OAKLAND CHINATOWN'S FIRST YOUTH GANG: THE SUEY SING BOYS

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ABSTRACT

Research concerned with Chinese gangs in the United States focuses on two sites, San Francisco and New York. This study examines Oakland Chinatown and the development of its first Chinese immigrant youth gang, the Suey Sing boys, during the five years from 1968-1973. I rely heavily on data from primary sources such as interviews with gang members and field observations. Key topics for investigation are the formation of the Suey Sing boys, the relationship of the youth gangs to the Chinatown social structure, and the relationship between gangs in Oakland and San Francisco.

INTRODUCTION

The gang problem is an issue of serious concern to American society. Many people are fearful of, and many are adversely affected by, gangs and their activities. The American public demands tougher police tactics, punishment, and prisons in response. Despite vigorous efforts, crime and gangs continue to be major social problems in the United States. Although most Americans can trace their ancestry to Europe, the literature on youth gangs focuses primarily on African American and Hispanic gangs.

The 1960s witnessed the emergence of contemporary Chinese gangs in the United States. The first nationally known Chinese gang, the Hwa Chings, which means "young Chinese," originated in San Francisco Chinatown in 1964. Eventually, branches of this group and other similar types of gangs spread throughout America's Chinatowns. Since the 1970s, due to escalating violence and expanded criminal activities, Chinese gangs have been increasingly viewed as a major social problem in the Chinese American community and as a menace to society-at-large. In government reports and the popular media, these gangs are blamed for the increasing violence in Chinatowns, shiploads of undocumented Chinese immigrants, and the massive smuggling of illegal drugs to the United States. Although these sources frequently exaggerate the criminality of the Chinese gang situation, it is accurate to state that Chinese gangs are involved in a variety of criminal activities, such as extortion, burglary, robbery, assault, and murder, that bring hardship and misery, especially to the Chinese community.

Study of Chinese gangs broadens our knowledge of early gang formation and gang structure, and illustrates how gangs can interface with Chinatown organizations within the context of contemporary social problems. Since the inception of gang studies by researchers Frederick Thrasher (1927) and William Whyte (1943), traditional gang research has paid little or no attention to the Chinese community. Reasons include lack of interest by traditional youth gang researchers, often linked to images of Chinese and other Asian Americans as the "model minority," the difficulty of gaining access to Chinese gang members, especially for non-Chinese researchers, and the political and social isolation of the Asian American community (Joe 1994).

This paper explores the premise that Chinatown gangs are not isolated entities, but are a part of, and connected to, the Chinese community; gangs impact community life and the community impacts gangs. The topics discussed are 1) the historical development of the first contemporary youth gang in the Oakland, California Chinatown community, 2) the "gang perspective" on why they formed a gang, 3) the relationship of the Oakland gang to Chinatown community organizations, and 4) the relationship between Chinese gangs in different sites, San Francisco and Oakland.

METHODOLOGY

I began inquiring about Chinese gangs, in 1968, to understand gang members' experiences and why such gangs form. Oakland, California (1960, population 367,548) was an ideal city in which to document the development of a gang. Chinatown was located in the heart of the city, adjacent to the downtown shopping area and the main police headquarters, and near city hall. There were no deviant Chinese groups operating in the area. Unlike San Francisco Chinatown, with a myriad of social organizations, Oakland Chinatown had only a few, such as the Wong Family Association, the Chinese American Citizen Alliance, and the Suey Sing Tong.

First as a participant observer, my field observations were the foundation to this study. In youth and adult gang studies that utilize observation as the primary methodology (Padilla 1993; Patrick 1973; Whyte 1943), the

researchers target a particular community or group to study. In my case, the gang members adopted me as friend and confidant. My father was a well respected tong member who had an excellent rapport with gang members. I was also treated with respect and loyalty by the Suey Sing boys. Though not a gang member, I was looked upon as an educated friend who worked for the members' welfare and needs. I had access to the social benefits of gang membership such as intra-group friendship, but never the responsibilities, such as participating in violent confrontations with other groups. I was marginally a part of the group, who could communicate with its members. I obtained meaningful and valid information as a semi-participant observer.

