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Chinese Americans in the Tucson Community

Their History, Their Contributions

Abstract: This paper focuses on the history and contributions of Chinese Americans in Tucson, Arizona. The Chinese in Tucson have a history of more than 130 years, during which time they made remarkable contributions to the economic prosperity of the Tucson area and attained memorable achievements in the development of the local community, although they lived and worked under difficult and unfavorable conditions before the end of World War II. The Chinese were among the earliest settlers in Tucson. When they came there 130 years ago, the city was still a small scanty rural town in the Southwest. Today, with the efforts of Chinese immigrants and all other ethnic groups, Tucson has become a populous international metropolis. Chinese immigrants have greatly contributed in every aspect of community life to build Tucson to what it is today. The first part of this paper is devoted to the history, historical background, and discrimination early Chinese immigrants experienced. The second part focuses on contributions they made in the areas of the local economy, politics, and community life.

Ever since three men, all of whom had the same last name of Wong, came to Tucson, Arizona, in the late 1860s¹ and opened the O.K. Restaurant on the southeast corner of Church Plaza and Mesilla Street, the

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existence of Chinese immigrants has never ended. Their presence has enriched the local diverse culture and brought the Chinese virtues and tradition to people living in this southwestern city. Although they lived and worked under difficult and unfavorable conditions before the end of World War II, they have endured and remained on this sunny desert land, making remarkable contributions to the prosperity of the Tucson area and attaining memorable achievements in the development of the local community. Their contributions and achievements are so striking that they deserve our earnest attention and study, as well as recognition and appreciation from all society.

History and Historical Background

The Chinese pioneers in Tucson came from California in the 1860s. Although they settled down in Arizona for various reasons, there were two principal ones. First, they tried to seek fair treatment in this new land, because they felt uncomfortable with the heated anti-Chinese sentiment in California. Second, because the Southern Pacific Railroad was extended into the territory of Arizona in the 1870s, many of them came here as railroad laborers with construction companies.

The 1870 U.S. census recorded twenty Chinese in Arizona. It remains an enigma how many of them lived in Tucson at that time. The exact year when Chinese settlers first set foot on the soil of Tucson may never be known. However, the earliest time may be dated back to at least earlier than 1870. According to the local newspaper, the *Arizona Daily Star*, February 22, 1935, those who were here in 1870 arrived during the 1860s. The earliest historical record of Chinese presence in Tucson is that three men sharing the family name of Wong followed the railroad east to Arizona in the late 1860s and started a Chinese restaurant in Tucson. Their history was recovered through the remarkable memory of Dan Chun Wo, one of the earliest Chinese residents in Tucson, in his letter to the *Arizona Daily Star* in 1935:

I place the arrival of the Wongs in Tucson as prior to 1870 because they had a case in court that could not be tried without an interpreter. Finally, a man by the name of Chan Tin Wo, who was able to understand Chinese and English, was located. Chan Tin Wo was a cook for one of the railroad building camps near Marieopa, and he was called to Tucson in 1870 to act as interpreter for that particular case.²

According to the 1880 U.S. census, the Chinese settlers in Tucson increased to 159.³ Of those, almost two-thirds (98) were laundrymen and another 26 were cooks (Fong 1978, 33). This increase was largely the result of the construction of the Southern Pacific Railroad, which reached Tucson on March 20, 1880. After the completion of the Southern Pacific Line, some Chinese laborers stayed in Tucson and became small businessmen and farmers. Over the next fifty years, although the Chinese population in the United States was declining, the number of Chinese in Tucson remained relatively stable but never exceeded 300. The year 1940 witnessed 347 Chinese residents in Tucson, according to the U.S. census. The Chinese were mainly engaged in grocery stores, restaurants, and laundries. According to the *Arizona Daily Star*, February 22, 1935, the Chinese ran sixty grocery stores, nine restaurants, and two laundries in Tucson at that time.⁴ After the 1940s, as the atmosphere in the United States toward Chinese became relatively friendlier, the Chinese population slowly increased. The 1960s saw the biggest change in the Chinese population in more than eight decades. The repeal of the quota system allowed a great number of Chinese from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other parts of the world to enter the United States (Keane 1992, 13). By 1990, there were more than 3,472⁵ Chinese living in Tucson. However, the actual number of Chinese residents in Tucson was far more than the one the census indicates because that figure does not include students studying at universities, visiting scholars, and trainees, who come to Tucson for different purposes. As a result of the millennium census soon to be published, there are many reasons to believe that we will see more Chinese in Tucson.

