

# Visibly *Ab Mou*<sup>1</sup>: Community Organizing as Minority Solidarity in the United States

Kalina Yingnan Deng  
Student of Philosophy  
Wellesley College  
email: [kalinayingnan.deng@wellesley.edu](mailto:kalinayingnan.deng@wellesley.edu)

## Abstract

On December 5, 1985, P&L Sportswear Inc., Boston's largest garment factory, without giving advance notice, closed its doors and sent home 349 workers, most of whom were uneducated Chinese females (*ab mou*) from Boston Chinatown. Although the 1984 Mature Industries Act entitled displaced workers to job retraining and English language courses, in the case of the P&L workers, the state neglected to fulfill this promise to Massachusetts' working class. After six months of state inaction, the *ab mou* traded their sewing machines for picket signs and transformed into powerful labor activists. This paper explores how the *ab mou* defied cultural traditions and social conventions to organize themselves as a political force. Furthermore, this paper narrates how the 1986 Boston Chinatown garment workers, by projecting their own voice and by making themselves visible to the greater Boston community and the state, cultivated a space for Asian America in the United States.

## Author's Note

Kalina Yingnan Deng is a junior at Wellesley College, where she is studying philosophy with emphases in political and social thought as well as in urban studies. Currently, she serves as an Asian-American Women's Political Initiative 2013 Fellow in the Massachusetts State House and as a Just Business? Fellow for the Babson-Olin-Wellesley consortium, in which she works to develop best practices for corporate social responsibility. And true to her Mississippi roots, in her free time, Kalina Yingnan loves listening to blues guitar legends and baking her own bread.

## 1. Introduction

In the mid-1900s, after the United States re-opened its doors to Asian immigrants and to Asian females for the first time after over a century of isolationist policies, "Hong Kong brides" flooded into Chinatowns on the East and West coasts and filled the work benches of garment factories (Cynthia Yee, personal interview, November 9, 2012).<sup>2</sup> However, overseas outsourcing in the 1970s resulted in the widespread shutting down of domestic garment industries. On December 5, 1985, P&L Sportswear Inc., Boston's largest garment factory, without giving advance notice, closed its doors and sent home 349 workers (Howe, 1986, p. 37). Of the 349 workers, 200 were Chinese women, 70 percent of all displaced workers had a below high school education, 73 percent of all were older than 45 years of age, and 38 percent were the primary wage earners of their

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<sup>1</sup> Chinese (Toisanese) word for uneducated, largely middle aged female garment workers

<sup>2</sup> The term "Hong Kong brides" is a Boston Chinatown colloquial phrase that describes the wives that young men from Boston Chinatown brought back from their native Southern China after the prohibition against Asian female immigration was lifted (Cynthia Yee, personal interview, November 9, 2012).

household (Frisby, 1986, p. 22). Although the 1984 Massachusetts Mature Industries Act entitled displaced workers to job retraining and English language courses, in the case of the P&L workers, the state neglected to fulfill this promise to the commonwealth's working class. After six months of state inaction since the P&L closing and after Beverly Rose Sportswear Inc. closed and displaced another 70 garment workers, Boston Chinatown's uneducated, female garment workers or *ab mou* traded their sewing machines for picket signs and transformed into powerful labor activists.

This paper explores how the *ab mou* defied cultural traditions, social conventions, and gender norms to organize themselves as a political force. In order for the displaced garment workers of P&L Sportswear Company and Beverly Rose Sportswear Inc. to effectively make demands of the state, these women had to overcome several obstacles: the American social perception of Asian Americans and of subaltern women, the legacies of Confucian philosophy in Chinatown culture, and the *ab mou*'s own lack of education and English language skills. This paper argues that community organizing, as demonstrated by the *ab mou*, is and should be seen as leadership in action. Furthermore, this paper evaluates how the 1986 Boston Chinatown garment workers cultivated their belonging in the United States by projecting their own voice and by making themselves visible to the greater Boston community and the state.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Situating Boston Chinatown as an Ethnic Ghetto