Second, I conducted numerous informal interviews with San Francisco and Oakland adult Suey Sing members and the Oakland Suey Sing boys, in a four and a half year period (summer of 1968 to early 1973). Conversations were held at restaurants, bowling alleys, and the Oakland Suey Sing clubhouse. I recorded the gist of these conversations and informal interviews but at that time I was not involved in any active gang research. Since 1993, I have conducted eight interviews with former Oakland Suey Sing boys and their associates. According to the authors count and key informants, there were "officially" 28 Suey Sing boys. Two were considered to be part of the Oakland Suey Sing boys and simultaneously were part of the San Francisco Suey Sing group. One resided and went to school in Oakland but spent a great deal of time in San Francisco and was considered to be an influential gang member. Interviews, which were about 1.5 hours long, were tape recorded (with permission) and transcribed in summary form. Data collection spanned three years (1993-1996). Quality ranged from little useful information to full descriptions of events and community social life.

Third, I examined archival sources in newspapers and governmental reports. From 1970 to 1988, there were articles about Chinese gangs in San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles. A study of *New York Times* articles on Chinese Americans over an 80-year period showed an abundance of crime coverage (Auman, Mark 1997). The study notes that half of the coverage analyzed was crime-related, followed by political events (25%), routine other news, and culture (Auman, Mark 1997). There were only a few articles on Chinese gangs and crime in Oakland Chinatown. Government criminal intelligence reports or law enforcement conference papers were of little use because of their unreliability and lack of emphasis on Oakland. Government reports do show growing concern of state and federal law enforcement agencies regarding Chinese gangs and heroin smuggling.

Fourth, a few researchers have published books or articles concerning Chinese gangs in San Francisco and New York (Chin 1990; Chin, Fagan, Kelly 1992; Joe 1994; Kwong 1987; Lyman 1970; Sung 1977; Takagi, Platt 1978). No one has studied Chinese gangs in Oakland. Only Gong and Grant (1930) and Chin (1990) examine the tongs to any significant extent.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is a multitude of youth gang studies in the United States, most concerned with ethnic minority communities. However, there has been a dearth of scholarly research and publications concerning the Chinese gangs in the United States. What little there is falls into two major categories: 1) journalistic accounts, some of which are based upon law enforcement gang task force reports (Bresler 1981; Posner 1988), and 2) descriptive/theoretical studies (Chin 1990; Chin, Fagan 1994; Chin, Fagan, Kelly 1992; Joe 1993, 1994; Lyman 1970; Sung 1977; Takagi, Platt 1978).

Some journalistic accounts glamorize Chinese gangs and heighten the fear of these gangs flooding the U.S. shores with tons of drugs. Two of these accounts, by Bresler (1981) and Posner (1988), state that adult and young Chinese criminals are trafficking in heroin. Bresler believes that there is an international Chinese crime conspiracy that is headquartered in Asia. Posner maintains that the Chinese Triads are the most powerful form of organized crime in the world and consequently pose the most serious threat to law enforcement. Both charge that the Triads in Asia, the tongs in Chinatowns, and the Chinese youth gangs are in close contact and structurally related, posing a serious threat.

Scholarly works on Chinese gangs concern two cities. Lyman's (1970) study focused on San Francisco Chinatown gangs, describing they were due to changing demographics and a tradition of social banditry from China. He examined the development of American born and foreign born San Francisco Chinatown gangs, such as the Hwa Chings and the Red

Guards, from the 1950s through the early 1970s.

Sung (1977) examines New York Chinatown gangs using theories of social disorganization, social structure, crime as conformity to explain the nature, and formation of these youth gangs.

Chin's 1990 book, *Chinese Subculture and Criminality*, focuses on New York Chinatown gangs, examining Chinatowns, Chinese secret societies, the development of Chinese gangs nationally, Chinese gang patterns and characteristics, and social sources of Chinese gang delinquency. He studies the relation of adult Chinatown organizations and Chinese criminality, and why and how Chinese gangs formed, claiming that New York Chinatown Chinese gangs and the tongs have a symbiotic relationship that deeply intertwines both bodies.

