "We are worldwide organization—Singapore, Hong Kong, mainland China, Taiwan. Costs thirty dollars to join. Annual dues are optional—could give ten dollars. It's up to you. We have three thousand members in New York, and it's growing. Every night, we have free dinner. Old people, young people come here and eat. Our members only. Every night, at least thirty people. Only pay a little bit for dishwashers. We got two cemeteries. Everybody donate money, and we fix them up nice. Any member without a family, we have to bury them. This is our brother. So we all put up money, one dollar O.K., thousand dollars O.K. Nobody ask you—whatever you can give. If not enough, the association gives the rest. We help each other—do whatever we can. Sometimes help find jobs. No longer lend members money. We still settle disputes. We decide what's right and wrong. Our word is law. But some-

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times it can't be settled, sometimes members have to go to court. Not always easy." Depending on the crime, Quan added, the association might raise bail for a member in jail. He went on to say that, like all the associations in Chinatown, Lung Kong Tin Yee celebrates Chinese holidays—New Year's, the arrival of spring—with a traditional banquet in a restaurant. And it buses its members to the cemeteries for Qing Ming.

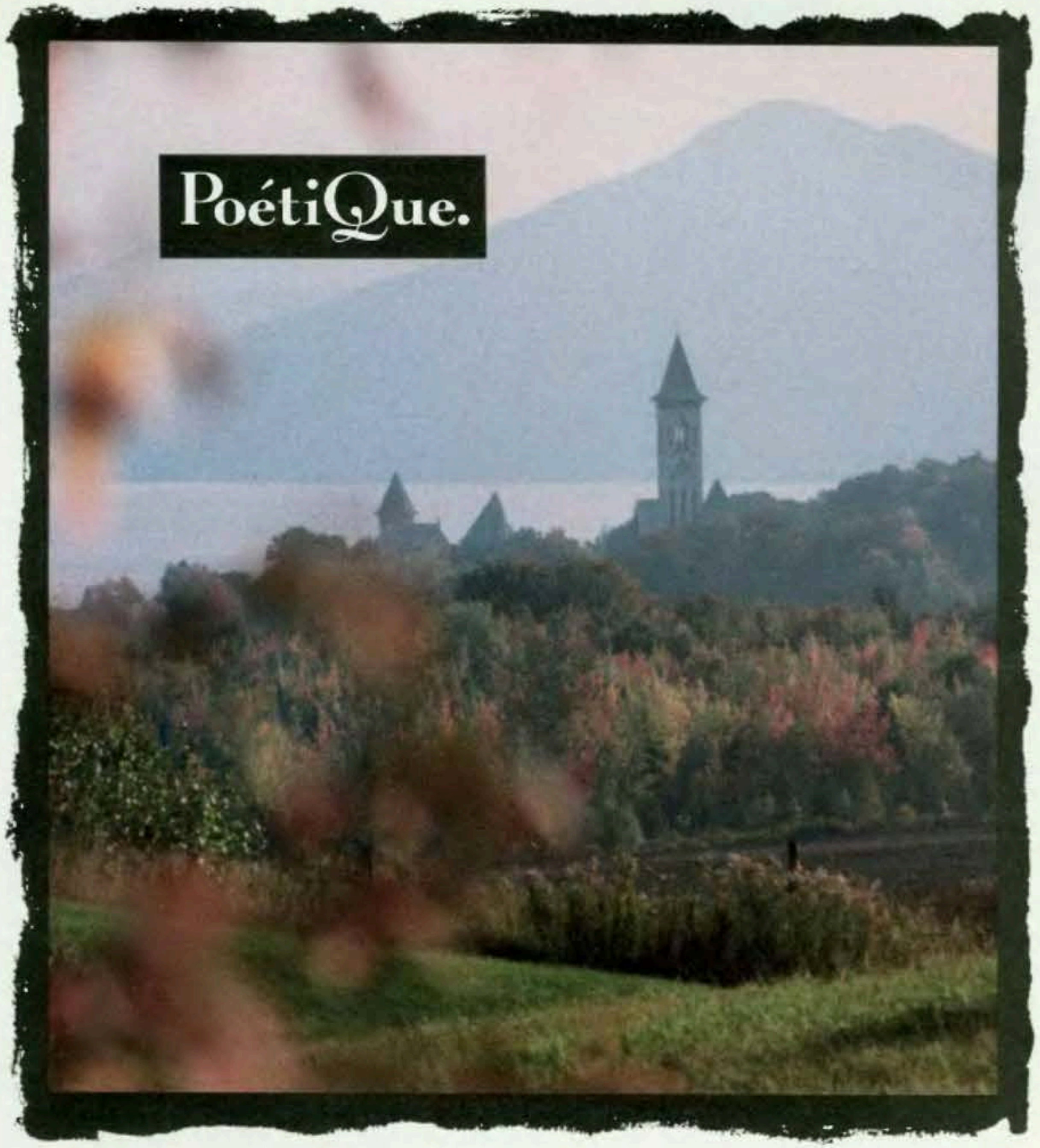
THE Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, to which the majority of Chinatown's family associations, more than ten of the district associations, and three of its six tongs belong, is constantly fighting for leadership with the new guard—members of the younger generation who run the Chinese-American Planning Council. The C.C.B.A. styles itself the supreme voice of Chinatown, though its word is no longer the absolute law it was a hundred years ago. It has not acted as a criminal court in many years, and its president, the unofficial "mayor" of Chinatown, is elected from one of two Cantonese associations that no longer represent most of the community. Nevertheless, the C.C.B.A., which is housed in a building on Mott Street, in the heart of old Chinatown, still operates as a city hall, and new immigrants who get lost are taken there. Many Chinese consider it retrograde, because its leaders advise Chinese to preserve their culture, and not assimilate.

The C.C.B.A. conducts all proceedings in Chinese. It will not discuss its inner workings with outsiders or reveal how its members are chosen. Those are private matters; it is not a public organization, I was told repeatedly by its president, Paul Yee. Nor will it accept funding from "outside sources," although it has made one exception—a grant from the city for a summer youth program. And it will not let in city-funded Asian-American associations, which criticize its conservatism, or such organizations as the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. The C.C.B.A. owns several buildings on Mott Street, and rent from five stores in these buildings provides an income of about three hundred thousand dollars a year. It has only four full-time, paid staff members: the president, two secretaries—one bilingual in Chinese and English, and one Chinese-speaking—and a janitor. The C.C.B.A runs the largest Chinese school in Chinatown, offering instruction in Chinese culture and language on afternoons and weekends.

The C.C.B.A.'s main purpose, however, is to promote Taiwan. It has been pro-Taiwan ever since 1949, when Chiang Kai-shek fled to the island after the Communist revolution. Most of its members ally themselves politically with Taiwan. And Taiwan has a representative on the C.C.B.A.'s executive council, whose seven permanent policymaking members also include delegates from three tongs (Hip Sing, On Leong, and Chih Kung); two district organizations dominated by the Guomindang, Taiwan's ruling party; and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. The C.C.B.A.'s president frequently doubles as a representative in Taiwan's legislative Yuan, or governing assembly, and other C.C.B.A. leaders, who are presidents of member associations, are also overseas members of the assembly. For voting in the legislative Yuan and promoting Taiwanese interests in Chinatown, they receive many benefits, including, it has been reported, salaries, free transportation to and from the island, and apartments in Taipei. The anomaly of American citizens' voting in another country's assembly came about because Chiang Kai-shek held to the traditional notion that Chinese are Chinese first, no matter how many generations they have been citizens of another country. And Taiwan, unlike the People's Republic, allows dual citizenship.

In the nineteen-seventies, when the United States moved toward establishing diplomatic relations with the People's Republic, the two camps in Chinatown, pro-Taiwan and pro-People's Republic, battled in the streets. Some family and district associations broke ranks with the C.C.B.A. and flew the colors of the People's Republic. Conservative, pro-Taiwan merchants became pragmatic and signed contracts with the People's Republic for merchandise. Those without good contacts in mainland China suffered. Now so many members of the community depend on the People's Republic for their livelihood that the two camps are holding their fire.

The Chinese-American Planning Council, with offices on the fringes of



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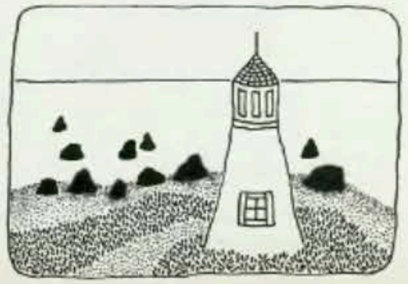
Chinatown, is made up of second-generation liberals and leftists, most of them veterans of the Asian-American movement. Some Chinatown residents derisively call them Chuppies—Chinese yuppies. Virginia Kee, one of the council's founders, outraged Chinatown when, in the nineteen-sixties, she broke the code of silence and argued that the community was a poverty zone, like Appalachia or Harlem, and needed assistance. Kee now sits with her back to the wall in public places, so she can watch who comes in; like most reformers, she is fearful of gangs allied with the tongs that are members of the C.C.B.A. "This was a community of old men," she says. "My mother couldn't stand near the window in the forties, because she'd have been thought a loose woman. The Second World War changed that—after it, we were allowed to be citizens. I do many things that challenge the establishment here. I realized in building the Chinese-American Planning Council, knocking on doors, that until we got political power no one would listen to us. We still have to educate each wave of immigrants. Where overseas did they ever get into the polls? They didn't vote in China or in Taiwan, and certainly not in Hong Kong."

Charles Wang, who is the president of the China Institute, an uptown center for Chinese culture and study, and was the executive director of the Chinese-American Planning Council, also blames the C.C.B.A.'s leadership for isolating Chinatown. "This community, because of its early history—the fear and the racism—was reluctant to have anything to do with the outside," he said when I spoke with him at his office. "It was designed so that those in power at the C.C.B.A. were the go-betweens, and the rest of the people would have to rely on them. Outsiders didn't take much interest in us unless there was a gang war, and our leaders didn't want outsiders to know what was going on. Therefore, few articles were written about us, and no one knew about our problems. Partly, we are at fault. We are so quiet, we don't complain, and so we tend to get short-changed. As more Chinese register to vote, and return census forms, more of us will be counted."

Most people in Chinatown aren't interested in American politics, and the neighborhood has only eight thousand registered voters. Only a quarter of them voted in the last mayoral election. But among the twelve thousand who in June of 1989 marched in the rain to the United Nations to protest the crackdown in Tiananmen Square were many people who live in Chinatown; at that time, too, thousands boycotted a pro-Beijing Chinese-language newspaper in Chinatown that was funded by the People's Republic, forcing it to fold.

Among Chinatown's new guard, the feeling is growing that Chinatown must speak out, demand its fair share of federal funding, vote, join America. "The new generation is getting much more mixed with the U.S. culture," Harold Ha, a jeweller and one of Chinatown's behind-the-scenes younger leaders, told me. "Chinatown will be part of the city—not so isolated as before. Before, it was really, really isolated area. Now it is more and more open. I hope it will become like San Francisco—more open, cleaner, prosperous." Miriam Friedlander, who has represented Chinatown in the City Council since 1975, also notices a difference. "The stereotype that Chinese are quiet and submissive has been broken by their own leadership," she said to me not long ago. "We're going to hear their demands for housing, for city services, for help against crime and gangs. The Hispanic community, as a contrast, is basically set. It is more advanced politically, and more a part of the American system. It has more people interrelated with speakers of English. But the Chinese are developing this now. Yes, the language barrier is more difficult. And inexperience is a factor. There is not one elected Chinese legislator in the entire state, for instance."

THE tongs are even stronger now than they were fifty years ago, and are doing their best to keep Chinatown isolated. They overwhelm the community, influencing every aspect of its life—business, politics, journalism, tourism. Their members sponsor crimes that terrorize and cow the community. Some crimes are the traditional ones—smuggling of aliens, prostitution, extortion, loan-sharking—but now members of tongs also import gargantuan quantities of heroin, generally through Bangkok or Hong Kong. Along with independent traffickers, they have in the last six years taken over from the Cosa Nostra the business of smuggling the drug.



The tongs' influence is pervasive partly because of their open structure: anyone who pays thirty dollars can join a tong, and will be inducted in an elaborate ritual that includes the burning of paper vows; chanting oaths before Gung Gong, the god of war; offering incense to the gods of Hell; and swearing blood brotherhood to avenge all wrongs done to other members and to die before coöperating with police. Not all tong members are criminals, of course. Thousands of waiters, merchants, laundrymen, businessmen, seamen, garment-factory workers, and even journalists belong to tongs. Any member of a tong can call on a gang's services in a dispute. A Chinatown elder explained why people join tongs: "You have so-called peace of mind. You think the tong is behind you. That's the psychological reason. You think also maybe it will help your business: you know more people, you will meet all the other members. As a member paying thirty-dollar dues a year, it's O.K. But if the tongs tap you to become part of their hierarchy, then you have to deliver."