The early Chinese settlers' lives were never easy and evoked sad memories. They were "accused not only of working for lower wages but also of taking away jobs that others deserved (Fong 1980, 5). They were discriminated against and persecuted, and lived and worked under very difficult conditions. With the conflicts between different ethnic labor forces becoming acute in the 1880s and with racist prejudice toward Chinese immigrants growing stronger, politicians, hungry for votes, joined this anti-Chinese movement. As a result, Congress passed a series of anti-Chinese acts and amendments. In 1880, the Burlingame Treaty Amendment prohibited the entry of Chinese laborers. In 1882, the notorious Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, which banned the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years and prohibited the naturalization of Chinese. This is the first anti-alien legislation ever passed in U.S. his-

tory. In 1888, the Scott Act prohibited Chinese from reentering the United States after a temporary departure. In 1892, the Geary Act extended the ban on the immigration of Chinese laborers for another ten years. In 1893, the McCreary Amendment to the Geary Act increased restrictions to Chinese businessmen. In 1894, a new U.S.–China treaty absolutely prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers to the United States for ten years. In 1904, the General Deficiency Appropriations Account Act extended the Chinese Exclusion Act indefinitely. Until the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943, Chinese in the United States had been living in extremely unfavorable conditions. Even after 1943, a limited annual quota of only 105 immigrants continued to limit the growth of the Chinese population in the United States (Keane 1992, 9).

Although, anti-Chinese activities mainly took place in California, which had the largest Chinese population in America, and anti-Chinese sentiment in Arizona never reached the intensity the Chinese experienced in California and several other western states, Chinese settlers in Arizona also fell victim to racist sentiment. Local newspapers from the time reveal a large number of historical facts about these sentiments. In 1880, there were 109 Chinese residents in Phoenix according to the U.S. census. The number, although seemingly a small one, comprised 4 percent of the total population in this ten-year-old settlement. However, the local newspaper, the *Phoenix Daily Herald*, published an editorial on September 15, 1880, stating that it would like to see “fewer Chinamen in Phoenix.” Editors complained about the Chinese monopoly on restaurants and laundry businesses and encouraged white citizens to start their own laundries. The *Phoenix Daily Herald*, on August 11, 1895, described the Chinese quarters on First and Adams as “unsightly,” “unhealthy,” and a “public nuisance” (Keane 1992, 35–36). The *Prescott Journal Miner*, in 1874, reported on a Chinese woman’s arrival in Wickenburg, “the first that has ever visited this town, . . . [and] we hope the last.” On another occasion, the same paper reported that “three more Chinamen arrived here during the week. . . . There are now four of them in this vicinity, which is quite enough” (Davis 1979, 14).⁶ The *Arizona Weekly Star* published an editorial in 1879 portraying Chinese as “an ignorant, filthy, leprous horde.” In 1879, the *Arizona Daily Miner* declared that “Prescott has about 75 or 80 Chinamen, which is 75 or 80 too many. Now is a good time to get rid of them” (Lister 1989, 30). A Tucson local newspaper, *El Fronterizo*, described the Chinese in 1892 as “the most pernicious and degraded

race on the globe” and, in 1894, as “a fungus that lives in isolation, sucking the sap of the other plants.”⁷

Other sources reveal more cases of anti-Chinese sentiment. Anthony J. Davis depicted what happened to Arizona Chinese in other towns, in his article “The Orientation of Tucson’s Chinese” that appeared in the *Tucson Citizen*, April 21, 1979:

In Arizona, the centers of anti-Chinese activity were Tombstone, Prescott, and Besbee. There anti-Chinese leagues met once a week in festival settings with brass bands and choruses parading th[r]ough the streets. At times, Chinese were physically assaulted.

The newspaper jumped on the bandwagon with headings such as “Exit Pigtails” and “Starve Them to Death,” and articles that congratulated merchants for firing Chinese. A burlesque play at Tombstone’s Bird Cage Theater in March 1886 was called *The Chinese Must Go*.