Karen Joe (1994b) examined the relationships between Asian American gangs and two variables, organized crime and drug distribution (*The New Criminal Conspiracy? Asian Gangs and Organized Crime in San Francisco*). In regard to San Francisco Chinatown gangs, her findings indicate that gang members know little of and have little or no contact with the tongs in Chinatown. Therefore, Joe found no evidence to indicate that the tongs in San Francisco are actually organized crime groups that have incorporated gang members into illegal enterprises. In addition, her findings support the thesis that the gangs as an organized group are not involved in heroin trafficking. Some gang members, as individuals, were involved with drugs, but not the entire gang.

Joe (1994a) *Myths and Realities of Asian Gangs on the West Coast*, poses two related questions: are Chinese gangs well-organized with ties to the San Francisco tongs and the Triads in Asia? and Are Asian gangs in Northern California involved in heroin trafficking? Joe refutes the theory, supported by journalistic accounts, that Asian street gangs are part of a larger conspiracy of an "Asian Mafia" and organized crime. She also takes issue with U.S. law enforcement beliefs and policies, in particular, the link between Chinese youth gangs and the Chinese Triads in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

OAKLAND CHINATOWN

Oakland Chinatown has been located in five different sites, each centered around the waterfront and the Oakland downtown/commercial area. By 1880, the location of the present Chinatown was established just a few blocks from where City Hall is today. As in most other cities, Chinatown was restricted to old, undesirable, commercial districts because of racial segregation in both housing and commercial enterprises. Thus, Chinatown was originally established in the midst of warehouses, factories, rooming houses, and junkyards. By 1960, Oakland Chinatown was in a sharp decline due to dispersal of Chinese to other areas in the East Bay and the reduction of residential housing, attributed to construction of the Nimitz Freeway, Laney Community College, the Oakland Museum, and the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) (Chow 1976).

An additional and forgotten factor in Chinatown's deterioration was the decline of gambling. This was due to the passage of the 1951 Federal Stamp Act (26 U.S.C. 4401 and 4402), which levied a flat ten percent tax on wagering income and an additional fifty-dollar tax on gambling operators. Violators could receive a $10,000 fine and five years in prison. Thus, gambling in Oakland Chinatown was sharply curtailed, which severely impacted businesses that thrived from the gambling industry (Mark 1989). There were fewer jobs, fewer residents, and a significant decrease in Chinatown business activity.

By the mid-1960s, Oakland Chinatown stabilized and its residential population grew because of the increase in immigrants as a result of the 1965 Immigration Nationalization Act. Families began to reappear, and the local elementary school (Lincoln School), the neighborhood junior high school (West Lake), and the two high schools (Oakland Technical High and Oakland High) enrolled progressively larger numbers of foreign born Chinese students. In 1970, Oakland's Chinese population numbered 11,335 and the Chinatown core area supported a population of 1,607 Chinese (Tracts 4030 and 4033) which represented 570 families (Homma-True 1976). By 1970, the Chinatown community was comprised mostly of immigrants, and 22 percent of Chinatown residents were classified with incomes below the poverty level as compared to 13 percent of the rest of the city. The median income in Chinatown was $6,690 compared to $9,626 for the rest of the city.

"HWA CHINGS" IN SAN FRANCISCO CHINATOWN

San Francisco Chinatown supported 40,000 people in an area of 42 blocks (Takagi, Platt 1978). American-born Chinese street corner groups such as the "Chinos" ("Chinese" in Spanish) became visible in the late 1950s. They raced hot rods and frequented Chinatown bars. One group known as the "Bugs" became involved in burglaries and were identified by their black clothing and raised heel boots. In 1965 over a period of six months, the Bugs committed 48 burglaries worth $7500 cash and $3000 in merchandise (Lyman 1970), but the San Francisco Police Department made key arrests and broke up the Bugs gang.