Beginning in 1875, waves of Chinese male manual laborers migrated from West Coast railroads and gold mines and settled along Oxford Street in Boston, Massachusetts. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the Immigration Act of 1924 ostracized the Chinese as the “ultimate foreigners’ in America” and maintained Boston Chinatown as a “bachelor society”<sup>4</sup> (Sullivan & Hatch, 1970, p.5). But after the enactment of the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act and the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Acts, throngs of women entered Boston Chinatown, and by 1960, the Chinese male to Chinese female ratio rose to 133 males per 100 females from the 1890 ratio of 2,678 males per 100 females (Sullivan & Hatch, 1970, p.7). Due to disparate economic conditions, waves of unskilled Chinese females were “pushed” out from China’s Guangdong province and “pulled” into U.S. garment factories (Lam, 1991, p.18-20). By the 1980s, three out of four women in Boston Chinatown, or roughly 4600 Chinese women, were constrained to garment factory jobs by their lack of English knowledge and other trade skills (Kiang & Ng, 1989, p. 288 and Vennoch, 1981, p.1). Due to the deterioration of domestic garment industries, by the early 1980s, the *ab mou* struggled with meager annual wages between \$3000 and \$4000.

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<sup>4</sup> To clarify, “bachelor society” refers to the nearly all-male composition of Boston Chinatown. However, these men were not bachelors as many of them had “left-behind wives and children” in mainland China (Yee interview).

In her literary ethnography, Yoonme Chang (2010) adeptly characterizes American Chinatowns as ethnic ghettos. For Chang, portrayals of Chinatowns as cultural or ethnic enclaves “obscure and naturalize Asian American experiences of class inequity” and “construct spaces like Chinatown as unique repositories of Asian culture” (p. 26). In other words, the conception of enclave overemphasizes a space’s cultural and racial characteristics and dismisses its socio-economic and political disparities. Whereas the descriptor of enclave masks class issues with culture and race, Chinatowns viewed as ghettos exposes the embedded class inequities within urban cities and within Asian America (Chang, 2010, p. 27). In fact, Boston Chinatown, situated in a city composed almost entirely of ethnically concentrated neighborhoods, *must* be understood as a ghetto to unveil the economic and political disenfranchisement of its denizens.

Geographically, the North End, Boston’s wealthiest neighborhood, borders Chinatown, Boston’s poorest neighborhood. Political power in Boston has long been wielded by English Brahmin and then by Irish political machines (Deng, 2012, p. 33). In the heated controversy over racially imbalanced Boston public schools a decade before the P&L garment workers’ movement, Chinatown voices and faces were discounted in the public conversation and in the media. In short, Boston Chinatown denizens were invisible to the greater community and to the state. After reframing Boston Chinatown as an ethnic ghetto, this paper moves to articulate the challenges the *ab mou* faced and thereby, the strategies they used to overcome these obstacles.

### 3. Voices of the Subaltern: Combating Racial and Gender Hegemonies

*“The racist exploitation of one ethnic group by another is based on a twin foundation of psychosocial and economic factors.... The ruling race calls, ‘Boy!’ The exploited race answers, ‘Yessir!’ The one stands forbiddingly upright. The other obsequiously bows his head. These forms of etiquette presume an ingrained sense of self-worth or lack of worth.”*

—Jack Chen, *The Chinese in America* as quoted in Ng, 1991, p.10.

In *Who Are We?*, political scientist Samuel Huntington (2004) attributes the effortless assimilation and economic success of Asian Americans to their partaking in the same Creed of Protestant work ethic and thrift established by the first U.S. settlers (p. 298 & 305). However, Huntington’s oversimplification of Asian Americans as the “model minority” not only glosses over class inequities within Asian America but also fails to fully assess the complex history of U.S. attitudes towards Asian Americans. In Irish dominated Boston, the Chinese satiated the voracious U.S. appetite for cheap, industrious labor: “By capitalist standards, the Chinese made ideal employees, especially compared with the Irish. They kept to themselves, worked for a pittance, and showed little interest in striking. ‘John was, in spite of his vices, a better addition to society than Paddy’” (Powers, 1994, p. 8). As journalist Peter Shrag (2010) noted, U.S. immigration policy and immigration attitudes, driven by economic incentives and labor demands, are like two “strands of

welcome and rejection wound tightly together” like a “double helix” (p.194). And as evidenced in the above excerpt from historian Jack Chen, the Chinese have been acculturated to view themselves as marginal in society and invisible to the state, affirming that “in the Rainbow Coalition, yellow is the faintest hue. ‘You need a critical mass to be visible,’” (Powers, 1994, p. 8). Because Chinatown denizens are in many ways culturally, socially, and politically segregated from the greater Boston community and also bear the titular yoke of the “model minority,” they needed to organize themselves as a visible, “critical mass” in order to prove that they indeed are minorities who face institutional prejudices.