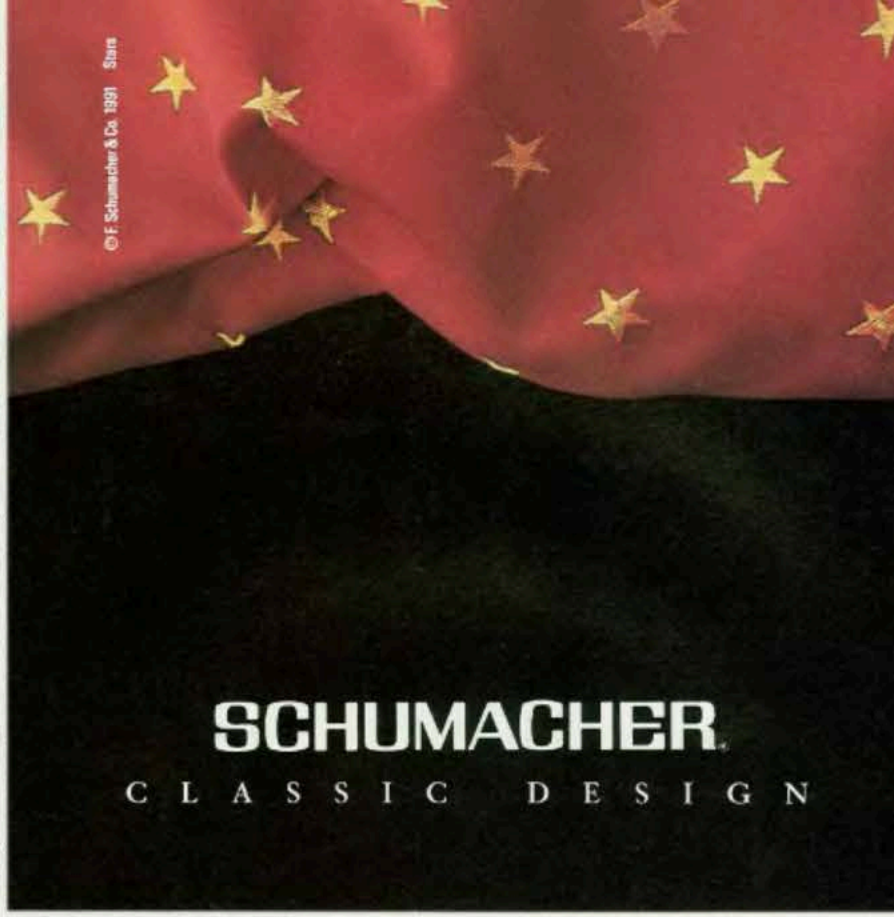
All the Chinatown tongs are national groups, with chapters in cities throughout the United States, and each has tens of thousands of members. The New York City chapters are the largest, because New York has the largest Chinese community in the country. For the same reason, several tongs have their national headquarters in Chinatown. The top men in a tong (women are not permitted to join) are its board members and its elders—the wealthy and influential in a community. Board members are elected because they are prominent: they may own a large business, or give to charity, or simply have charisma. But power resides in a tong's elders and its president, whether or not they are important outside the tong.

The so-called godfather of Chinatown is Benny Ong. (His real name is Kai Sui Ong, which means Good Prophecy Ong.) He is the adviser-for-life of Hip Sing, Chinatown's most powerful tong. Ong is eighty-three years old, a thickset man with a sagging moonface and with hands like square blocks. He is often called Uncle 7, because he was his parents' seventh child. Born into a poor family in Harbin, he emigrated at age twelve, worked in a Chinatown laundry, and became a Hip Sing in the nineteen-twenties. He spent the years from 1935 to 1952 in jail for second-degree murder, and thereafter resumed active membership in Hip Sing, which was then under the presidency of his brother Sam. After Sam's death, in 1974, Ong took over. He was jailed again, briefly, in 1977 and 1978, for bribing police and government officials; in conversations recorded by investigators he boasted that he was *the* payoff man in Chinatown.

Hip Sing's big rival is On Leong, which has its headquarters in New York and is run by the national president, Chan Wing Wa, and the local president, Albert Moy. Tung On, headed by Clifford Wong, is a new group, with its headquarters in Chinatown. In addition, there are Chih Kung, the Chinese Freemasons, and the Fukien Association; the last was formed in the early eighties by people from the Chinese province of Fujian, and is said by law-enforcement officials to be heavily involved in heroin trafficking and the smuggling of aliens. Except for Chih Kung, each tong is affiliated with a gang, and it is the gangs—the equivalent of standing armies—that carry on the tongs' power struggles.

The tongs' turf is rigidly divided. Law-enforcement officers assigned to cover Chinatown, and others working on Asian crime, have maps of Chinatown with streets colored to indicate tong control. Hip Sing controls Pell Street; On Leong controls Mott. A tong member on the wrong street is a provocation, just as it was in the eighteen-nineties, and a gang member ripping off another tong's gambling parlor still starts a war.

"Chinese invented the Mafia, and then Marco Polo took it to Italy and the Italians reinvented it," a Chinatown insider explained to me. "The tongs are the families—everyone knows who's a member. You don't want to cross them. Each has about fifty prominent members. Real bosses, about ten



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each. They post elected officers. If you're a Chan or an Eng, it's quite possible you belong to one of them. Chans or Chens are On Leong; Engs or Ongs are Hip Sing. The tongs run the gangs and the gambling houses, and they settle disputes in the old-fashioned way: you give me face, I'll give you face; if you don't listen to me, I'll break your face. Uncle 7 is the elder statesman of the underworld, but his power has been eroding for some time. He's from the previous generation, and many mavericks have been challenging the structure. Also, there are the Vietnamese gangs—the tongs have no control over them."

The Vietnamese gangs, new to Chinatown crime in the last few years, are greatly feared in the area; they are considered more violent and more vicious than Chinese gangs, who occasionally hire them as muscle. They are mostly young refugees who have dropped out in frustration at being unable to learn English or have run away from foster homes. As refugees, they can't be deported. Members of one of their gangs, Born to Kill, are often tattooed with the initials B.T.K. Born to Kill has upset the longtime order of Chinatown organized crime, because it is not backed by any tong, and because its members speak dialects none of their victims understand, and prey on merchants who have already paid tongs anything from fifty to a thousand dollars a month in "lucky money," or protection money.

"It's chaotic now," Mrs. Kong Kee, who runs a large retail soybean business, told me. "Different gangs come to the store and ask for protection money. Usually, a store has to pay the tong, and then its gang doesn't bother them. But now the Vietnamese gang shakes the store down, and other gangs do, too."

Mrs. Kee's daughter Tina added, "We know a policeman who is more powerful than the gangs, so we don't pay. It depends on your business and who your friends are. We pay lucky money at New Year's, but it's nothing—fifty or a hundred dollars. Of course, it's a bad problem. People is very afraid about it. To set up some business if they know no friends! I just try to protect our interest—not stop it. A lot of people complain, but they never do anything to stop it."

Another merchant told me, "It's cost of doing business here. Maybe one per cent of places getting extorted are unhappy. It's status quo. I'm upset now because we're in first phase of disorganized crime. It's so serious it's terrifying. Those kids come in. We have no one to negotiate with. You can't b.s. your way out, or make a deal. This is new. In eighty years, this is new. We don't know who they are—it's not the same guys each time. We think it's free-lance kids. Vietnamese don't respect anybody. Things are changing."

THE REVENANT

Jet lag, a jump-cut dawn, distempered
Daze of brick dust and rose dust;
Ache of memory, insomniac mumble of June.
The worst of absence is return,
Already not becoming what you once

Almost already were. . . . Forgotten things
Forget themselves; the spellbound mirrors slumber
Dreaming of sand. A shut book dreams of lumber.
You wake them once a year;
Every year it gets harder.

Delicate hour,
Mica, translucent moon,
Hue of penitence (sham) on sleeping windows—
You walk to the borough gardens:
Locked, but a demolished house leads through

And you stand in the exfoliated green of your own past,
Between the pond and the bench where the blind men sat,
Chestnuts plowing the light—domed emerald rubble—
And a rain of birdsong gibbering like a language
You no longer speak or understand.

—JAMES LASDUN

• •

This merchant explained why he preferred the organized crime of the past, when gangs extorted weekly or monthly payments for themselves and the tongs with clockwork regularity: "If it's organized crime, and one wild kid says, 'I want to sell you an orange tree'—you know, extorting me, demanding a lot of money for the lucky New Year's plant—I say, 'Don't break my face, are you kidding?' I know the management of the tong that controls my street, its general and its lieutenants. To save face, I'll complain to its second rung, not the top. The kid gets taken care of. If I have really big problem, I go to see the top people: on Division Street, I go to see Clifford Wong. On Pell Street, I go to see Benny Ong. On Mott, I see Chan Wing Wa. I'm for tranquillity. I'm not looking for reform. I'm typical, I think. My neighbors are getting rich. They don't view themselves as enslaved by gangs and associations. The I.R.S. enslaves me, not the gangs."

Crime is worsening in Chinatown. According to a study made last year by Ko-lin Chin, a sociologist with the New York City Criminal Justice Agency, and two colleagues, eighty-one per cent of the restaurants and two-thirds of all the businesses in Chinatown are victimized by gangs. Everyone knows who the gang kids and the tong bosses are, but no one revolts and turns them in. Those who do make complaints won't testify in court. Few crimes are reported; fewer still go to trial. Police make cases only with great difficulty. A sergeant in the Fifth Precinct, which includes Chinatown, said, "Chinese don't coöperate—although the little they're doing now is better than the nothing they did before."

The sergeant, who spoke to me on the condition that he remain anonymous, went on, "The situation with the Chinese is unique. I've had them come in to the precinct house to do lineups, and look at the floor. They never coöperate in identifications when we go out canvassing. Off the top of my head, I can think of only one complainant who has gone to court for us. She's the only one.

"They're funny people to deal with—they're used to having the government shoot criminals. That's how the Communists deal with them in China. The perpetrator isn't going to come back and haunt anyone. All the time, they ask when I say So-and-So is in jail for a few years, 'In jail for only two years?' "

Nancy Ryan, the chief of the Trial Division in the Manhattan District Attorney's office—she is known in Chinatown as the Dragon Lady—adds, "In fifteen years, I have had less than two dozen merchants testify in open court. Not until 1983 did we have any civilian testify in a murder case. We had to arrest him to get him to court. And I've had just one civilian identify the murderer in a homicide. It's a very complicated problem—the Chinese are deeply frightened. They know there are armed thugs on the street and they can't have twenty-four-hour police protection. They don't understand our system, and they can't conceive of a system where cops know who the gang members are and let them roam the street, or a system where if someone is charged with a crime he's out on bail in a week. They don't trust public officials. Chinese have many proverbs that exhort people not to trust public officials. They come here with the shirts on their backs and their dreams, and they struggle in a way we can't conceive of, because we are too spoiled by affluence. I find it hard to imagine that anyone else in these very adverse circumstances would be more noble about testifying."

William Calhoun, who until the beginning of this year was the captain of the Fifth Precinct, added, "It's not 'Will there be retribution?' but 'When?' Ten years is not too long for Chinese to wait, I'm told. This community is faced with people bent on havoc. It's organized retribution."

In one of the latest instances, in the spring of 1990, a beauty-shop worker and her boyfriend were murdered and their bodies dumped on an estate on Long Island. The woman, a former Miss Chinatown and a former girlfriend of a gang leader, had testified five years earlier in a gang-related trial in Brooklyn.

CHINATOWN has four Chinese-language daily newspapers, but most of them don't report such crimes. Journalism in Chinatown is a warped, submissive creature, as ineffective as it is in China. Journalists risk firings and death threats for reporting the news. Ying Chan, who has been one of Chinatown's most respected reporters and is now on the staff of the *News*, told me, "There's no tradition of independent journalism in Chinatown—everyone is so scared. The papers represent political interests, which are tied to economic interests. You can't cover the tongs—we did the best we could. Every time we tested the limits, people got beat up. The gangs called me in the early nineteen-eighties and told me they were waiting for me on the street. In 1988, my publisher told me that Benny Ong had asked him to fire me and said he would give him thirty thousand dollars' worth of advertising." This sort of intimidation, Chan added, was common practice in Chinatown. "The publisher didn't fire me—he asked me not to cover Chinatown. The unwritten rule is: No names of tong members or gang members. We print their English names, or use phonetic Chinese to confuse everyone, or give just their Chinese surnames. Or we blank the name out—it's standard to put 'XXX' for a witness's name."