In 1964-65, the Hwa Chings (Young Chinese) were formed by mainly teen-aged immigrant youths, the majority from Hong Kong. The Chinese population in the United States, and in Chinatowns, in particular were increasing because of the changes in United States immigration laws and policies that permitted an increase in Chinese immigration to the United States. As more Chinese immigrated to San Francisco, the Hwa Chings became larger, more visible, and more powerful. They committed crimes such as burglary and assault. The Hwa Chings had as estimated 300 members in a loosely organized group. In an interview with a reporter, "Tom Tom" declared that the Hwa Chings only wanted jobs, girls, and to be left alone (Lyman 1970). Tom Tom was the gang's main leader, but there were others high in the leadership structure who had many followers.

By 1967, Hwa Ching crimes became more violent, and to the Chinatown establishment, more serious, when they extorted Chinatown businesses for protection money. In the winter of 1968, the Hwa Chings, through their spokesman, George Woo, threatened to burn down Chinatown if their demands for better jobs and educational opportunities were refused. Although the Hwa Chings did not and probably could not follow through on their threats, the Chinatown establishment realized that some action had to be taken (Lyman 1970).

In 1969, the Hwa Chings gained the attention of the national media. In the December 1969 issue of *Esquire* magazine, Tom Tom and the Hwa Chings were part of an article, "The New Yellow Peril," that centered upon the conflicts and violence that were plaguing Chinatown. Tom Tom was quoted as saying:

> TT: ...We never marched as a gang....You have to kill us to stop us. You split my head open—I get up, keep fighting. We all been to the hospital. I been three times.
> I: What did you use as weapons?
> TT: Axes and knives.
> I: Axes?
> TT: Yeah. They don't slice but they hurt plenty. (Wolfe 1969)

In 1967/68, San Francisco Chinatown leaders devised a plan to split the Hwa Chings into various factions in order to control the Chinatown gang violence and extortion. The Chinatown establishment leaders turned to one part of the community's social structure, the tongs. Four of Chinatown's five major tongs (Hop Sing Tong, Hip Sing Tong, Bung Kong Tong, Yin On Tong, and Suey Sing Tong) invited gang members to join them and each identified a Hwa Ching leader and recruited him and his followers into the tong. The tongs offered the youth gang members a club house to hang out in, a "slush fund" for bail, and employment opportunities in Chinatown gambling dens which they controlled.

The Hop Sing Tong was initially the most active tong in the recruitment of gang members. Soon their young gang members were demanding protection money from Chinatown gambling dens. However, most of the dens were under the protection of Suey Sing. As a result, the Suey Sing Tong actively recruited Tom Tom and his Hwa Ching followers in order to counteract Hop Sing. The gang situation in Chinatown dramatically changed from one large gang to five smaller ones, the remnants of the Hwa Chings and the four tong youth groups, each vying for power and control over the Chinatown community. Contrary to the intentions of the Chinatown elders, gang violence increased, and the tongs could not control the youth groups. The top gang had the fear and respect of the community. By the end of 1968, the Tom Tom gang, the youth gang affiliated with the San Francisco Suey Sing Tong, emerged as the strongest gang.

SUEY SING TONG

The word *tong* means "hall," or, freely translated, "lodge." The tongs descended from Triad or "secret societies" that originated in China. Formed after the Manchu overthrow of

the Ming Dynasty in 1644, the tongs sought to overthrow the Manchus and to restore to power the Mings. The concept of these secret societies was transferred to the United States and the first tong, the Kwong Duck Tong, was founded in San Francisco in 1852. The second was the Hip Sing Tong, the only tong to have branches throughout the United States. Soon after the Hip Sing Tong was founded, Yee Low Dai established the Suey Sing Tong (Hall of Auspicious Victory) (Gong, Grant 1930).

The initial purpose of the tongs was to counteract the larger and wealthier family (surname) associations (Gong, Grant 1930). The early history of the tongs was marked by conflicts with other Chinese societies, especially the family associations. The tongs were most successful in their wars with the clans and by the 1890s gained a great deal of power and wealth. Simultaneously, the tongs gradually lost sight of their original function, which was to seek justice for the weaker groups. Inside Chinatown the secret societies soon took control of gambling and prostitution (Gong, Grant 1930).

Since World War II, the tongs have continued their involvement in the gambling industry (Mark 1989). A tong would either directly operate a gambling den or have it under its protection (Chin 1990). If a gambling den was on a tong's protection list, the den would make weekly contributions to the tong and possibly hire some of its members (Mark 1989).