In those days, according to Abe Chanin, “a public outcry in Clifton forced a mining company to abandon its plans to bring in Chinese workers. In Tombstone, a businessman offered to put up \$1,000 to get the Chinese out of town” (Chanin 1977, 202). By 1893, the Chinese were required to carry a certificate of residence with a photograph.⁸ Moreover, an Arizona law of 1901 banned Chinese from marrying whites, stating that “the marriage of a person of Caucasian blood with a Negro or Mongolian is null and void” (Fong 1980, 23).

Even in the 1940s, anti-Chinese sentiment was strongly felt by Tucson’s Chinese residents. Esther Don Tang, a prominent Chinese American woman in Tucson, recalled an unpleasant experience her parents experienced at that time. Her parents put a down-payment on a house; when they revisited the house the next day, they were greeted by obscene writing on the walls and informed that Chinese were not wanted there.

My mother put \$2,000 of well-earned money on a house in the Belmont subdivision on Country Club Road. The salesman did not tell her that originally the subdivision had been restricted to keep Orientals from living there. On revisiting the house, “No Chinks Wanted” was scribbled on the wall. My mother and father gave the house up and lost \$1,000 of their well-earned money, which was a great deal of money in those days.⁹

Actually, in those most difficult years, the atmosphere in Tucson was a bit looser than in other parts of Arizona and California. No anti-Chinese league existed and a petition to the City Council to segregate Chinese businesses to a certain part of town was rejected as unconstitutional

in 1893 (Fong 1980, 25). Even under such relatively friendlier conditions, Chinese in Tucson still experienced absurd restrictions and suffered from subtle discrimination. As Esther Don Tang recalled her life as a child, "In those days, city swimming pools were off-limits to Chinese and Mexicans." So "we would go swimming in the irrigation ditches at the base of Tumamoc Hill and 'A' Mountain."¹⁰ Esther Tang also recollected other prejudices against Chinese, "When we went to the old Lyric Theatre, the Chinese could not sit in the main area; we had to sit up in the balcony" (Chanin 1977, 204). The discrimination died away slowly. Even after the abolition of the Chinese Exclusion Act, many Chinese Americans found that they were still not in a position to purchase houses in certain areas of Tucson (Chanin 1977, 203). Soleng Tom, one of the most influential Chinese Americans in the Tucson community, as discussed below, recalled that even in the 1950s his white neighbor dumped garbage in his garden because he was a Chinese.

Even within such a climate, Chinese immigrants in Tucson still earned a certain recognition from the community because of their successes and contributions. The good testimony is that the local newspaper, the *Arizona Daily Star*, devoted eight pages in its Eleventh Annual Rodeo edition to the Chinese community in Tucson on February 22, 1935. Collected and recorded in that issue were a large number of immensely valuable materials about early Chinese settlers and Chinese Americans in those days. The front page demonstrated the recognition of Chinese Americans' achievements with the headline "Great Stride Forward Made by Old Pueblo Chinese Population."

Their Contributions and Achievements

Tucson is now a prosperous southwestern metropolis with a population of 750,000. The Chinese were among the earliest settlers who helped to build the city of Tucson into what it is today. Yee Hoy, who was one of the earliest Chinese in Old Pueblo and is believed to have arrived only shortly after the three Wongs, recalled that when he arrived in Tucson as a young man in 1870, Tucson was an almost imperceptible hamlet. He said that there was only one brick house when he arrived, and all the others were made of mud. Business was slack, and not many white Americans lived there.¹¹

The early Chinese immigrants came to Tucson mostly as workers for the railroads and mines. After completion of the Southern Pacific Rail-

road and with racism against Chinese laborers in mines becoming stronger, some of the early Chinese immigrants chose to return to their home country; others decided to stay with dreams of either making a fortune and then returning home or earning enough money to bring their family to Tucson. Employment opportunities for those early Chinese settlers were very limited. The only choices were occupations such as running restaurants, grocery stores, and laundries, or farming.