In 1978, Hsin Yuan Cheng, then a Chinatown columnist, was badly beaten on the street one night by five young men. He is sure that the reason he was attacked was that he wrote so many stories about the community. "At that time, I am young, and I try to correct everything," Cheng told me. In 1984, a member of Hip Sing's gang, the Flying Dragons, walked into the office of the editor of *Sing Tao Jih Pao*, a large Hong Kong-funded daily, and demanded at gunpoint that a reporter who had written about a dispute over an extortion be taken off the story. She was. In 1987, the *Center Daily News* dropped its coverage of a landlord-tenant dispute involving the gangs when its reporter was harassed. In 1989, a reporter from *Sing Tao* did not observe the unwritten rule, and wrote up the testimony of an On Leong boss in a murder trial. The reporter was fired but was rehired after he apologized personally to the On Leong boss, and the paper, in abject apology, sent the tong a roast pig, a traditional offering of respect. A Chinese TV reporter who shot footage of an On Leong gambling joint in the late eighties was told he

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would be killed if the story was shown.

Peter Lee, a Chinatown journalist, explained, "It's in Chinese culture to be careful of what you say, not to humiliate someone in public, to avoid confrontation. This is why tongs threaten us so freely. As the tongs see it, they have a legitimate beef when we cover them or print their names. It's a vicious circle. The longer people tolerate this, the less freedom they have." Perhaps having second thoughts himself about talking to an outsider, Lee added, "If one day you read that Peter Lee is found dead somewhere, you can pretty much draw the conclusion that I have a big mouth. I'm only half joking. I know there is that possibility. I hope the Justice Department and the F.B.I. will open an investigation into censorship and infringement of the First Amendment in Chinatown."

Quo Chen, a Taiwanese reporter who has worked in Chinatown, doubts whether anyone will ever do "the inner story" of the tongs and the gangs. "The damage would be too great—the dirt would be spread on everyone's head," he told me. "I mean community leaders. It's a nasty statement, but it's true. This is such a small community. We meet each other every day. No way to escape, no way. Suppose you are a publisher, you know someone who is a good friend of a tong member who's doing drug trafficking, prostitution. Because you take sides, you may lose money. Take my former paper, which comes out as a weekly in New York and as a daily in Taipei. It has enough money and manpower to investigate the tongs and the gangs—why doesn't it? Let me put it this way: these things are not a significant disease. Some of the tong members traffic in drugs, some launder money, but what is their relation to one another? We don't know. And we are not that interested in finding out. You have your way to survive, I have my way—that's the dialogue among Chinese. You may belong to a tong, but I do not. I understand you, and you understand why I don't see you as a criminal—your acts don't hurt my interests."

Additionally, some Chinese see tongs as legitimate, even admirable, because they provided financial backing for Sun Yat-sen's 1911 revolution and then for the Guomindang. Chiang Kai-shek used triads, secret criminal societies on which the tongs were modelled, to assist the Nationalists in the civil war against the Communists. After 1949, many triad members fled with him to Taiwan. Others formed the underworld in Hong Kong, maintaining ties to their American cousins the tongs. "It would take a dissertation to explain the admiration for these people," Quo Chen says. "They're not looked down on: they're always against the government, which in Chinese history has always been corrupt. The connection between the Guomindang and the gangs has its source in Sun Yat-sen. In a feudal society, to make a revolution you have to have organizational power, and the triads were it. So you see it in the government. In China and Taiwan, they say, 'You are in the black way, the dark root.' That means gangs. Now Uncle 7, tongs, overseas Chinese—all are attached to the Guomindang. It's nasty, but it's understandable if you know our history."

One story the Chinatown press stayed away from was a bitter dispute several years ago between City Hall and the C.C.B.A. The C.C.B.A. had arranged the election of several tong members to the board of a corporation overseeing a proposed addition to the Manhattan Detention Complex (known as the Tombs), a prison on the western edge of Chinatown; the addition would also include shops, and housing for the elderly. Richard Mei, Jr., who was an adviser on Asian affairs to Mayor Edward Koch, led a fight to remove the tong members. He told the Koch administration in a memo that the city could no longer support the project if the tongs remained members. Mei recalls, "We were afraid that they'd control the community space in the project or charge rent or protection money. One of the problems is that it has always been very difficult to gather evidence against the tongs." The city tried to shame the tongs off the board, saying that the C.C.B.A. had elected "unacceptable" members, including some associated with organized crime. Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau said the police believed that the gangs served as enforcers for organized-crime activities. Benny Ong responded, in the *Times*, that the C.C.B.A. would not "tolerate this type of defamation."

The city won on a technicality—it took the C.C.B.A. to court for stacking the board. Richard Mei, who is now with the State Department, says, "I was vilified in the Chinese press. They said I was a yellow dog, and a traitor to the community. The C.C.B.A. put a notice on its door banning me from its premises." The project is finally going forward after years of delay.

Another subject that Chinatown journalists have avoided is the tightening of the tongs' control over the C.C.B.A. itself. The tongs have long been able to dominate the C.C.B.A. through its executive board, but until recently a gentleman's agreement barred them from electing one of their members president. In February of 1990, however, Benny Ong, the Hip Sing elder, and Chan Wing Yeung, the former national president of the rivalrous On Leong, shocked Chinatown by voting as a bloc at the C.C.B.A.'s annual election. "It's time for a change," Uncle 7 said. "All the past presidents have been corrupt. None of them have spoken English." He proposed raising the president's salary and extending his term from a year to two years. A former president of the local chapter of On Leong nominated a former president of the local chapter of Hip Sing. This nomination was seconded by the national president of the Chinese Freemasons. Chan Wing Yeung nominated Paul Yee, a businessman, and Yee's nomination was seconded by the national president of Hip Sing. Several hours later, the other candidate withdrew, citing "health reasons," and the C.C.B.A., over the objections of its outgoing president, who reminded members that they weren't permitted to vote on only one candidate, elected Yee.

A Chinatown reporter observed, "It was the first time these rival tongs coöperated and endorsed the same candidate and forced him down our throats. Usually, they don't coöperate and no one votes for their candidates. The *World Journal*"—one of Chinatown's newspapers—"and *Sing Tao* sanitized and glamorized the election and said it was great for Chinatown. That is ridiculous. You have a handpicked puppet of the Chinese Mafia running the C.C.B.A., Chinatown's govern-

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ing body. Imagine if the mayor of New York was handpicked by John Gotti!"

CHINATOWN's police, most of whom are white, have their own view of the area and its crime. To get a sense of how the tongs divide up their turf, I accompanied police officer Mike Wagner on his rounds. Wagner, a bachelor in his late thirties with a ruddy face, strawberry-blond hair, and a mustache, worked in gang intelligence in the Fifth Precinct for five and a half years, and is now a sergeant in another precinct. We were starting a week later than we had planned, because the previous week a businessman had been kidnapped by one of the gangs, and Wagner's unit had had to go out searching for him. Wagner's sergeant, Michael Collins, told me, "It happens down here. It was a business deal gone sour. His partners called the tong and arranged for the gang to get him."

From the front seat of an unmarked Chevrolet, the community, with its jagged neon signs, looked seedy and dangerous. We passed the headquarters of On Leong, and drove slowly down Mott Street. "There's No. 66," Wagner said. "Down there, in the basement, that's On Leong's gambling place. It's thirteen-card and pai gow. See that white piece of paper on the door? It says '*hoi p'ei*,' or 'Open Skin'—it means open for business. The skin is the surface of the tables. No. 63, another On Leong joint, was padlocked by the Police Department's public-morals squad, and it never opened up again.

"It's crazy here," Wagner went on. "These people strangle each other. Factories pay lucky money. Even the ones on the third floor pay. But to arrest for extortion we need a threat of violence. The gangs know that. So they say, 'My brother needs fifty dollars,' with no direct threats."

We turned up Bayard Street toward the Bowery. "This all belongs to the Ghost Shadows gang," Wagner said. "Mott is controlled by one of its factions, Bayard by another. They do extortions, robberies, and some kidnappings and homicides."

A 1988 Justice Department report on Asian organized crime says:

> The Ghost Shadows Gang is attached to the On Leong Tong. . . . Money from gang extortions, a traditional source of revenue, still flows up to the Tong leadership and is subsequently redistributed according to existing agreements. In many respects, however, the Shadows is an independent organization that works with, rather than for, the On Leong Tong. . . . Members of the Shadows are known to work as mid-level heroin couriers, travelling frequently to Toronto, Boston, Chicago, New Orleans and Miami. At least some heroin distribution occurs in collaboration with New York and Chicago LCN [La Cosa Nostra] families.

As we drove down Pell Street, a narrow passage through overhanging tenements, our car practically brushed the restaurants lining the sidewalk. "That's No. 9—a Hip Sing gambling parlor," Wagner said, pointing to a nondescript entrance. "It's open two eight-hour shifts a day. Uncle Benny's cut from that is a hundred and thirty thousand dollars per month, an informant told us. Might not be gospel." Wagner slowed the car in front of the Chung Shing Tea Parlor, a Flying Dragons hangout. A gang member in jeans and a parka, a street boss, came outside and greeted him. Inside, about fifteen *sai low*—"little brothers," as gang members are called in street slang—played video games.

The Justice Department report:

> There are three powerful Tongs in New York: Hip Sing, On Leong and Tung On. The leadership of each is believed to be controlled by [Chinese organized-crime] figures. . . . Formal leadership of the Hip Sing Tong is a complex arrangement of co-presidents, chief officers, executive staff, coordinators, external relations and assorted administrators. Informally, the power resides in Hip Sing's "Advisor-in-Chief for Life". . . Benny Ong. . . . The Flying Dragons Gang . . . is attached to the Hip Sing Tong. During the last three years, the Dragons have recruited heavily among Vietnamese youths who now comprise about one-quarter of the . . . gang members. The Dragons operate from Pell and Doyers Streets in Chinatown and are reported to have branches in other major cities, including Dallas, Houston, Atlanta and Washington, D.C.

On Division Street, opposite a statue of Confucius, Wagner showed me the Tung On headquarters, a three-story brick building. "This association has ties to the Sun Yee On triad, over in Hong Kong," he said. "That's the biggest triad in Hong Kong. The triads are banned in Hong Kong, you know. Tung On's boss brought back some twenty-five-year-olds from Sun Yee On to guard his gambling houses. His street gang, the younger kids, do the robberies and shootings." Clifford Wong, the handsome, dynamic thirty-eight-year-old leader of Chinatown's third most powerful tong, is known as a "legitimate" businessman. In 1989, the New Jersey Division of Casino Gaming Enforcement revoked Wong's "junket license" to bus gamblers to Atlantic City, charging that Wong was an organized-crime leader, and last year banned him from the tables. Wong's brother Stephen, who is known as Tiger Boy and is the leader of Tung On's gang, was convicted on federal narcotics charges two years ago.

"On this corner here, at the head of Catherine Street, is the Tsung Tsin Association, one of Chinatown's wealthiest businessmen's groups," Wagner told me. "The winner of its election is easily moved, shall we say, by Clifford Wong. No. 1 Catherine and No. 1 Division are the same building, and in the basement is the Tsung Tsin gambling house—two shifts, noon to 8 P.M., and 8 P.M. to 4 A.M., a multimillion-dollar business any given time. All the houses are."

Going down East Broadway, Wagner said, "No. 7, here, is a Fujianese gambling house occasionally." Farther on, he pointed out an unlit, five-foot-long neon sign running down the side of a building: "The Golden Star Bar," it said. "They used to call it Grandpa's—that was the owner's nickname. There was a shoot-out there in 1982. The restaurant never reopened." I knew the story, which is famous in Chinatown. Herbert Liu, an immigrant from Hong Kong, defected from Hip Sing and, with backing from the Chinese Freemasons, challenged Benny Ong's power. The challenge ended when four masked men carrying automatic weapons walked into the Golden Star Bar, a Freemasons hangout, and opened fire, killing three diners and wounding eight. Liu accused Benny Ong of ordering the shootings. Freemasons surrounded Hip Sing and briefly took over Pell Street. Liu held a press conference. Benny Ong said nothing. Several weeks later, he told a reporter from *New York:* "Sixty year I build up respect and he think he knock me down in one day?" Liu apologized to Benny Ong, and Hip Sing then took control of the Freemasons.