The Suey Sing Tong national headquarters is located in San Francisco Chinatown. There are nine Suey Sing branches in the western U.S.: Oakland, Stockton, Watsonville, Salinas, Marysville, Monterey, Portland, and Seattle. The ten Suey Sing Tongs elect officers every year. For example, in 1972, eleven officers were elected for the San Francisco headquarters. The top seven positions were occupied by Chinatown business owners.

Chinese New Year is a significant event for the different Suey Sing Tongs. Although all of the branches celebrate this annual event, each year, one Suey Sing Tong hosts the other cities for a large celebration with performances by a Chinese orchestra and singers, banquet dinners and gambling.

By the 1970s, the Suey Sing Tong served four basic functions: 1) It celebrated special occasions such as New Year. 2) It provided assistance such as interpreter services, employment referrals, and burial arrangements; 3) the tong clubhouse provided opportunities for members; 4) the tong protected the business interests of its leaders by providing opportunities for additional business, such as business partnerships.

WHY FORM A GANG?

Only three studies (Chin 1990; Lyman 1970; Takagi, Platt 1978) concerned with Chinatown youth gangs examine why the gangs formed. Lyman (1970) asserts that the gangs were a product of conflict and rebellion, and examines why existing groups such as the Hwa Ching develop in a specific direction.

Takagi and Platt (1978) attribute gang formation and gang violence to the social structure, asserting that the Chinatown structure, specifically the tongs, were the reasons for the violence in Chinatown.

Ko-lin Chin (1990) believed that causative and intervening social factors gave rise to Chinese gang delinquency, including school problems, family problems, and the lack of employment opportunities. These factors alienate immigrants from the Chinatown community and the broader society. Chin asserts that these causative factors, coupled with intervening factors, such as affiliation with and internalization of tong norms and values, contribute to a youth group's development into a Chinatown street gang.

In this section, I look at an earlier stage in Chinatown gang formation than the three other researchers. What I believe is important to explore is just why these youth join or form a group in the first place.

During my five years of association with the Suey Sing boys, I had the opportunity to casually talk to many of the San Francisco and Oakland members. Several, including Tom Tom, were original Hwa Ching members. All of the gang members indicated that after their arrival in the United States, they were verbally harassed and physically abused by many different groups at school and in their neighborhoods. The gang members stated that the people that harassed them the most were the American-born Chinese (ABCs). Regarding this topic, Tom Tom stated in an interview:

> We use to fight the American-born Chinese all the time. They call us 'Chinabugs.' We say 'Who you think you are?' They say, 'We American-born.' That's a joke. They Chinese same as us. (Wolfe 1969).

Another gang leader stated:

> I wanted to go to school. And I tried. But it didn't work. You know what happens; the other Chinese kids say they are not Chinese but Americans. They spit on me. (Allard 1975)

As a result, many Chinese immigrant youths were forced to band together with other Chinese immigrants in order to protect themselves (Thompson 1976).

Why would the ABCs antagonize the Chinese immigrant children, commonly referred to as "FOBs" (Fresh Off the Boat)? Many local-born Chinese respond to this question by stating that the foreign-born Chinese represented everything that they "wanted to get away from" such as speaking Chinese, dressing differently, eating Chinese food, and simply not being "American." Ignatius Chinn, who for 21 years was the primary police officer working in Oakland Chinatown, expresses this sentiment. Chinn grew up in a middle-class family, his father was an Oakland accountant, his mother a secretary. Asked about his youth, Chinn speaks with painful candor.

> When I was young, I was trying to be white. Most of my friends at Westlake Junior High and Oakland High School were white. When I saw Asian immigrants I thought they were geeks. I felt contempt for them because they reminded me of who I didn't want to be...

With difficulty, Chinn tells of feeling ashamed when friends visited his house and met his uncle from Canton, who spoke no English.

> I felt uncomfortable because they reminded me of what I was trying so hard not to be. I felt between races, between cultures. I didn't have much background about anything Asian. (Rosenthal 1991)

A method for the ABCs to create a barrier between themselves and the FOBs was to make fun of, put down, and verbally and physically harass their foreign born cousins. In this way the foreign-born would be established as a different and distinct group from the American-born Chinese.