The earliest Chinese business in Tucson ever recorded was the O.K. Restaurant run by three Chinese men sharing the surname of Wong, as noted above. They charged 75 cents for a meal and used a laundry basket for a cash register.¹² Their employees received a free dinner at the end of the day. However, restaurants were never the major industries for Chinese in Tucson until the 1970s. According to statistics, in 1901 there were only four restaurants run by Chinese. By 1935, this figure had increased to nine (Schweitzer 1952, 44). In 1950, the Arizona Chinese Directory listed only eight Chinese restaurants in Tucson.

Farming was another important industry for the early Chinese settlers. After they left their jobs with the railroad or the mines, some turned to vegetable farming. In 1878, some Chinese started leasing plots of land along the Santa Cruz River near Tucson. By 1885, the Silver Lake District was dotted with Chinese farms. They grew “cabbages, garlic, and, in fact, everything in the vegetable line from an artichoke to the biggest cabbage” (Fong 1980, 15). In the late 1880s, Chinese farms became the only source of fresh vegetables in the Tucson area (Schweitzer 1952, 26). It is now hard to estimate how many Chinese immigrants were engaged in this industry at its peak because none of the land was recorded in the names of the Chinese farmers themselves, but we know that this situation continued until the late 1900s.¹³ Those farmers brought their produce to the city and sold it by themselves or disposed of it through grocery stores owned by their relatives or friends. Clara Ferrin, a Tucson woman, gave a graphic description in 1897 of the life of a Chinese farmer, and in it she wondered about the “great disadvantage it would be to us if all the ‘vegetable Chinamen’ were removed from Tucson.”¹⁴ Gradually, most of the Chinese farms disappeared. By the year 1935, only one or two Chinese farms remained. There were various reasons why the Chinese farmers quit the industry, but the main reason was the draining of Silver Lake and the consequent lack of irrigation water in the 1900s. Most vegetable farmers moved into towns and became grocery operators.

The major industry for Chinese immigrants in Tucson before the 1960s was grocery stores. In the 1930s, there were as many as sixty grocery stores and more run by Chinese.¹⁵ Some of these were the largest at the time. The first Chinese grocery store in Tucson was probably the one established by Chan Tin Wo, who came to Tucson in 1870 to act as an interpreter for the three Wongs in their lawsuit case, as described earlier. After the trial of that case, Chan Tin Wo remained in Old Pueblo and established a general merchandise store on North Main, between Ott and Alameda streets.¹⁶ He was so successful in his business that he was the first Chinese immigrant to become a naturalized citizen in Tucson. The Pima County register showed that he was naturalized in 1881 (Fong 1980, 9). In 1882, he was recorded as the first Chinese American ever to vote in Tucson. It is a safe supposition that one of the important reasons for his success in business and politics was his English-language abilities. *The Arizona Daily Star* praised him on November 9, 1884, as a "most prosperous grocer in this city."¹⁷ However, he chose to return to China in 1895.

Don Kim was another man whose name was on the roll call of Tucson's pioneer merchants. Don Kim founded his family-managed grocery store in 1889 at the corner of East Eighth Street and Fourth Avenue. At that time, this location was at the edge of the city. Five years later, he moved his store to the corner of West Jackson and Meyer Streets, and the store occupied a full half block. The merchandise included groceries, clothing, hardware, and everything needed to make it one of the most complete merchandise stores in the Southwest. At that time, Don Kim's grocery store was the second largest in Tucson. Its scope of business, however, was reduced to groceries and meats after the death of Don Kim in 1918, when Mrs. Kim found that the job of managing a general merchandise store was too much for her. Although Don Kim's store was regarded as a neighborhood store, its customers came from all areas of the city.¹⁸

Don Wah was another notable Chinese merchant in the history of early Chinese immigrants in Tucson. He first came to Tucson as a cook for the railroad workers. Later, he left the crew and found a job in a Tucson restaurant. At the age of thirty, he returned to China and married Fok Yut Ngan, a young woman of eighteen. The couple returned to Tucson and rented a store on the corner of Convent and Simpson Streets in 1910. Don Wah was an adventurous businessman. Apart from his grocery-store business, he also ran a grocery truck route from Tucson to

Marana in the 1920s, transporting merchandise to the migrant cotton workers in Marana and serving the farmers and homesteaders along the way. As a result, other merchants, such as Bing K. Wong, Bing G. Wong, Jim Wong, and Joe Tang, also adopted this business practice. Don Wah also had a cattle ranch near Rillito. He opened one of Tucson's first bakeries at Convert and Simpson Streets in connection with his grocery store and eventually developed his business into a chain of successful grocery stores. Don Wah was a unique businessman. He used a method similar to that employed by today's credit-card companies. Esther Tang, his daughter, recalled the charge method her parents practiced:

In those days, I remembered, we had a little notebook and it was called a *cartera* and any charge purchases that the people made was put down in that book. The funny thing is we always gave that notebook to the customer; the Chinese grocer never kept an accounting. There was tremendous trust. (Chanin 1977, 206)

On their payday, customers would return to the store and pay their bills, and in exchange they would receive *pelon*, a gift bag of fruit or candy, in appreciation of their business.

Many other Chinese Americans contributed greatly to the development of the Tucson business community. Among them, Soleng Tom is a representative figure. When Soleng Tom arrived in Tucson in 1930, he was still a teenager. He began his career as a restaurant cleaner and a laundryman. Later, he and his uncle combined their savings, plus a loan, to open a small grocery store at Congress and Simpson that marked the beginning of his business ventures. In 1937, Soleng, in partnership with C.Y. Tom, managed to open the T&T Market, which was then the largest market in the Tucson area. Through their diligence, their enterprise became a lucrative business. However, Soleng was not content with his relatively small market, so, two years later, he proposed a grand plan to his partner to open a supermarket, which was a new idea at the time. Because his partner was intimidated by Soleng's great dream, Soleng built his own supermarket, the Soleng Supermarket, on South Sixth Avenue in south Tucson in 1939, the first supermarket in Old Pueblo. He later expanded it into the first shopping mall in Tucson, Soleng's Center, which included "a furniture store, a jewelry store, a clothing store, a variety store, a hardware store, a restaurant, a barber shop, a finance company, a beauty parlor, a bakery, and a post office."¹⁹ Soleng Tom was an ambitious businessman, and he was never content with what he

had achieved. From 1944 to 1955, he further developed Soleng's Center into Empire Foods, a chain supermarket with four locations that distributed its products throughout Old Pueblo, serving a population of around 100,000 in Tucson. For Soleng Tom's remarkable contributions to the local community and American society, John Rhodes, Arizona's congressman, made a special speech in the House of Representatives on July 19, 1956, praising Soleng Tom's unique achievements in every respect; this speech was recorded in the Congressional Record.

Several reasons account for the success of Chinese American businessmen in Tucson. Industry, a traditional virtue among the Chinese, is the major one. Every successful Chinese American businessman is hard working. For example, Del Reitz describes Soleng Tom in his early business days with these words: "He slept in the back of the market, ate from stock, and worked nights and holidays" (Reitz 1988, 30). Thrift is another reason. Chinese businessmen, in addition to working hard, usually saved the profits for further development. Another characteristic for successful Chinese businessmen is that they quickly learned English and Spanish, as well as local customs, in order to run their business well. Further, they had their own way of raising money to start their business. Esther Tang recorded the way the early Chinese settlers raised money: "To help each other succeed, ten men who needed capital to start their own business would pool their money. The man who won the bid to pay the highest interest would then receive the money to start his business."²⁰ Their practice of extending credit liberally also contributed to their success. For example, one rancher had shopped in one Chinese grocery store for twenty years. He bought all his groceries there and only paid once a year when he sold his calves (Schweitzer 1952, 41). Even today's businessmen would not dare to conduct such a practice.

Early Chinese immigrants were political nonentities. Because of their small number among the population and the undesirable political climate, their involvement in politics was minimal. According to the historical record, as mentioned above, Chan Tin Wo, a railroad cook and then a successful businessman, was the first Chinese immigrant ever registered to vote in Tucson. He was listed in the Pima county register for 1882. His social status, achieved through his success in business, may account in part for his participation in politics; his English-language ability was another important reason. Chan Tin Wo was listed as a Republican (Fong 1980, 11). Another story about voting, involving her father Don Wah, was recorded by Esther Tang: "One day, he went to the barbershop

to get his queue cut. . . . Well, that day they were voting as to where to build Drachman School, and there was a tie. My father said they pulled him out of the barbershop. He voted, and this is why Drachman School is where it is today” (Chanin 1977, 203).