As we drove under the Manhattan Bridge into the Wild West of Chinatown, where few people were about, Wagner said, "Down here, when a gang comes in, it tries to show its power and do a lot of extortions and robberies. When you see a 'Grand Opening' sign, it's only a matter of time before the gang gets an extortion. The going rate here for a grand-opening extortion is three hundred and sixty dollars. Protection money is divisible by threes and sixes. And eight is lucky. It could be a thousand and eighty dollars—three times three hundred and sixty. Anything divisible by three, they like. But never four itself—the number four means death."

The Fukien Association, Wagner told me, has its headquarters at 125 East Broadway. Two stone lions out front scare away demons. "Their territory is Forsyth, Eldridge, and Grand Streets," Wagner explained. "The top guys in their gang, the Fuk Ching, are heavy into importing heroin." We headed up Eldridge Street, which looked especially shabby. "Three Mountain Association is another Fujian tong. Here's their gambling spot, No. 7. During the summer, they were so blatant. They'd open the door for air and there'd be a whole shitload of them in there. I guess there are about half a dozen permanent gambling spots in Chinatown—a lot less than there used to be.

"A lot of parents save their children from the gangs by sending them back to Hong Kong or the mainland to live with their grandparents. We know of three in the last month. We tell parents we can't babysit their kids—eventually, they're going to get locked up or dead. Immigrants are the ones with the runaways. The American-born Chinese, the wife stays home with the kids. You can't blame the new immigrants—they work so hard. The mother works eight to eight in a garment factory, the father works twelve to twelve in a restaurant, and who's home when the kids are? We had one runaway whose mother and father live in Brooklyn. They told me they put him in Chinatown in his grandmother's apartment. Come on! Everyone puts it over on Grandma!"

Wagner pointed out the window as we swung down Mott again. "See that?" he said. "Those two bullet holes in the back of the pay phone? That was an ambush of Ghost Shadows by some Flying Dragons, but Born to Kill is our worst problem. The Vietnamese came here five, six years ago and opened up the malls on Canal Street. That was the only place they could go; old Chinatown is full up. Vietnamese gangs are a problem in every major city—Houston, Washington, Philadelphia. Everywhere, there's a problem with them hitting Oriental jewelry stores. They rip off the Chinese elders because they know the elders won't report the crimes."

On our way up Bayard Street, we passed a number of stores shuttered with heavy metal screens. "See those big, expensive locks on the gates?" Wagner said. "The gangs Krazy Glue 'em if the stores don't pay."

We cruised by the Pell Street tea parlor again. "Look at 'em all in there, they're all Dragons," he said in amazement. "Twenty, twenty-five Dragons. The Chinese gangs have taken in a lot of Vietnamese for muscle. Vietnamese are crazies. They shoot anyone the gangs want."

PEOPLE who know Chinatown have different ways of explaining why the tongs, which were relatively quiet after the nineteen-thirties, when a series of tong wars ended, have had a resurgence since 1965. The commonest explanation is that the new immigrants flooding Chinatown since the change in immigration laws gave the tongs new life: more people meant more gamblers, and the tongs needed muscle to watch the pots. "We don't have Wells Fargo, so tongs hired kids," one resident said. "The kids rapidly outgrew the tongs. Now the tail wags the dog."

Nancy Ryan, who began working in Chinatown in 1976, after graduating from Yale Law School, is, as much as anyone, a historian of the gangs. She has prosecuted more of their members than anybody else in the city, and her version of gang history confirms the conventional wisdom. "People who were made gang members in the seventies tell me very similar stories," she said. "They were twelve-, thirteen-, fourteen-year-olds, new immigrants from Hong Kong. They didn't know English, their parents were off working, they could look forward to rising to the level of waiter, maybe, or being a

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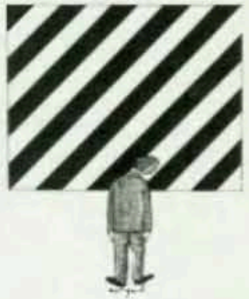
garment worker forever, and they were being picked on by other ethnic groups. At first, they banded together for self-protection, no heavy artillery. Then they began associating with an older group—men doing a lot of robberies. They got bolder and acquired guns from elders in the tongs, and claimed territories. In the early seventies, we had a lot of gang warfare—kids facing off across city thoroughfares and just shooting madly. Somehow, around that time, in a way that's not clear to me, they took up with the tongs. The relationship is symbiotic. The gangs use the tongs to enhance their own prestige. They also make money collecting payoffs from the tongs' gambling houses and acting as lookouts for the police. The tongs protect the gangs and use them to enhance *their* prestige, because the gangs inspire terror. There were a lot of drugs in the early seventies in Chinatown, and the story I got was that On Leong was not happy with the drug trafficking of the gang that controlled Mott Street then—the White Eagles—so in 1974 it replaced them with the Ghost Shadows. A lot of the Ghost Shadows and the Flying Dragons are members of the tongs. Hip Sing denies it, but that's a lot of nonsense—the gang's activities can be traced to the tong."



In the mid-seventies, Ryan went on, the gangs grew more independent, graduating to organized crime, and extortions and robberies, on their own. "The stores paid without hesitation," she said. Then she broke off to tell me about Eddie Chan, who ran On Leong in the late seventies and early eighties. A former staff sergeant in the Hong Kong police department, he had left Hong Kong, along with some forty other policemen, in the early seventies, during an investigation of corruption in the department. Chan was said to have made millions from illegal activities by then. He arrived in New York in 1975, opened a jade and antique store, and rapidly acquired a funeral parlor and interests in a chain of movie theatres, several restaurants, a gold exchange, and a Hong Kong commodities company. He engaged the services of Michael Nussbaum, a New York political consultant, and Nussbaum introduced him to senators and congressmen. Chan was called Fast Eddie by the police, for his swift ascent to the national presidency of On Leong.

By the late seventies, crime and gang warfare had become rampant in Chinatown. Alarmed by this situation, the New York Police Department authorized a group of detectives to investigate Asian crime. The group, which became known as the Jade Squad, was led by Sergeant James A. McVeety, who retired last year after thirty-three years of police work. The squad was given jurisdiction to work anywhere in the city, and began making inroads into Chinatown. Those inroads led to the only federal prosecution so far of a Chinatown gang, the Ghost Shadows. (Last month, thirteen people, all but one of them members of a Queens gang, the Green Dragons, were indicted under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations act.)

"In 1984, we indicted twenty-five Ghost Shadows for racketeering," Ryan told me. The case had its beginnings with an anonymous tip indicating that a white woman whose body was dumped in the precinct in 1982 had been killed by the gang.

"The detectives went out with photos of the victim and asked a group of kids on Mott Street if they'd seen her," McVeety said. "Our informant was with them. He noticed one kid shy away, and later he asked him why. He said, 'Because we killed her.'"

Ryan, who prosecuted the case, recalled, "They picked the victim up in a bar, and she went to one of their apartments, not knowing they were Ghost Shadows. She had sex with one of them, then the rest of the gang came up to the apartment. She refused to have sex with the others, and one of them rushed at her with a cleaver. Eventually, seven raped her, then they sat around playing a kid's game—rock, paper, scissors—to decide who was going to kill her. They left their lighters around the body, providing a flickering light. It turned out that gang rape was not uncommon."

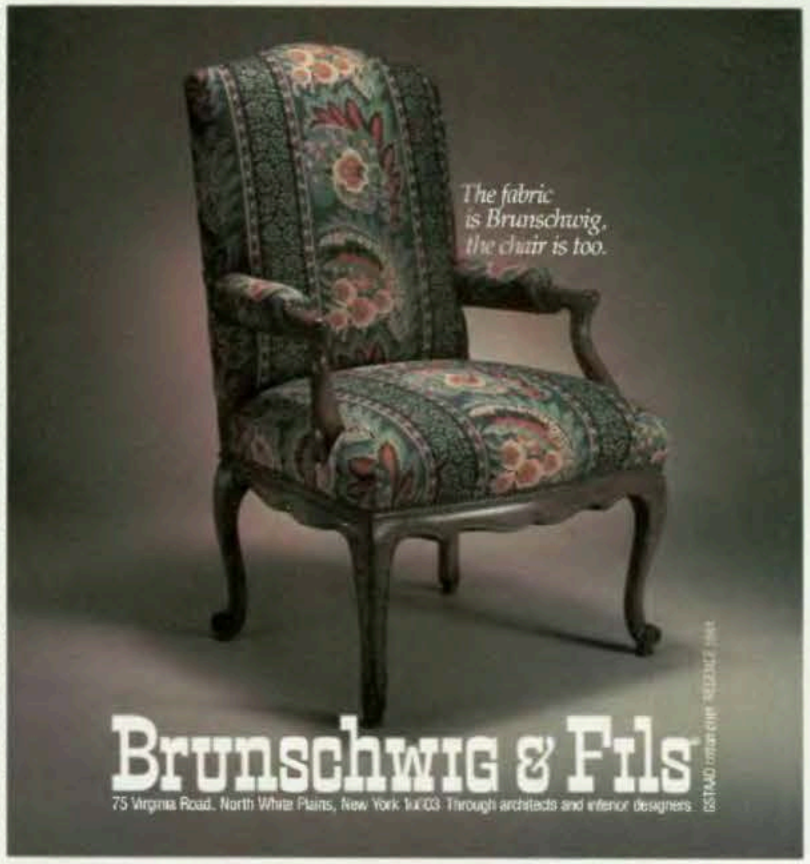
The same informant helped the Jade Squad and Ryan develop the 1984 case. The Ghost Shadows were charged with eighty-five crimes, spanning more than a decade—among them thirteen murders, forty-three acts involving murder, nine acts involving extortion, and two acts involving bribery. The investigators tape-recorded two extortions; negotiations between a gang leader and a gambling house about money; and a gang-initiation ceremony. A government summary of the charges alleged that proceeds from crime were used for "lawyers' fees, bail money, and other legal expenses; entertainment, meals, and spending money for the 'kids' . . . and—of critical importance—gang apartments and guns." It also described recruitment tactics: in schoolyards, for example, teen-agers were beaten by gang members while others recited the advantages of membership—girls, money, cars.

Somehow, Eddie Chan got away; he left the country secretly about a month after the indictment of On Leong's gang was made public. "We were trying to develop a case against him," District Attorney Morgenthau told me. Three months before Chan fled, the President's Commission on Organized Crime had identified him as the leader of organized crime in Chinatown. A rumor spread that he was going to be arrested, and in the space of a few days Chinatown depositors withdrew six million dollars from the United Orient Bank, in which Chan was a major shareholder. By the time Chan disappeared, he had become a prominent Asian-American spokesman: fêting politicians at banquets, testifying before Congress, lobbying for larger immigration quotas, contributing to Ronald Reagan's 1984 reëlection campaign and to the campaigns of local Democrats, among them Donald Manes, Geraldine Ferraro, and Mario Biaggi.

With Chan's rout, and with half the Ghost Shadows in prison—all twenty-one who were caught pleaded guilty—Hip Sing was riding high in the mid-eighties. Around that time, Robert Stutman, then the head of the Drug Enforcement Administration in New York, grew concerned about the rise in purity of heroin on the Lower East Side and in Harlem and the Bronx. China White, a variety of heroin whose street purity is as high as eighty-five per cent, was inundating the streets. The drug comes from the Golden Triangle, the area where Laos, Burma, and Thailand meet, and makes its way to Chinatown through Hong Kong—the Chinese Connection. "We were missing the boat—we knew nothing about Chinese traffickers and their organizations," Stutman told me. "I requested an agent. We were very lucky. Richard LaMagna, our agent, happened to be fluent in Chinese—one of the real experts in the country on China. I asked him to form a group and find out what was going on."

Police around the country were coping with an increase in Chinese crime, and had begun to wonder about the involvement of the gangs, which exist in every city with a Chinatown and in some other cities as well, and of the tongs, which have chapters in many cities, and of certain other international criminal groups—Big Circle, for instance, a Chinese gang in Hong Kong with a branch in New York City, and the Wah Ching, a similar organization with ties to San Francisco. The feeling grew that these organizations were in some way interrelated and that the new wave of crime was the doing of groups as methodical and dangerous as the Mafia.