Why did Chinese born in the U.S. feel ashamed of their ethnic background; or, in other words, suffer an ethnic identity conflict? The Chinese were a small ethnic minority numbering only 237,292 in 1960, and 431,583 in 1970. Shortly after the first arrival of Chinese workers to the United States in 1850, racial discrimination and hatred was directed towards the newcomers, culminating in the Chinese Exclusion Acts of 1882, 1888, 1892, and 1902 (Lai, Choy 1971). For over a hundred years, to be Chinese in the United States meant to be slandered, abused, and treated as a third class citizen with few of the rights guaranteed by the Constitution to other Americans. To many young Chinese Americans, to be Chinese was not desirable. What was desirable was to be like mainstream white America; speaking standard English, eating sandwiches, cookies, and milk for lunch, and wearing the latest American teen fashions. As a result, anything associating them with China and being Chinese was rejected.

THE OAKLAND SUEY SING TONG YOUTH GROUP

The Oakland Suey Sing Tong is located on 8th Street, right in the heart of Chinatown. Oakland Chinatown supports several Chinese traditional associations and community service organizations; but Suey Sing is the only tong. In 1966/1967, teenage immigrants began to develop a community reputation as a group of young toughs who frequently got into trouble. One incident occurred in late 1967 when two Oakland youths, "Barry" and "Puki," were beaten up in San Francisco Chinatown by some Hwa Ching members including "Ben Gong" and a youth nicknamed "Big Head." As a result, Tom Tom and his San Francisco followers assisted and befriended the two from Oakland. "Ben Gong" was later murdered in 1970, in an unrelated crime. By 1967/68, approximately 28 young men who hung out on the corner of 8th and Webster started to spend time in the Suey Sing Tong clubhouse. Their ages ranged from 15 to 18 years old and their families had immigrated from Hong Kong. All were fluent in Cantonese and one was completely fluent in English. They wore casual clothes. Only one eventually completed high school. All but four lived at home with their families.

A merger between youth gangs and the old established Oakland tong was brokered by two tong members. They had established rapport with gang members and were willing to take on this risky endeavor. "Uncle Choy" was the Suey Sing Tong member who recruited and advised the San Francisco youth group. At that time, "Uncle Yee," my father, was active

in San Francisco, and was also the Oakland Suey Sing President. According to D.F., "Uncle Yee" was the main Oakland Suey Sing contact and worked with "Uncle Choy" to recruit the Oakland Suey Sing group.

The motives for the Oakland Suey Sing boys were different. They simply wanted a place to hang out. They also desired affiliation with the San Francisco Suey Sing group for their protection from other youths. At the same time, Tom Tom and his San Francisco Suey Sing Tong followers believed that the Oakland group could assist them in turf battles in San Francisco Chinatown. By 1968, the group was called the "Oakland Suey Sing boys" or "Sing Sing boys" and the San Francisco group was referred to as the "Tom Tom Gang" (Chin 1990). The Oakland group was relatively small, consisting of eight paid official Suey Sing members and about 20 associates. Unlike the Hwa Chings and, later, Tom Tom's group, the Oakland Suey Sing boys did not have a clearly defined leader. From my observations, between 1968 to 1972, they often deferred to Tom Tom, but by no means was he their acknowledged leader.

One day in August 1968, a Suey Sing member was beaten up by two Hop Sing Tong members. Later that night the former saw "Big Nose" of the Hop Sings driving his car on Grant Avenue in San Francisco, and ran up and shot "Big Nose" in the head. Although "Big Nose" survived and knew who shot him, the assailant was never arrested. The assailant was able to leave San Francisco and flee across the Bay where he stayed for one night at the home of one of the Oakland Suey Sing youths, and then stayed the next three weeks at the Oakland home of a tong elder. After a cooling off period, the Suey Sing member joined the Merchant Marine and left the gang life.