Furthermore, sex, especially construed in terms of race and ethnicity, further pushed the displaced workers out of the state’s peripheral vision. Garment work “required patience, good eyesight, and manual dexterity... the particular virtues of women” (Lam, 1991, p. 48). For U.S. garment factory owners, Chinese women’s “nimble fingers,” “docility,” and “ability to sit patiently” best qualified them to work in sweatshop factories (Aguilar, 1997, p. 162). Although the *ab mou* were, in part, oppressed due to their sex, this paper emphasizes that their demands and concerns did not at all wax feminist. In *Red Pedagogy*, Sandy Grande (2004) critiques mainstream (read: whitestream) feminism as an extension of the colonialist project (p.126-27). Whereas privileged white women have propelled mainstream feminism and advocated for women’s rights, subaltern women, inclusive of the *ab mou*, are concerned with everyday “bread and butter” issues, which are complicated by race and class as well as gender.<sup>5</sup> For subaltern women, the patronizing force is not their men but the white state.<sup>6</sup> Echoing Grande’s contention on how white women have contributed to the subjugation of subaltern women, sociologist Evelyn Nakano Glenn affirms, “white women have always benefitted from the exploitation of Asian women who work as domestics and produce cheap clothes in the garment district” (Kirchheimer, 1980, p. C6). Thus, on one hand, it is important to expand feminist thinking to look beyond the shared female experiences of domesticity and motherhood and away from the gaze of the status quo white bourgeois female (Glenn, 2000, p. 457-58). But on the other hand, “identity or difference feminism... has the paradoxical effect of ostensibly recognizing the ‘other’ at the same time that it conceals the material conditions underpinning that marginality” (Aguilar, 1997, p. 154). Because the P&L workers were working class immigrant Chinese females, their complex minority identity served an enigmatic dual role in their discrimination by the state and their demand for and procurement of entitled services from the state.

Political theorist Wendy Brown asserts that due to various groups’ refusal to be absorbed, the historical process of the democratic political project has generated politicization of identities based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Identity politics is nursed by a host of anti-

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<sup>5</sup> I borrow the term “bread and butter” to describe the subaltern women’s issues from “Boston’s Third World Women: bread and butter issues are top priorities, not mainstream feminism” (Kirchheimer, 1980, p. C6).

<sup>6</sup> I underscore the importance of class inequities here. Whereas more mainstream Asian American women’s groups relied on the established middle and upper class status of its members to further nationalist agendas for Taiwan (Yung, 2000, p. 262-63), Asian American women living in ethnic ghettos experienced class prejudice that essentially prevented their involvement in quid pro quo mainstream feminism.

discrimination policies and services that reinforce the “wounded attachment” victims have to the state, where the victims are only recognizable to the state based on their politicized identities (Brown, 1995, p. 27-29). Brown and Grande agree that the prevailing mode of multiculturalism is disempowering to those who have been historically marginalized by colonialist, capitalist, and “democratic” agendas (Grande, 2004, p. 19, 33, & 48; Brown, 1995, p. 68-69). As this argument applies to the P&L workers, the *ab mou* had to make themselves visible to the state by organizing themselves as “critical mass” and by holding the state to its word. In this way, this case study shows that identity politics is a double-sided sword. It is identity politics that marginalized these garment workers on the basis of their race, ethnicity, class, and sex. However, this paper will argue that it is also identity politics that allowed these women to use their minority status to make demands for job training and English classes from the state.