Soleng Tom, discussed above, was the most active Chinese participant in politics. He made his first attempt to run for councilman as well as mayor of South Tucson in 1955. As a leading businessman and the major taxpayer in the town at the time, Soleng was dissatisfied with municipal mismanagement and corruption and hoped to change the situation. At first it appeared that he had won the election as one of the five councilmen in south Tucson, but later noneligible voters from outside the township were brought in and included in the ballot count and so he was defeated. Nevertheless, through the efforts of Soleng Tom and his supporters, including the Pima county attorney, in less than one year the primary corruption in South Tucson City was cleaned up. Four officials, including the mayor, were brought to trial and removed from office, though they were never convicted (Reitz 1988, 102). During this period, Soleng Tom received a death threat for what he had done, and later his supermarket became a victim of suspected arson. But Soleng Tom never regretted the sacrifice he had made for the South Tucson community. Soleng Tom’s second attempt to enter politics was his run for the Senate in 1962. It took courage to contest the Senate election in Arizona against Senator Barry Goldwater, who was a much publicized Republican and was then seeking nomination for the U.S. presidency. However, Soleng Tom thought that Congress needed a voice from Asian minorities, and he was in closer contact with voters in Arizona than was Senator Goldwater and knew what they wanted; he felt it was his responsibility to speak for Arizona voters. Though eventually he lost the campaign, his aspiration to serve his community and the United States never faded. In 1980, Soleng Tom made his third and last attempt to run for an official position as congressman. Once again he lost, this time to Jim McNulty, a World War II hero. At that time, Soleng was already over seventy, so he decided to fade out of politics. That year witnessed Tucson’s recognition of Soleng Tom for his outstanding contributions to the local community when he was declared “Man of the Year” in 1980.

Many Chinese Americans in Tucson are not only successful businessmen but are also civic leaders, having made great contributions to the development of the local community. Two such important figures are Esther Tang and Soleng Tom. Esther Tang was brought up in a tradi-

tional Chinese family. The Chinese values and virtues have helped to shape her personality and her view of the world. "The community out there is an extension of your home. You must contribute and be of service to it," her father often told her when she was young and which she recalled on many occasions. So from her youth she was determined to serve the community all her life. Her contributions and achievements since then can fill a thick book. A list of her community involvements at different levels is impressive. Two associations are most noteworthy. The first is the Pio Decimo Neighborhood Center where Esther Tang served as executive director for twenty years since 1966. The second is the Pima County Community College Board where she acted first as secretary and then as chairperson from 1975 to 1985. In addition, she provided leadership in many other community organizations. Her honors and awards are also very impressive. For her outstanding contributions to the local community, she was honored as "Woman of the Year" in 1955 and received the 1987 Jefferson Award for Community Service. Her many other awards and honors include "Tucson Woman of the Year in Administration" in 1968, "University of Arizona Alumni Award" in 1976, "Outstanding Citizen Award by the City of Tucson" in 1988, and "Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Distinguished Leadership Award" in 1991, to name only a few. In 1997, Esther Tang was selected as the recipient of "La Dona de Pueblo de Tucson" by Los Descendientes del Presidio de Tucson. This is remarkable because it was the first time the award was ever granted to a non-Hispanic person. Her selection indicates recognition of Chinese Americans' role in the development of multicultural Tucson. Furthermore, Esther Tang was selected as the representative of Tucson to introduce President Bill Clinton at the Tucson Convention Center during his visit to Tucson on February 25, 1999. Esther Tang is eighty-three years old. Her years of service to the Tucson community fully realize her personal motto: "to serve and improve the community in the areas of education, business, and social services."²¹

As a strong believer in one's responsibility to one's community, Soleng Tom, also discussed earlier, made immense contributions to Tucson community life as well. Apart from being a major taxpayer, he did a lot of work in serving local people. As early as the 1950s, he founded a very costly and well-equipped YMCA at Irvington Street and Nogalas Highway, which provided a popular activity center for Tucson residents. He was elected as the first president of the organization. He also established and supervised the Chinese School of Tucson, which not only