By 1969, the Oakland group faced two major challenges. One was conflict with Chicanos, especially at Oakland Technical High School. When Chinese students were beaten up by Chicano students, older Suey Sing members came to the aid of the high school members and used hatchets as weapons to defend the Chinese students. During the same time period an Oakland-based American born group of Chinese and Japanese, "The Rickshaw Runners," posed the second challenge. The Runners had numerous altercation with the Suey Sing boys in Oakland Chinatown and at the local bowling alley. In this case, the San Francisco Suey Sing members assisted their Oakland counterparts in fighting the "Rickshaw Runners" in a number of skirmishes. Eventually, the "Rickshaw Runners" were forced to back down and maintain their distance from Chinese immigrants in general, and the Suey Sing boys in particular.

In August 1969, the East Bay Chinese Youth Council (EBCYC) was established in Oakland Chinatown. It was organized by American-born Chinese college students who wanted to bring a progressive voice to the East Bay Chinese community. They lobbied to increase social services for Chinese youth in the East Bay cities of Oakland, Alameda, Emeryville, and Berkeley. Unlike other Chinatown organizations, the founders were a diverse group of young people. Some of the founding members and original EBCYC Board of Directors included three Suey Sing boys from Oakland. Tom Tom from San Francisco was a founding member. I was the organization's founder and first President.

Unfortunately, the goals of the gang members involved in EBCYC was not to bring about community empowerment and social change, but to make "easy money" through government-funded programs the way Tom Tom did in San Francisco. In San Francisco Tom Tom was employed as a gang outreach worker and often worked only 15 minutes per day. His job was to control gang activities and violence. However, this position only further enhanced Tom Tom's ability to recruit new gang members because it demonstrated to potential members that he had the connections and the intelligence to manipulate "the system." In the case of the East Bay Chinese Youth Council, it never became a source of "easy money." The Youth Council never obtained the gang prevention funding that other organizations in San Francisco Chinatown were able to obtain, and the EBCYC staff was interested only in working for the larger community.

The relationship between EBCYC and the gang members had a profound effect upon the latter. Between 1970-1972, new members (ages 14-17) attached themselves to the Oakland Suey Sing youth group and were also participants in EBCYC's programs such as the War on Poverty's Neighborhood Youth Corps Program. Many of the older gang members (ages 18-22) had changed and had adopted the principles of the college students. Those older gang members were now concerned with improving Chinatown community life.

By the end of 1972, Tom Tom's gangs power base eroded because of a change in policy by the San Francisco tongs and increasing competition and conflict with other gangs in Chinatown. First, by the summer of 1972, the San Francisco experiment of incorporating the former Hwa Chings into the tongs was deemed a failure. The tong youth groups were viewed as too big a liability. In San Francisco, both the Hop Sing and Suey Sing tongs, who had the largest youth groups, either expelled many youth members or no longer supported the youth. In San Francisco Suey Sing, only fifteen who actually became tong members remained.

Another factor was the reemergence of the Hwa Chings. In January 1970, one of the old Hwa Ching leaders, Kenny Mack, was discharged from the U.S. army. He maneuvered his way back into power and revitalized the Hwa Chings. One night in August 1972, Tom Tom was severely beaten in a San Francisco Chinatown restaurant. He was hospitalized for six weeks. During that time, the Tom Tom gang dissolved: some joined other gangs, and others left the gang life. Still others had to flee because Tom Tom could no longer protect them, and a few, including Tom Tom himself, moved to Oakland. Thus, the transition of power was made—the Hwa Chings became the strongest gang in San Francisco Chinatown.

Tom Tom and the remnants of the San Francisco Suey Sing group attempted to reestablish themselves as a viable gang in Oakland. Tom Tom approached the Oakland Suey Sing boys and was rejected by the older group that once supported him. As mentioned earlier, EBCYC had positively influenced some of the older gang members and they did not want to follow Tom Tom.

Some of the younger Suey Sing members and their friends followed Tom Tom and initiated a hostile takeover of the EBCYC club house, programs, and staff. I participated in three months of negotiations which resulted in the takeover of the Youth Council by Tom Tom and a few of his followers. By the time the gang members took over the EBCYC, nothing was left to take over except for an empty shell of a club house. The EBCYC Board of Directors and staff had transferred everything to the newly founded organization, East Bay Asians for Community Action, which continued and expanded upon the EBCYC programs.