#### 4. For Families that Shun Them: Chinese Cultural Constraints

*“The driving force behind Chinese immigrant women’s entry into the public sphere was the well-being of their family, community, and nation”* (Yung, 2000, p. 257)

The Chinese Progressive Association’s *Through Strength and Struggle* documentary depicted how difficult it was for the *ab mou* to overcome Chinese cultural barriers. First, the oppressive nature of their native government imbued that the Chinese refrain from civic and political engagement; only troublemakers dared to protest against the state. To dispel their peers’ fear of legal consequences, the few *ab mou* who spearheaded the movement posted fliers at restaurants and other public establishments to curry public endorsement and to show that the rally was legal (“Through Strength and Struggle”). Second, there was opposition from within the Chinatown community. Adhering to the structural framework of conventional Chinese households, mothers-in-law and husbands of the *ab mou* prohibited their respective daughters-in-law and wives from participating in the rally and support meetings. The traditional Chinese attitude of “love for boys” and “hate for girls” and culturally demanded female passivity translated well into American Chinatowns (Louie, 2001, p. 22). Confucian philosophy upholds a complex patriarchal and generational kinship hierarchy. Women as mothers and wives are subordinate to their husbands and mothers-in-law and hold a position lower than their own children (Lor-Tseng, 1997, p. 76-77, & 82). Due to their subservient position, most *ab mou* required their husbands’ approval to participate in the labor movement. Many women feared their husbands’ staunch and possibly brutal opposition to their participation in the labor movement. As one organizer attested:

When we decided to have a rally, we were no longer a small group. We went into the streets to pass out fliers. The people who didn’t want to go, when they saw us, they ran away and hid from us... They say, “I can’t go. My husband won’t let me. If I go, when I come back, he’ll break my legs. If I go, he’ll kick me out of the house.” (Hing Seto, “Through Strength and Struggle”)

Even if they did not react violently, many husbands opined that their wives were “silly,” uneducated women who did not understand what they were doing (Tan & Tse, 1987). Moreover, many mothers-in-law of the *ab mou* perpetuated dissension of the workers’ movement. As another organizer recalled, her mother-in-law virulently gossiped with other community members saying, “She’s always going to meetings, God knows what about” (Tan & Tse, 1987). In this way, the mothers-in-law reinforced the status quo and echoed stereotypical views about what is appropriate for the garment workers, “You sew so quickly...it’s not your business [to demand rights from the state]” (Tan & Tse, 1987). Such sentiments thickened the atmospheric pressure against the *ab mou*’s collectivizing and demanding their rights from the state. To turn the negative cultural and community discourse on its head, the garment workers who spearheaded the movement appealed to their peers’ duty to serve their families and the Chinatown community.

The economic and physical wellbeing of Chinatown families depended on the *ab mou*’s secure positions as garment workers and union members. As Regina Lee, then spokesperson for the Chinatown Housing and Land Development Task Force, averred, “The future of the garment industry is also the future of the Chinese community in Chinatown” (Vennoch, 1981, p. 1). Unfortunately for Chinatown denizens, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) precipitously deteriorated with the degeneration of domestic garment industries. Union membership fees had been steadily increasing whereas the services and benefits that membership entailed have been on the decline. When their union health insurance expired on June 1st, the *ab mou* and their families were bereft of healthcare (Kiang & Ng, 1989, p. 289).<sup>7</sup> In this way, the displacement of the garment workers had detrimental implications for the Chinatown community and the individual families that constitute the ethnic ghetto. Stressing that the loss of health insurance would affect the whole family’s wellbeing, the primary organizers went door-to-door to persuade the *ab mou*’s husbands to permit their wives to protest against the state (“Through Strength and Struggle”). Confronted with such a strong argument, the husbands conceded to their wives.

## 5. Marriage of East and West: Engaging the Younger Asian American Generation

*“We just know how to sew. We did not know the law”* – Mei Ling

*“I can’t speak English”* – Mei Chan, “Through Strength and Struggle”

Due to their lack of English skills and of understanding of the law and their rights, the garments workers sought assistance from Boston’s Chinese Progressive Association. Founded in 1977, the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) was instrumental in securing victories for

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<sup>7</sup> Katie Quan, PhD of UC Berkeley makes an excellent point that the labor union was partially at fault for the *ab mou*’s predicament. Although I wholeheartedly agree with this point, for the purposes of this paper and given the specific situation of the Boston garment workers, I choose not to explore this issue further.