The realization was a decade late, federal authorities now acknowledge. In the nineteen-seventies, New York, like most other cities, had only token Chinese in its police department: in 1978, out of twenty-four thousand six hundred officers, there were fewer than twenty who were not white, black, or Hispanic. Chinese didn't sign up—"No good Chinese join the Army or the police," an old Chinese adage has it—and police departments made no effort to recruit them. (Even now, uniformed officers who are not white, black, or Hispanic make up less than one per cent of New York's police force.) Without Chinese-speaking police, authorities couldn't possibly understand Chinese criminals. China has nearly two thousand dialects—three hundred in Guangdong Province alone—and Chinese names are confusing. Chinese have a family name and two given names, and all three are necessary to identify someone. But, since classic Chinese has only a hundred surnames, the same names recur in millions of combinations. And they are written differently in English depending on the dialect: Ng (or Ong or Eng), a Cantonese name, is Wu in Mandarin, for example. Police departments were mystified by all this, especially since they couldn't find translators. "If the suspects switched to Fujianese on you—forget it," one New York policeman said. But the overrid-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ing reason that the feds were lost was that understanding and controlling Chinese crime had never been a priority. In the seventies, the F.B.I. and the D.E.A. were busy learning Sicilian and investigating the Cosa Nostra, and in the eighties they were fighting the crack epidemic. And non-Chinese police obviously couldn't go undercover in Chinatown.

Not until the mid-eighties, when Chinese began selling heroin outside Chinatown to other ethnic groups, could a few cases be made—mostly by Italian and other white cops, aided by the smattering of Chinese detectives who had been added by then to the force. But in the last five years, thanks to the group that Richard LaMagna supervised at the D.E.A., the number of cases has soared. Connections between Chinatown gangs and Asian crime networks and Hong Kong triads have been exposed by LaMagna's group, called Group 41, and by prosecutors in the New York Eastern District, who have made reputations as the first to prosecute a "new" crime. The cases have involved sixty-five hundred pounds of China White shipped through New York City since 1987—enough to last America's five hundred thousand heroin addicts a year and a half. "We believe the impetus is 1997, Hong Kong reverting to China," Charles Rose, the former head of the Eastern District's organized-crime and drug-enforcement task force, said. (He is now the district's executive assistant United States Attorney.) "We see many people trying to get their goods and money out of Hong Kong before the Chinese take over."

NOT long ago, I went to the D.E.A.'s offices on West Fifty-seventh Street to find out what Group 41 thought about the extent to which Chinese organized crime now controlled the heroin trade. Several agents there filled me in.

The veteran member of the group, a man in his fifties with a diffident manner, said, "In the early eighties, the Sicilians brokered heroin. No longer. Opium production in the Golden Triangle has doubled, and the Chinese have jumped in with both feet.

"Here it is in a nutshell," he continued. "The opium is grown in the Golden Triangle, mostly in Burma, and production is booming. Chinese there sell it to Chinese brokers in Hong Kong, and they deal with Chinese in Chinatown. That's the Chinese Connection. The usual route is from Bangkok trawler to Hong Kong trawler to Hong Kong speedboat to the harbor."

The supervisor interrupted. "But it also can be transited through Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and—this is new—the People's Republic. It's from ninety to a hundred per cent pure. Street heroin used to be five or ten per cent pure. This stuff on the street is generally cut to thirty or fifty per cent pure. It's lethal. We're very worried we're going to see a smokable heroin, too—mainly because of AIDS. Smokable heroin is widely used in Asia."

The veteran said, "We're getting killed on mail parcels."

"The gang kids wait in an empty apartment, sign for the package, and leave," the supervisor explained.

The one Chinese agent present said, "From Chinese to Chinese, heroin is one price—between sixty and eighty-five thousand dollars a unit. That's one and a half pounds. If Chinese sell to Dominican or Puerto Rican distributors, it's between eighty-five and a hundred and forty thousand dollars. Dominicans are the major buyers."

The supervisor: "We've had the rubber case, the umbrella case, the bean-sprout case—the stuff in that one was hidden inside the cylinders of machines that wash bean sprouts. Most of these cases involved large quantities—a few of them eight hundred pounds and up. Years ago, you were King Shit if you imported two hundred pounds of heroin. The largest seizure in the French Connection"—the heroin-smuggling route from Turkey to New York via Marseilles—"was only two hundred and twenty pounds."

The veteran: "We've found people working in kitchens in Chinatown, where you don't ordinarily make much money, who have little ruby-and-diamond Christmas presents and three thousand or four thousand dollars in their pockets. They invest in the jewelry stores. The stores launder the money back to Hong Kong."

The supervisor: "The most common means of money laundering is to have couriers carry the cash on planes. A person can carry as much as a million dollars. One suitcase holds half a million. Money is heavy—they use hundred-dollar bills if they can.

Or they 'smurf' it back—send it in money orders under ten thousand dollars, the limit for reporting to the government. Smurfs are . . . What the hell are smurfs?"

No one in the group knew exactly. Little gnomes, someone said. The supervisor nodded. "Yeah, gnomes in banks you buy off."

The veteran: "Normally, gamblers with debts become the couriers."

The supervisor: "The approach of 1997 is flushing out the animals. A lot of the traffickers are triad members, but the public has got it wrong—triads don't run this business. It's not like the Mafia. Some triad members traffic, but when they do it's their own show. They have no obligation to kick their profits up to a godfather." He looked glum. "The traffickers run to Taiwan. We have no extradition treaty with Taiwan."

WHEN Group 41 started, it picked as targets eight or nine top heroin dealers in Chinatown, among them Johnny Eng. Also known as Onionhead and Machine Gun Johnny, Eng had taken over Hip Sing's Flying Dragons in 1983, after its leader was murdered. He travelled often to Hong Kong, and authorities suspected that he was smuggling heroin. Eng, a self-possessed man in his mid-thirties, greeted cops by name on the street and held to the code of silence.

In the winter of 1986, Robert Lee, who runs the Asian American Arts Centre, an art gallery and dance studio occupying a loft on the third floor of 26 Bowery, knew nothing of Group 41's objectives, and in some ways that was fortunate, considering the nightmare events that followed the day when his landlord, one of the last Jewish landlords in Chinatown, introduced Lee to representatives of his new landlord—three casually dressed Chinese men in their twenties and thirties. They invited Lee to a restaurant, where two other men and a young woman joined them. "This is Johnny," one said. The man named Johnny sized Lee up without saying anything while the others made their pitch: they asked him to move his arts center—which was also his home—from 26 Bowery to a building they owned on Mott Street, where the rent would be the same. They explained that they planned to open a fancy Hong Kong-style restaurant on the two floors below the loft that Lee and his wife, a choreographer named Eleanor Yung, occupied, and that they needed the loft for the restaurant's banquet room. Lee said that he couldn't decide.

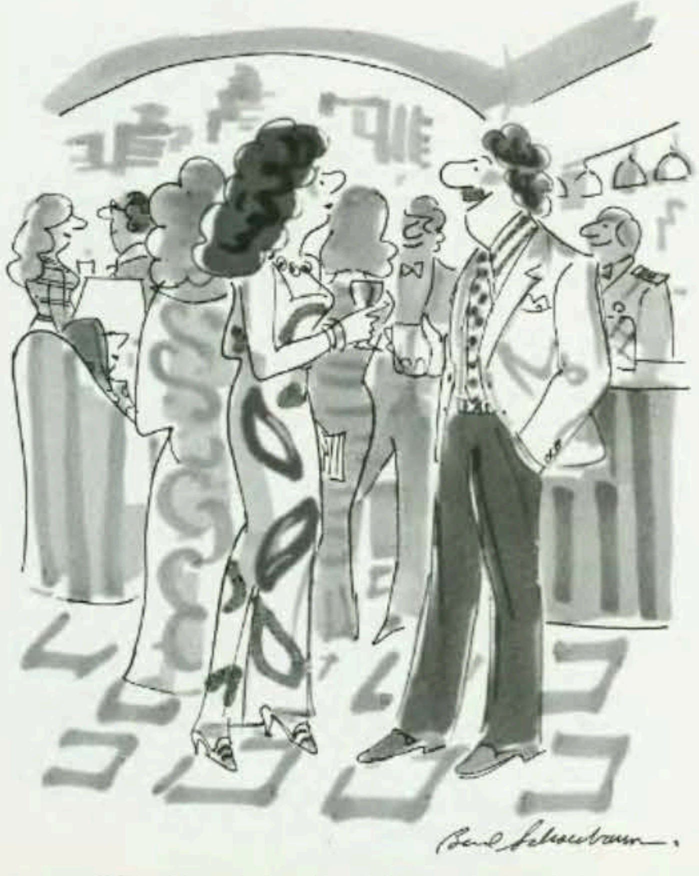
Later, a stranger called, and said that his name was Ngarn and that he represented the new landlord, but Lee asked for proof that this new landlord owned 26 Bowery and the property on Mott Street. Ngarn came to a meeting at the loft. Lee and his wife demanded to know the name of the new landlord, but all Ngarn said was that unless they vacated their loft they might run into trouble on the streets. "I'm a good guy," Ngarn said, "but the landlord is bad tempered and is associated with the Pell Street Boys"—another name for the Flying Dragons. He told Lee, "You sat next to their leader—Onionhead, Johnny Eng, the biggest gang leader in Chinatown—at the restaurant several weeks ago."

"We were then very frightened," Lee told me.

Nonetheless, Lee refused to move. Ngarn offered him two hundred and fifty thousand dollars if he would vacate, and persuade the other tenants to do so, or eighty thousand dollars if he would get rid of the fourth-floor tenants and move upstairs. Ngarn would not talk to the fourth-floor tenants himself, Lee noted, because they were *low faan*, and he dealt only with Chinese.

Eleanor Yung told the New York City Loft Board later, when she and her husband filed a complaint against their landlord for harassment, that they were in a difficult position. "To have accepted the offer would mean that we would have to begin associating with Hip Sing, and we would have to bring gifts to Uncle Benny," she testified. "And then we would be in their hierarchy of operation, we would have to listen to them." But, she said, she and her husband were trapped. "I couldn't turn it down immediately, because we were afraid it would backfire and they would set the gangs on us."

Friends urged them to resist. Their lawyer told them to forget it—they were up against Chinatown's biggest gang leader. Lee thought of people who had resisted: the woman who prepares the ducks in a Catherine Street restaurant had picked up her cleaver and chased a gang when it tried to extort lucky money from her; the owner of another restaurant had held a press



"Oh, I've had a few failures, followed by a string of successful marriages."

conference rather than give in to extortion. Those were the only two resisters Lee could think of who were still alive. He and his wife nevertheless decided not to give in. Ngarn informed them that in that case their landlord, still unnamed, would do things his way.

Soon after they announced their decision, construction began on the restaurant, and odd things happened: the hall lights went off; the hot water functioned only sporadically; and one day the façade of the building was gone, the arts center exposed. The lights were still not working when the restaurant opened, the following winter, and Lee and Yung had no intercom and no mailbox. By that time, they had lost two-thirds of their students, and Yung had done no choreographing for the season.

In pictures of the restaurant's New Year's opening party which were published in Chinatown papers, Lee recognized one of the men he'd met a year earlier. He was a thin, goggle-eyed man, identified as Shu Yan Eng, the owner of 26 Bowery. Lee remembered that Shu Yan Eng had sat next to Johnny Eng and had said very little.

A couple of weeks later, a man from Hip Sing paid a visit to Lee's father, a retired laundryman who lives in Chinatown. Telling me this part of the story, Lee lost his composure, and covered his eyes to wipe away tears. He explained that, though his surname was Lee, his father was one of Chinatown's many "paper sons," who had entered the country with false papers, and that his actual surname was Eng. "My father has lived in the United States since he was thirteen," Lee said. "He was part of the all-male Bachelor Society. The men went back to China once in twenty years to see their wives and make them pregnant. My father still has his old friends, though there are fewer of them each year. They hang out in the back of barbershops, continuing their calm existence. This man visited him and said, 'Tell your son that everything is O.K.—O.K. to take his time, look for another place to move to, and we'll help him move.' My father is an Eng. Hip Sing is an Eng society, you see—this man came on behalf of the tong. They said, 'Oh, he's an Eng. Let's be nice.' I had no way to protect him. He didn't feel threatened—he was trying to help me. This man was his old chummy. They had now made it clear to me that they knew my father and where he hangs out. By this I knew they were threatening the life of my father."

Shortly after the visit to his father, Lee broke Chinatown's code of silence and reached out to the white world for help. He held a press conference and accused his landlord, Shu Yan Eng, of using the gangs to intimidate him into vacating his loft. The one Chinatown paper that sent a reporter stopped investigating the story when the reporter was threatened. Rumors spread that Lee and his wife were obstructing business, and merchants' contributions to their arts organization dropped.