In 1968, the Oakland Chinese Community Council (OCCC) was established to provide Chinese-speaking referral and social services to the Oakland Chinese community. In 1970, OCCC hired its first full-time salaried Executive Director, Edward K. Chook. Little was known about Chook except that he was active in the local Kuomintang (KMT) Party. In the beginning of his tenure, EBCYC and Edward Chook had a cordial working relationship. By 1972, the relationship had cooled a great deal. According to Tom Tom, Chook had advised him and his followers to take over the Youth Council. Chook even promised Tom Tom that he would help set up youth programs such as the summer Neighborhood Youth Corp program. In 1972/1973, Tom Tom's efforts to remodel EBCYC for his personal benefit had failed and the organization had a quiet end. Tom Tom lost his followers and was shortly afterward deported to Hong Kong because of a felony conviction.

Unlike their San Francisco counterparts, the original Oakland Suey Sing youth group did not extort Oakland Chinatown businesses and community members. However, after the group no longer existed as a Suey Sing Tong sponsored group, some of Tom Tom's young Oakland followers named themselves "Suey Sing boys" and began to extort members of the Oakland Chinese community. In November 1972, a local newspaper reported the arrest and conviction of four Chinese juveniles and two adults who were part of an extortion ring. To their victims they identified themselves as "Suey Sing boys."

The Suey Sing boys took a variety of paths. Four continued their deviant life style and have become involved with drugs and two were incarcerated for serious crimes such as murder. Twenty are married with children, and they have indicated that they do not want them to join any gang. Six own and operate businesses. One is a well known chef and restaurant owner in another city. Approximately 20 are gainfully employed in occupations such as hair stylist and automobile mechanic, and seventeen have moved out of Oakland but still live in the greater San Francisco Bay Area, and are successful in their professional and personal lives.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings from this study suggest that early Chinese gangs on the West Coast were not originally a product of mere greed and irrational deviant behavior. Instead, they were initially a group of youths who banded together

for protection and survival. Even today, thirty years later, young immigrants still join Chinese gangs, Samoan gangs, Cambodian gangs, and Filipino gangs for mutual-protection (Alegado 1994; Revilla 1996). The implications of this study for public policy makers is that they should look beyond the gangs as the sole problem, and to look inwards towards the broader Asian American community. One obvious question to be addressed is how we can reduce the rift between local-born Asians and our immigrant/refugee cousins.

Oakland Chinatown's Suey Sing boys did not come into existence as a gang because of their association with San Francisco Chinatown gang members nor due to the Oakland Suey Sing Tong. Before their recruitment into Oakland Suey Sing, they already functioned as a gang. However, they were acknowledged as a gang only after they became affiliated with Suey Sing Tong and the nature of their activities were in fact influenced by the San Francisco Tom Tom gang. In other urban centers, the pattern of gang members in one city creating or influencing the development of a new gang in another city has been a major factor in the spread of Chinatown gangs in the United States. This phenomena requires additional study not only for Chinese gangs but other Asian gangs in the United States.

The Asian gang literature does make linkages (Chin 1990) and non-linkages (Joe 1994) with the tongs and Triads. What I discuss in this study that requires further research is the links to other community organizations such as those of the Suey Sing boys to the East Bay Chinese Youth Council. For the Suey Sing boys, the gang's development and also its demise were influenced by a variety of components of the Chinese community. Future gang studies need to address these important issues of gang/social structure relations. Another topic for examination is: can self help community-based organizations positively impact the nature of a gang, gang membership, and violence perpetuated by gang members? If so, should there be more community programs for our youth? And what should these programs look like? These questions have significant public policy implications regarding the control of gangs and related criminal activities.

In 1971, Oakland Chinatown had only one gang, the Suey Sing boys. This group operated as a gang for approximately five years. The situation in Oakland Chinatown is different today. There are now 16 predominantly ethnic Chinese gangs in Oakland and many are based in Chinatown. They have gang names such as the Red Fire, Wo Hop To, Vietnamese Troublemakers, Asian Car Thieves, and Chinatown Rulers (Rosenthal 1991). What can we do?

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