met the needs of the Chinese community but also provided cultural, linguistic, and job assistance to other ethnic groups in Tucson. Soleng also played a very active role in the American Legion, serving as Arizona Department Commander in the late 1950s, as Western Regional Commander in the late 1960s and narrowly missing being elected National Commander in the early 1970s.²² Other organizations in which he took an active part included the Tucson Red Cross Society, the Tucson Masonic Club, the Tucson Lion's Society, and the South Arizona Boy Scouts. Soleng never gave up opportunities to serve his community. In 1964, he was asked to serve on the Board of the Tucson Unified School District, a school district soon to be the largest in Arizona. He served as president of the board five times, and, during his sixteen years of productive and fulfilling service, he "gained a reputation for cutting directly to the heart of problems; often exercising expedient, common sense approaches where others might have dragged their feet while waiting for someone else to make decisions for which they feared taking responsibility" (Reitz 1988, 113). In 1980, Soleng declined the invitation to continue serving on the board, and, in recognition of his outstanding and appreciable contributions to education, a community elementary school was named after him in 1988.

Today, there are about 250 Chinese enterprises distributed in almost every area of business in Tucson. With high educational backgrounds, the third generation of Chinese immigrants serves in such areas as real estate, insurance, hospitals, legal agencies, and architecture. In addition, there are more than 100 Chinese restaurants scattered all over Tucson, serving 750,000 Tucson residents wonderful Chinese food.²³

Conclusion

The history of Chinese Americans in Tucson is almost as long as the history of the state of Arizona. When they came to Tucson 130 years ago, Tucson was still a small rural town in the Southwest. Today, with the efforts of Chinese immigrants and all other ethnic groups, Tucson has become a populous international metropolis. The Chinese have never failed to cooperate in any useful undertaking or improvement to the local community. They have made great contributions in every aspect of community life to make Tucson the city it is today. They always retain their Chinese heritage, but they never forget that they are Americans, part of a great nation with a diverse culture. Today, the Chinese Americans in Tucson are working as diligently and devotedly as their elders to

make Tucson a better community. As Esther Tang said, “I am a Chinese but I am also a Tucsonian. My dad and mother used to say that the community is just an extension of your home. And you are going to have to live with whatever becomes your community. That’s very true.”²⁴

Notes

1. In his essay, “Sojourners and Settlers: The Chinese Experience in Arizona,” Lawrence M. Fong recorded that this event happened in the late 1870s. However, Don Chun Wo’s recollection in the *Arizona Daily Star*, Eleventh Annual Rodeo edition, February 22, 1935, may be more accurate.

2. *Arizona Daily Star*, Eleventh Annual Rodeo edition, February 22, 1935, p. 4.

3. According to John L. Schweitzer’s master’s thesis, “The Social Unity of Tucson’s Chinese Community” (p. 41), written in 1952, this figure includes Japanese.

4. *Arizona Daily Star*, Eleventh Annual Rodeo edition, February 22, 1935, p. 5.

5. 1990 U.S. census, Tucson, Arizona, p. 65.

6. Lawrence Fong uses the second half of the same quotation in his essay, “Sojourners and Settlers: The Chinese Experience in Arizona,” but his source is from the *Daily Arizona Miner*, November 27, 1869.

7. Source: www.dizzy.library.arizona.edu/images/chamer/railroad.html.

8. Source: www.dizzy.library.arizona.edu/images/chamer/farmb.html.

9. Source: www.dizzy.library.arizona.edu/images/chamer/wah-don.html.

10. *Arizona Daily Star*, October 1, 1998, p. 9.

11. *Ibid.*, February 22, 1935, p. 4.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

14. Quoted by Lawrence Fong in his “Sojourners and Settlers,” p. 25.

15. *Arizona Daily Star*, February 22, 1935, p. 5.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

17. Quoted by Lawrence Fong in his “Sojourners and Settlers,” p. 9.

18. *Arizona Daily Star*, February 22, 1935, p. 5.

19. John Rhodes, *Congressional Record*, Appendix A5698, July 19, 1956.

20. Esther Tang, *Arizona Daily Star*, p. 43, date unavailable.

21. Source: www.dizzy.library.arizona.edu/images/chamer/tang-e.html.

22. Source: www.dizzy.library.arizona.edu/images/chamer/soleng-t.html.

23. Interview with Peter Chan, president of the Tucson Chinese Association, November 9, 1999.

24. *Arizona Daily Star*, October 1, 1998, p. 9.

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