In the spring of 1988, Lee and Yung began testifying before the Loft Board in their case against Shu Yan Eng. The case pivoted on Johnny Eng—who he was, and whether he was threatening the couple. Shu Yan Eng's lawyer bore down: Had his client ever threatened Lee? Had Johnny Eng? Had Hip Sing? No, not directly, Lee had to admit. And the lawyer forced Lee to concede that 26 Bowery wasn't his sole residence—the Lees occasionally shared a nearby apartment with a relative. "You've lost the case," Lee's lawyer told him. "You can bring a suit only if 26 Bowery is your home."

As Lee struggled to make the hearing officer understand how dangerous a threat involving Onionhead was, Johnny Eng, unbeknownst to Lee, had fled Chinatown, leaving the Flying Dragons in disarray. His sub-boss, Michael Yu, was arrested on narcotics charges. According to affidavits filed later by the government for Eng's extradition, Yu's downfall was a result of gambling.

Yu's girlfriend, Wah Tom Lee, loved to gamble. She was often found at the parlors on Pell Street that Yu ran for Johnny Eng and Hip Sing. Her debts rose into the thousands of dollars. At Eng's suggestion, she earned fifty thousand dollars by arranging for two friends to pick up heroin brought by Eng's couriers from Hong Kong to a washroom at Kennedy Airport. Several months later, Eng asked her to find people in Chinatown willing to receive packages mailed from Hong Kong. Inside each package, among tea and toys, was at least fifteen pounds of heroin. For the first delivery, Wah Tom Lee earned thirty thousand dollars and the receiver earned twenty thousand dollars. More packages arrived and more profits were collected. Yu and Lee sold some of the heroin themselves and made even greater profits. In September, 1987, together with some friends, they flew to Hong Kong with about six hundred thousand dollars of profits in their suitcases for Johnny Eng. Eng treated the couple and one of their friends to five days at Club Med in Indonesia.

BEVERAGES
SODA
SELTZER
SYRUP
Stuart Leeds

Customs and D.E.A. agents intercepted the eighth package and arrested Yu and Wah Tom Lee on March 1, 1988.

That fall, Robert Lee pressed his complaint again, this time with a new lawyer, and with an expert witness to identify Johnny Eng. Peter Kwong, a Taiwanese immigrant who is a professor at the State University of New York at Old Westbury and the author of several highly regarded books on Chinatown, explained to the Loft Board that the Hip Sing tong was "an organization in some ways similar to the Mafia," which intimidates Chinatown with violence. "Either you move out of Chinatown, don't do business in Chinatown, or you basically shut up," he testified. "The code of silence is that it's understood we resolve things within Chinatown."

A year later, with the complaint still not settled, Lee one day looked up and saw five United States marshals in bulletproof vests running through his loft with guns drawn. They had arrested Shu Yan Eng for heroin trafficking, they announced, and were confiscating the building. One of them told Lee to send his rent checks to George Bush. "Bush has his problems, but at least he's fair," he said.

"It was like the cavalry coming to rescue us from our tormentors—absolutely surreal," Lee told me two months after the government took over his building. Lee is aware that revenge for resisting the gangs could come at any time, but he is not leaving Chinatown. "We love this community," he says.

Shu Yan Eng was recently acquitted on the narcotics charges, but he was convicted of tax evasion, and is now

awaiting sentencing. Johnny Eng, who is charged with buying heroin from Shu Yan Eng and also with smuggling hundreds of pounds of heroin himself, is fighting extradition from Hong Kong. Prosecutors are hoping that if he can be brought to New York he will coöperate and provide the break they need to assemble a racketeering case against Hip Sing on a gamut of charges, including heroin trafficking. "It comes down to whether we can ever show that Johnny Eng had to pay grace money to Uncle Benny," one United States Attorney told me, referring to profits from crimes.

A Chinatown elder confides, "The next two or three years will be the worst, until a successor to Uncle 7 is chosen."

AS prosecutors wait for Johnny Eng, one link in the Chinese Connection has been broken: Tai Pei Liquors, at 53 Mott Street, in the heart of Chinatown, is gone. The sign has been removed, the stock sold, and drygoods have replaced the overpriced liquor. Peter Woo, who was its owner, is gone, too, awaiting sentencing for his part in the largest heroin haul in United States history—eight hundred and twenty pounds, worth a billion dollars on the street. It was this case, more than any other, that alerted authorities to the rise of a new, Chinese Mafia.

Woo was also part of Bachelor Society Chinatown, the community of men who grew up together in the thirties and early forties without Chinese women, knew one another's business, feuded and traded with each other, and slowly took over the positions of power in Chinatown's family associations and tongs. Woo, a man of medium height, with a round stomach, had an aura of self-satisfied bonhomie. After he began to grow bald, he wore a cap with a little brim, like a Greek fisherman's cap. He looked as though the world were his oyster, and for many years it was.

Woo came to this country from Guangdong Province in the nineteen-thirties. During the Second World War, he fought in the Asian theatre. When he returned to New York, he became conspicuous in Chinatown: he was a leading shrimp and lobster wholesaler, a landlord, and a restaurateur, and he had contacts with City Hall. Because he spoke English, he was one of the few who could go outside Chinatown. "Woo was the first Chinatown person to become involved in politics," a resident who had known him for many years told me. "He was very important from 1950 to 1965. He knew everyone in city politics. He got a lot of things for the Chinese community—jobs, and help from City Hall—without receiving any pay. He just built up his reputation."

Woo cultivated several New York mayors, starting with Robert Wagner, in the fifties, and in 1960 turned out the Chinese vote for John Kennedy. Woo reportedly ran a gambling parlor in the American Legion hall in Chinatown. The Chinatown Democratic Club, which Woo started in the basement of his liquor store, doubled as a gambling hall, and made him a millionaire in the sixties. Some said he paid off City Hall to make sure his gambling joint was the only one in Chinatown at the time. But he was so tightfisted that lion dancers, who bless each store at New Year's, could get little money from his store. Estranged from his wife, he lived for a time with an actress from Hong Kong. He travelled often to the racetrack, to Las Vegas, and to the Far East. At night clubs in Hong Kong, he was introduced as a big shot—the worldwide head of the Eng Association (Eng is his surname in Cantonese), an overseas political leader.

In the late seventies and early eighties, however, Woo seemed to be semiretired. He became strangely inconspicuous, though he still spent hours at the liquor store, most of them on the phone. Then, toward the end of 1987, a Chinese immigrant from Hong Kong, a thirty-seven-year-old importer-exporter, gambler, and kung-fu expert named Simon Au Yeung, walked into the F.B.I. office in Chicago with a tale that was of great interest to the agents there. Au Yeung said he had spent a small fortune to infiltrate the operations of top Southeast Asian drug traffickers. The names he dropped were all Group 41 targets; among them was Eddie Chan, the former On Leong boss, who had been a fugitive in Asia since 1985.

The F.B.I. knew far less than Group 41 about Chinese traffickers. "The Asian community is so tight-lipped," I was told by Jules Bonavolonta, a former assistant special agent in charge of the organized-crime and drugs

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divisions of the F.B.I. in New York. "There's an ethnic code of silence, the way there was with the Italians for years. Au Yeung's offer to go undercover was unprecedented."

Robert Shaw, the head of the Asian-crime squad in the Chicago office, said, "Usually, working a case, you're at the lower or middle levels, reaching for the top. Au Yeung's information put us at the top immediately."

Au Yeung told the F.B.I. that the drug dealers had asked him to join their operations and use the Taiwanese import-export company he headed to smuggle heroin into the United States. He said he had met Eddie Chan at an international meeting of On Leong in Taipei in 1986, and Chan had liked him enough to have him introduced to Lai King Man, a major Hong Kong heroin smuggler. Au Yeung and Lai had gambled together, and one night in Manila, Au Yeung recalled, Lai had lost seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars in a single hand. Au Yeung also said he'd gone on shopping expeditions with Eddie Chan for presents to give Taipei bar girls. To cultivate Chan further, Au Yeung said, he'd given him twelve bottles of rare Louis XIII cognac, which cost six hundred dollars a bottle, and a Xerox machine. The F.B.I., which had been investigating links between the Cosa Nostra and the tongs, was also interested to hear about a "juice" loan—a street term for money lent by a loan shark—that Au Yeung had received from a Chicago member of On Leong who was known to collect "street taxes" in Chinatown for the Chicago mob. In September of 1987, Au Yeung got a second juice loan, of fifty thousand dollars. Au Yeung told the F.B.I. that he had planned to use this money to buy drugs but had then lost it gambling in Hong Kong with the drug dealers.

By the time Au Yeung turned up with his improbable tale, he had spent seventeen increasingly disillusioned years in Chicago. The son of a Hong Kong businessman, he had come to the United States on a student visa, hoping for a college education and a better life. Instead, when his visa lapsed he became an illegal alien, surviving by working as a bartender, a busboy, and a waiter while studying off and on at the University of Illinois. Somewhat later, he had founded a kung-fu association and had managed several well-known Chicago restaurants. Au Yeung was apparently not new to the F.B.I.; for four years, he had reportedly been a free-lance informer for its foreign-counter-intelligence unit, which monitors espionage in the United States, and had provided information on Taiwan's political activities in Chicago. (The F.B.I. will not comment on this.) Although the F.B.I.'s Asian-crime squad didn't know what to make of Au Yeung (for one thing, he had a minor criminal record), the bureau decided that his information checked out, so it gave him a contract, for twenty-five hundred dollars a month, to gather evidence against Chinese traffickers. As part of the investigation, the F.B.I. made payments on Au Yeung's juice loan.

The first person he got in touch with was Peter Woo, to whom he had been referred by an old Army buddy and Eng cousin of Woo's—the Chicago loan shark. When Woo sold Au Yeung a pound of ninety-two-per-cent-pure China White for the bargain price of thirty-five thousand dollars, the F.B.I. took notice. "The amount and the purity were a clue that Woo had connections to a source in the Golden Triangle," Shaw explained, and Bonavolonta added, "We knew we had something big."

"At this time, I don't think Woo is a biggie," Au Yeung told me in January of 1990. "He's an old-timer. He likes to brag a lot. He's kind of broke. He doesn't have the potential to buy cheap and sell dear. His aim is to get a commission from each sale, maybe three thousand dollars a transaction."

Au Yeung was right about Woo. Woo was a hub in the Chinese Connection—a broker who brought Asian sellers and American buyers together. Occasionally, he bought a small amount of a shipment himself, and to sell it he turned to his partner, a meat-market owner two doors from Tai Pei Liquors. "Don't distribute through Chinese or the tongs, especially not Hip Sing and Johnny Eng," Woo warned his new customer, Au Yeung. "Uncle 7 may be a stoolie. Sell only to blacks and Italians."

For months, the F.B.I. tailed Woo, to and from the OTB in Chatham Square, where he bet daily, and Atlantic City, and the racetrack, and it listened in on a wiretap of the liquor-store phone as he made deals with Chinese suppliers in Singapore, Hong Kong, and many cities in the United States and Canada. Charles Butera, a New York police detective who, with F.B.I. special agent Geoffrey Doyle, was in charge of the case, told me, "Woo was a wheeler-dealer, always looking for a way to make a buck. He did legitimate deals, too, bringing people together for his wholesale-seafood business. He'd mix the truth with lies to better his position, or to make a buck. He played both ends against the middle, constantly. As he got the money, he'd gamble it away. Sometimes he spent it before it came in. He was always meeting with people. People in Chinatown respected him and went to him for help. Every afternoon, when he walked back from the OTB after checking on his bets, people would stop him on the street to ask his advice. He always had a smile."

The F.B.I. tailed Woo to Little Italy and to Staten Island for meetings with Mafia associates. After months of waiting for more heroin, the agents began to wonder if Woo was a dead end, but then he suggested that Au Yeung meet his supplier in Hong Kong. The F.B.I. flew Au Yeung over in September of 1988, and there Chan Hok Pang, a quiet thirty-seven-year-old with the mark of the unicorn—a large mole between his eyebrows, considered good luck by some Buddhists—offered to do business with him. Au Yeung checked with his acquaintances in Hong Kong's triads and learned that Chan belonged to Sun Yee On, the largest triad, and was linked to Khun Sa, the warlord leader of the Shan tribe, in Burma. Khun Sa oversees the production of more than sixty per cent of the world's heroin, and is the source of the Chinese Connection. Au Yeung claims to have seen Khun Sa's headquarters—a mountain-top stronghold, defended by a private army of several thousand men and by SAM missiles. "When I learn Chan is working for Khun Sa, I am reluctant to go after him," Au Yeung said. "That's just a little bit too big. He's offended, he'll kill you in seconds. We all have our limits. That was mine."

The F.B.I. nevertheless persuaded Au Yeung to go on. "Getting to Khun Sa was a dream," I was told by Dan Bellich, the agent in Chicago who convinced Au Yeung that he should press on. "We did not force him," Bellich added.

After many twists and turns in the case, Chan Hok Pang arrived in New York in February of 1989 to supervise a heroin shipment. When agents raided three houses in Queens, they found eight hundred and twenty pounds, vulcanized inside hundreds of golf-cart tires. Forty-four suspects in Hong Kong and Singapore and in New York, Chicago, Detroit, Buffalo, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver were eventually arrested. Many of them pleaded guilty, including Peter Woo. Khun Sa himself was indicted on federal narcotics charges later that year.

"It was an incredibly sophisticated and exquisitely planned shipment," I was told by Jacques Semmelman, a former Assistant United States Attorney, who successfully prosecuted several of the defendants. "The tires were opened in Thailand, the heroin was fitted in, and they were revulcanized. The shipment went from one country to another, making its way across the world, and not one thing went wrong. It looked very easy, very easy, to import eight hundred pounds of heroin into the United States. The breakdown occurred on the receiving end, with Peter Woo. Woo was the key to all this, directly or indirectly."

Last fall, during the trial of one of his suppliers, Woo gave his account of why he had changed from brokering politics to brokering heroin. The self-described "shrimp king of the world" admitted having smuggled illegal aliens and heroin into this country, and having run gambling clubs in Chinatown. Woo's double life of respected businessman and political fixer, on the one hand, and smuggler and gambler, on the other, is typical of Chinatown: its tong bosses and drug dealers and bookies are often also legitimate businessmen.

Woo told the court that he began dealing in drugs in the mid-eighties, after losing a lot of money trying to corner the shrimp-export market in China. The defense argued that he began far earlier, after incurring losses at a casino in Hong Kong. They portrayed him as a ladies' man, with three girlfriends around the world; as a frequenter of massage parlors in Asia; and as a heavy gambler, who ran up large debts in Hong Kong. Woo said that he was "pretty well known among the Chinese community as well as the American community." He also said that he knew almost every government in the Far East. On the stand, Woo exhibited no remorse, and bridled when his prestige was impugned. When he was asked where he obtained money to start buying drugs, he snapped, "Sir, twenty or thirty thousand dollars, and I have been doing business since 1946—you don't think I have that much amount of money?"

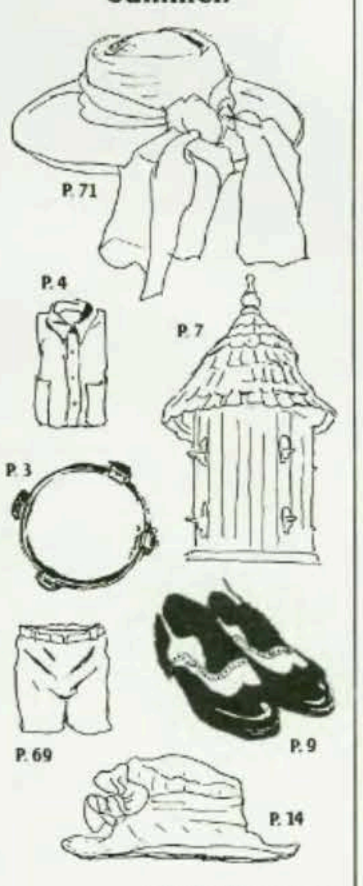
Chinatown residents have their own ideas about how Woo became *bot fun guey*, a "white powder ghost," or heroin dealer. "Before he retires, he spend so much, and he couldn't make up," one said. "If you live that kind of life, like a rich man, you become poor, you won't be able to survive. He thought he was smart—he just do like a matchmaker. When the deal went down, he maybe was in Toronto. He didn't understand narcotics conspiracy law."

Just days before his arrest, Woo was promoting the idea of a political-action committee for Chinatown. "We have to get our fair share," he was telling friends.

AFTER Woo's arrest, Simon Au Yeung, a man who is like Woo in many ways—a gambler rumored to have large debts, an international trader, a boastful, charming con man—disappeared briefly into the witness-protection program. His lawyer, a former Chicago cop named Daniel Soso, told me that there was a million-dollar contract out on him, and that Au Yeung would meet me only if I travelled to a "safe" location, and paid for both his and Soso's travel and hotel accommodations there as well.

We met at a resort in the winter of 1990. Soso wore jeans; Au Yeung was in a suit, with a tie whose price tag ($37.50) he'd forgotten to remove. He had a round, smooth face and curly hair—unusual for a Chinese. He proudly showed me an Uzi machine gun in his briefcase and two .9-mm automatics under his jacket. There was tension in the air throughout our meeting.

The Chinese Connection, Au Yeung said, takes advantage of "the govern-



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ment's overlooking Chinatowns and their isolation. Heroin is viewed simply as a commodity: you buy cheap and sell dear. To Chinese, they are not harming their own people. The biggest customers aren't Chinese; they're blacks, Dominicans, Mexicans, whites. And heroin trafficking is an easy way to accumulate wealth, to get a good face. So long as Chinatowns are kept isolated, the criminals can do anything they want, because the Chinese community isn't offended by drug trafficking. They will stick up for their own, they will not accept the role of the U.S. government to prosecute Chinese."

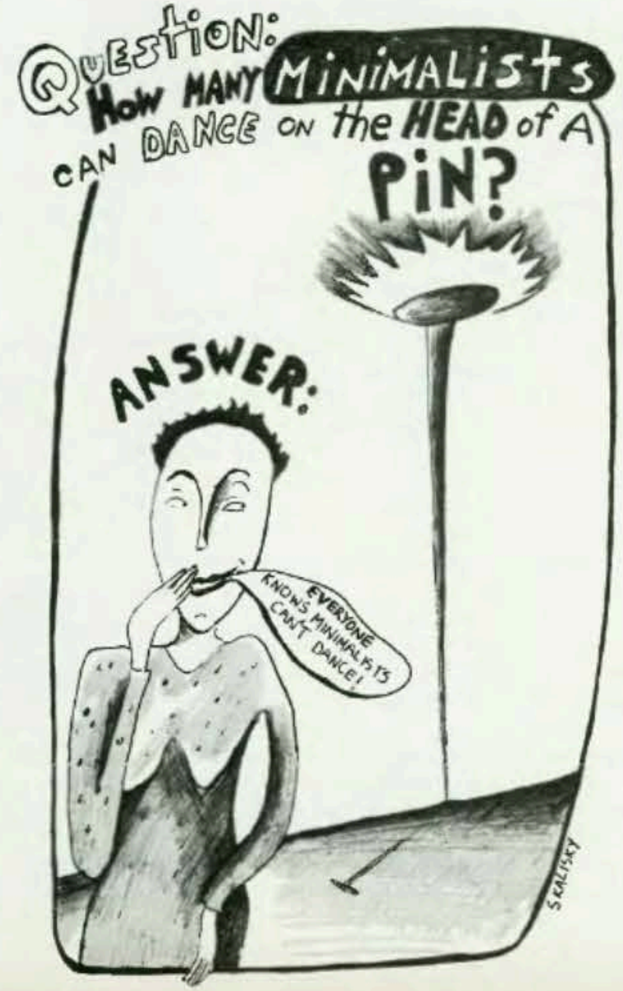
He had volunteered to go under cover for the F.B.I., he said, because the drug dealing and corruption in Chinatowns appalled him. "I was in Hong Kong in the mid-nineteen-sixties, when the Hong Kong police were corrupt and mixed up with the triads, but here in the U.S. it turns out to be some of the tongs which are criminal. First time I met with the F.B.I., in the seventies, no one could care less. I felt it was a common concept of law enforcement at the time that this is Chinatown business, let them handle it."

Au Yeung went on, "Taiwan has the upper hand in Chinatowns now. The immediate reason is the murder of Taiwan's foremost critic in 1984 by a Taiwanese gang in the United States. I hate it so much. No one should do that in the U.S. Plus, no Chinese should be afraid walking around or have to pay extortion money to do business. In the early years, they came here as coolies, without much education, and they had to stay together to fight the 'white devil,' their name for Americans. But time flies, and we got so many different people immigrating now, we should live by the U.S.'s rules.

"The men who make the unwritten rules in Chinatown that protect the On Leong and Hip Sing say the rules protect welfare of all Chinese. But look at New York, San Francisco, Boston. In New York, for instance, the tongs are in massage parlors, drugs, gambling associations. The streets are under control of the gangs. The victims are afraid—the ones who badly need help are those who have to rely on Chinatown and couldn't survive outside. They are afraid of reprisals, they take corruption for granted, so they just keep suffering."

In our discussion, Au Yeung unveiled another motive for his undercover work: "It was my ego trip. Put it this way—I'd like to join the bureau for a long time. I came to the U.S. with high expectations of myself. Later, because of so many personal and financial things, I couldn't achieve what I expect."

Here Soso put in, "I'll be blunt. He found himself in a situation where he was involved with a lot of bad guys overseas and he wanted to do good. He also wanted to see political change in Taiwan. And it fed his ego that he was being a star undercover agent for the government." He added that it was against his advice that Au Yeung had left the witness-protection program. "He's crazy," Soso said. "He is irrationally convinced of his invulnerability."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SKALISKY

Au Yeung declared that he'd had to leave the program because the Chinese press attacked him as a stoolie and a drug dealer who had coöperated with the F.B.I. only to avoid arrest. He angrily insisted that he was no stoolie or criminal, and had never sold drugs. But his account of what led him to infiltrate the Chinese international drug rings before becoming a contract employee of the F.B.I. struck me as unconvincing. For instance, when I asked him how he had first met the most wanted Chinese criminals, he replied merely, "On business overseas."

He had left the witness-protection program, he said, to be able to talk to the press and clear his name, and to convince other Chinese that helping the federal government fight drug dealers and crime would not harm them. "The Chinese press say I'm going to hide for the rest of my life. I'm *not* going to hide! The bad guys have to hide. I didn't do anything wrong. Why should I hide? The way I see it, the drug dealers can get killed like me. Put it this way—if they come after me, I hope I can take out two on the way down." As he left, smiling, and brushing aside concern for his safety, he said, "I'm a tiger."

Au Yeung and I talked several times by phone in the months after our meeting, and the more we talked the more bizarre he seemed. His motives multiplied, becoming more complicated with each interview. He seemed to be always holding back information, to have one more veil to drop. His story was full of holes, and he often retracted things he had told me earlier. Even Daniel Soso agreed that his client was a con man. "I can't figure him out yet," he said. "I don't know why, when he's holding back. It's difficult to figure out his reactions." This elusiveness, of course, kept him alive during eighteen months of undercover work, sometimes without any F.B.I. backup. Most of Au Yeung's stories are impossible to verify; he alone knows whether or not they are true.

On one occasion, Au Yeung said that he had initially called the F.B.I. in 1983 not out of idealism but to save his skin—something that he and the bureau have repeatedly denied. He said that gambling had been his chief entertainment in Chicago. Once or twice, he had gambled at On Leong's building, the gateway to Chicago's Chinatown. On its third floor, disputes were arbitrated. On the second floor were gambling tables for pai gow and fan-tan. In 1982, he said, he let a relative use his account with a suburban bookie. The relative lost his entire credit line—ten thousand dollars. The bookie demanded payment. Au Yeung worked out a deal with the bookie in which the relative would pay off the debt in weekly installments. The relative's wife, however, threatened to go to the police. At that point, Au Yeung said, he went to Hong Kong for two months with his family to see his father, who was ill. When he returned, the bookie again threatened him about the unpaid debt, and he alerted the F.B.I., thus beginning his four years of free-lance informing.

As Au Yeung told it, he decided to investigate the On Leong officials he met in Taiwan on his own, without F.B.I. approval, and to pay for the investigation with his winnings at On Leong's gambling parlors in Chicago. One night, he won twenty-five thousand dollars, the next night forty thousand, and, eventually, a total of two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars. "I found a trick in fan-tan," he said. "It takes time and patience."

To further his investigation, he continued, he joined On Leong and went to Taiwan to meet Eddie Chan. Two years later, when Au Yeung was a contract F.B.I. employee, Eddie Chan became suspicious after an F.B.I. raid on the On Leong building in Chicago. He invited Au Yeung to Manila and warned him about betraying the tong. Au Yeung kept his composure, and Chan, mollified, introduced him to some Dragon Heads, as chiefs of organized crime and drug-trafficking groups in the Far East are known. "It

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was like a dinner party, with fifteen or twenty people," Au Yeung said. "Eddie vouched for me. It was the biggest mistake Eddie Chan made." He laughed. "Now a lot of people think Eddie's working for the authorities."

Au Yeung's evidence against On Leong and Eddie Chan became the starting point of a second federal case, a mammoth racketeering indictment handed down last summer against On Leong. The Justice Department has charged that the tong ran an illegal-gambling operation in several of its chapters in the United States, protected that lucrative operation by means of the Ghost Shadows, and paid off, assaulted, threatened, or murdered anyone who got in its way. Twenty-nine people, including four past On Leong national presidents—Eddie Chan among them—and the organization's current national president, have been indicted, and On Leong buildings worth millions of dollars in Minneapolis, Chicago, Houston, and Miami have been seized. Sixteen of those indicted have pleaded guilty. The case, which is being tried now in Chicago, seeks eleven and a half million dollars in illegal-gambling proceeds from the tong, and aims to shut down the tong's illegal activities. It is the first case against a Chinese tong by the United States government, and, incidentally, is the very case that the Manhattan District Attorney's office failed to make in the mid-eighties when it prosecuted the Ghost Shadows, and Eddie Chan disappeared. The case has already had repercussions: before the trial began, a leader of the New York chapter of On Leong, who had been subpoenaed to testify, was murdered.

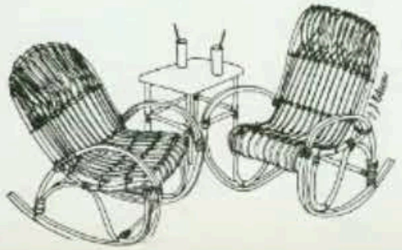
Au Yeung's principal target in this case (besides Eddie Chan) is a man who, like Peter Woo, rose to wealth from gambling parlors in New York's Chinatown. Chan Wing Yeung, Eddie Chan's handpicked successor, is on trial in Chicago for racketeering and running an illegal gambling operation. Chan Wing Yeung, who is in his mid-forties, was a waiter until 1977, when Uncle 7 went to jail along with a man who ran a gambling parlor on Mott Street. While those two were in jail, I was told, Chan got financial backing to open a gambling house of his own. He quickly became a millionaire. With some of the profits, he bought a restaurant on the ground floor of On Leong, and in 1987 was elected the tong's national president. His younger brother Chan Wing Wa is now the national president. Another brother heads a faction of the Ghost Shadows.

In the Chicago trial, Chan Wing Yeung's lawyer admitted that his client bet on On Leong games but scoffed at the idea that he directed a racketeering enterprise. On Leong is the same sort of organization as the Lions' Club, the lawyer argued, and gambling is an ancient, respectable part of Chinese culture.

The F.B.I. agent who directed the case acknowledged that gambling had existed in Chicago's Chinatown for generations. Why, then, I asked, hadn't the F.B.I. brought the case years ago? He replied, "What's sexy? What's interesting? Kidnapping? Murder? Is Chinese gambling? We could execute gambling search warrants every day here, but is it exciting? Is it worthwhile? Is it going to get prosecuted? What made it exciting was that this is a national organization, with a large amount of revenue, unreported income, tax violations, and with forfeitures that could be initiated under the RICO statute. And then, all of a sudden, it wasn't just a gambling case; it was bribery, too."

What made that happen, the agent said, was Au Yeung. He had returned to his old gambling haunt in the On Leong building and gambled again, this time undercover. His testimony led to the raid and to the seizure of the building. He also identified about a hundred gamblers who were present during the raid, some of whom are coöperating witnesses for the prosecution.

The F.B.I. has not hired Au Yeung. It considered giving him the Good Samaritan Award for citizens who aid its investigations but then decided not to. Instead, the Justice Department awarded Au Yeung two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for invaluable help in the Peter Woo heroin case and the On Leong gambling case. Au Yeung, who is always heavily armed, now sends out Christmas cards in envelopes bearing his return address, and is hoping to sell the movie and book rights to his story as the first Chinese to bust Chinese organized crime and the Chinese Connection.



ON Sundays, half a million people descend on Chinatown. Most are Chinese, but tourists invade, too, and all nationalities and cultures drift down Mott Street. Sunlight sparkles off red heads and blond heads in the river of black-haired Chinese. Trendy young Chinese women with pipe-cleaner legs in cutoffs walk by with white guys; others, decked out in leggings and puffy skirts, are on the arms of Chinese men. Prosperous, beautifully dressed Chinese, in from Hong Kong or Europe, stroll through the streets, speaking English.

Above, leaning out of tenement windows, old men watch the drifting carnival. One lights a joss stick and, with a hairless, sagging arm, puts it on the fire escape to burn. Behind him, other old men in their undershirts move like ghosts in the dimness of a *gong si fong*.

On Sundays, no one toils except waiters and cooks and gambling-house dealers. A burden lifts from this desperate community, strangled by miserable wages and organized crime. All over Chinatown, families stroll, shop, gather for the noonday dim sum. In huge, noisy restaurants, they *yum cha*—sip tea and gossip.

The OTB is mobbed, as it is every Sunday.

The Buddhist temples are also full. People pray to Kuan Yin, the goddess of mercy, for male children and for wealth.

Barbershops hum with business. Sundays are propitious days for haircuts.

In the Kong Kee soybean shop, Mrs. Kong Kee cuts rice bean cake.

Students from uptown buy books from the People's Republic. Chinese from the outer boroughs and New Jersey and Connecticut make matches, celebrate birthdays at banquets, visit family associations.

Hundreds push into the C.C.B.A. to see the Shanghai Opera. Upstairs, in classrooms, children laboriously copy Chinese characters.

In the old Mee Heung Chow Main factory, four elders play mah-jongg, wedged between boxes of noodles.

There is no sign of life in the On Leong building, at the portal of Chinatown. A curtain billows into the boardroom through an open door on the balcony. Former national president Chan Wing Yeung has lost twenty pounds since being indicted, in August, people say. The word on the street is that Big Boss Eddie Chan may come back and cut a deal.

Gamblers avoid two former On Leong gambling spots, on Mott and Bayard Streets; both places were raided a few weeks before the RICO indictment was handed down in Chicago.

Today, peddlers have taken over. Dozens of them crowd the Bowery. Two men seated on low chairs on the sidewalk tell the fortunes of a couple, squatting before them, by their facial bone structures. Nearby, another fellow sits by an open suitcase that is heaped high with pink, yellow, and white puffy hair bows, which he sells for fifty cents. He wears a pink bow on his head, laughing at himself.

Confucius has had a birthday. At his feet flowers bloom.

Along Canal, venders with steel pushcarts display fish balls, intestines, chicken feet, peanut cakes, curried squid, deep-fried peppers and eggplants, and chewy fish skins stewed with turnips. All around Chinatown, venders fry *chong yow bing*—thick, tasty scallion pancakes.

Mr. Lin, a Fujianese peddler, sells umbrellas at a corner. Children hawk blocks of frozen shrimp from Asia. Shoppers trample newspapers, mud, fishtails, betel nuts. The litter blows around their ankles.

On Pell Street, German tourists scramble out of a bus to videotape the vertical restaurant signs. Teen-age gang members in Hong Kong suits pace outside No. 16 and watch indifferently. A car with New Jersey plates pulls up. "Oh, wow! Look! Chinese Dumpling House!" a girl inside shouts.

"You finally made it to Chinatown!" her date says, kissing her.

Two years ago, crowds watched news broadcasts from Taiwan and China near a Democracy Wall on Bayard Street, which was plastered with caricatures of China's gerontocracy, and they laid oranges and other food offerings at altars under signs saying "MARTYRS OF TIANANMEN SQUARE," "BRIGHTER THAN THE SUN AND MOON," "SACRIFICE TO A RIGHTEOUS CAUSE." Today, the altars are gone,

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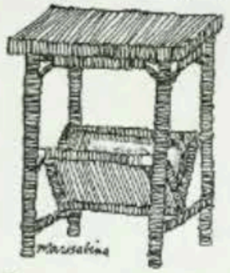
the outrage and the sense of purpose having seeped out in the drive to make money and escape from Chinatown. Today, a student trying to register voters complains, "It's a hard job. People don't know the candidates, and in Asia the tradition is that people don't get involved in politics."

The wonton man is out. A thin man with coarse black hair, he works on the sidewalk on an upended cardboard box, on which a ceramic plate is piled with ground meat. For utensils, he has two scrapers. In his left hand is a floured square of dough, the wonton. He scrapes twice off the pile of meat, puts the dab inside the square held in his cupped hand, and makes a fist, squeezing the dough until it resembles a belly button. Customers watch. He puts the wonton on a cookie sheet on his counter—another cardboard box. When he has twenty wontons, he takes a customer's twenty-dollar bill. He asks for smaller change, but the customer has none. Looking around furtively, he slips the twenty down his sock and under his foot, and slips his foot back in his shoe. From somewhere else he extracts a wad of neatly folded singles, and he hands over eighteen.



"Wonton," he barks. "Very good."

Up the street, in a Thai grocery, the owner, a woman wearing wide green silk pants, stands on a plastic milk crate, bowing and praying to a Buddha on top of her freezer. Two open glass jars of coconut milk are up there, too, with bowls of offerings, two lighted candles, and a burning stick of incense. The Buddha looks like Jesus of Nazareth, with a yellow sash across a white shift. The woman gasps, startled to find me staring. The only Western product in the grocery is Pringle's potato chips. There is dried octopus, with shrivelled suckers, in plastic bags. There are black preserved eggs from China. Duck eggs lie in sawdust, flies buzzing above. Sections of palm leaves are shockingly green among the dried and packaged merchandise.

The mothers watching children in the parks are the real power in Chinatown: many earn more than their husbands, who can no longer look on them as just baby machines. Remarkably, in this troubled community there is little drug use, AIDS, homelessness, or teen-age pregnancy. Here the major health problems are parasites; giardiasis, an intestinal ailment common in China, Cambodia, and Vietnam; hepatitis; malnutrition; anemia; and high cholesterol from oily foods.

On Grand Street, the nougat vender is out with her pushcart. In Little Italy, the feeling is different: people yell and argue in the streets, and fights break out. In Chinatown, no one yells or argues. It's too dangerous. Guns and cellular telephones are stashed all over Chinatown. Even gang members duck when a car backfires.

No one talks to me, a *low faan*, as I wander. I poke along Mulberry, notice an alley between two stores which is piled with boxes, and follow it into an inner courtyard backed by a decrepit low tenement—a "rear tenement." Wedged between its taller neighbors, it was put up before the building code was changed at the turn of the century. In the courtyard, a man in an apron is bending over a metal tub, stirring bloody tripe with his hands. He doesn't live here, he says. He lives with twelve other bachelors in a *gong si fong*. The courtyard is piled with bags of cement, barrels of brick dust, discarded wooden shipping boxes stamped "DRIED LOTUS ROOTS." It is a gritty, gray, forlorn place, a patch of old Chinatown more or less untouched since the eighteen-eighties.

The rear tenement, its windows broken or blackened with soot, its front door gone, looks uninhabited. Yet from a second-story window an ivy plant straggles. The stairway is nearly blocked with trash. Both ground-floor apartments are locked. I climb the stairs, expecting to find the second floor open to the sky and pigeons nesting. On the landing, a candle and two dusty balls of string, which on inspection turn out to be dried-up oranges, lie on the floor by a door. On the door, there is a red sign bright with gold calligraphy and happy dragons. The oranges and the sign grant blessings on everyone who enters this door.

I knock. A frail old man appears. He greets me quizzically. He has lived in Chinatown for sixty years, he says, and has never spoken to a white person.

—GWEN KINKEAD

(*This is the second part of a two-part article.*)

GREAT ESCAPES

All illustrations by Russell O. Jones

Travelling America

There are Americans who dismiss travel in their own country because "it's not exotic enough." To them we can only say, clearly you've never seen the Corn Palace.

Rising like an onion-domed mirage above the plains of Mitchell, South Dakota, this monument to our agricultural heritage is decorated from base to tower with corn, sorghum, and other grains. In addition to its offbeat aesthetic appeal, the Corn Palace has a humanitarian function: it serves as a buffet for thousands of birds and small animals who might otherwise starve during the harsh South Dakota winters. Mitchell residents refer to it as "the world's largest bird feeder."

The Corn Palace—like the Oregon Vortex, Carhenge, and countless other off-the-wall attractions—exemplifies one of the great pleasures of travelling in America, the chance revel in our peculiar national consciousness. Foreign visitors are entertained by what they find here, but also confused. They wonder, for instance, why a seemingly sane man would devote his life to building a monument out of junked cars.