Chinatown residents in their battles with the state, such as justice for the 1985 police brutality victim Long Guang Huang (“Through Strength and Struggle”). Conscious of the garment workers’ minority and immigrant statuses in the United States and understanding of Chinese cultural suppression of political action, CPA leaders were important assets to the *ab mou*. However, having overcome their belief that they were powerless and ignorant, the *ab mou* remained in charge and did not let anyone else, including the CPA, play the ventriloquist to their wooden puppet (Ng, 1991, p. 13). But to gain traction in their campaign against the state, the *ab mou* needed more woman and man power.

Thus, the Chinese Progressive Association reached out to college students in the greater Boston proper, leveraging the city’s politically-minded college communities. On April 11, 1986, over fifty Asian American undergraduate students from Boston area schools, including Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Brandeis University, Tufts University, Boston University, Northeastern University, and the University of Massachusetts at Boston along with community members and activists formed the Garment Workers Support Committee (Kiang & Ng, 1989, p. 288). The students provided translation services, engaged in outreach, media, and publicity, researched into legislation and industry comparators, and secured endorsements from various community leaders including Mel King<sup>8</sup> and Dominic Bozotto<sup>9</sup> (Tse, 1987; Feng & Yuen, 1987). Despite the students and the CPA’s having more advanced education and more experience in political activism, the support committee’s role was strictly to support the *ab mou*. As CPA leader Suzanne Lee affirmed, “[I]t’s the worker’s decisions because it’s their lives that we’re talking about. So, at the outset, [we made] very clear who the supporters were and what the main decision-making body would be” (Ng, 1991, p. 40).

Whereas support committee member Man Chak Ng in his 1991 thesis stressed the crucial role of the CPA and the support committee in the success of the P&L struggle, this paper underscores the garment workers as the thrust of the movement, as they orchestrated the complex symphony of volunteers, community members, and political leaders (p. 44). It was the *ab mou* who initiated the movement and enlisted the assistance of the CPA, which created the support committee to buttress the *ab mou*’s specific needs. Whereas the CPA’s and support committee’s community education generated broad support across the greater Boston proper, it was the main organizers’ realization and comprehension of the worries that most *ab mou* had about being perceived as troublemakers that guided the strategies the organizers employed. In short, the movement was led by the *ab mou*’s collectivizing and organizing of themselves and their community.

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<sup>8</sup> Mel King, currently of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is a prominent social activist and community organizer in Boston (CPA documentary).

<sup>9</sup> Dominic Bozotto was the then-president of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union Local 26 (Feng and Yuen 1987).

## 6. Showtime: Holding the State to its Word

*“Fight for our rights, fight for our survival! Equality for Asian workers! Rally for P&L Workers! Justice for all workers! May 21st at 4 pm. State House”*

(Flyer, courtesy of Northeastern University CPA archives)

On the day of the rally, over two hundred displaced workers, student supporters, community members, and local leaders gathered in front of the Massachusetts State House to demand immediate funds for retraining programs, extension of health insurance benefits, and the *ab mou*'s autonomous decision-making power over the design and implementation of retraining programs (“Through Strength and Struggle”). At first, many *ab mou* hid their faces behind their signs. To engage their still-reluctant peers, the movement leaders emphasized that each garment worker's involvement matters to *every marginalized individual*: “If you do not care about yourself and abuse yourself, always staying at home, even if the sky falls down, you wouldn't know. So we need to come out to fight. If we don't come out to fight, we won't get anything [for anyone]” (Tan & Tse, 1987). Reminded of the importance of the rally and the greater implications of their struggle against the state, the *ab mou* peered out from behind their signs and proudly demanded their entitled rights under the 1984 Mature Industries Act (Tan & Tse, 1987).

In hopes of priming his 1988 presidential bid, Governor Michael Dukakis advertised that the commonwealth was at the height of its “Massachusetts Miracle:” the unemployment rate was at its lowest in decades and “Employment and Training” promised to be the economic upturn of the century (Ng 1991:24). Wanting to curry the favor (and votes) of the working class, Dukakis and newly elected Boston Mayor Raymond Flynn championed the 1984 Mature Industries Act. According to Dukakis, “never again in Massachusetts will 100 or 200 men and women lose their livelihoods with no warning, no health insurance for their families and no chance to plan what comes next” (Simon, 1984, p. 20). Under the new legislation, companies joined a “social compact,” by which they were required to give their workers 90 days advance notice of plant shutdown and extended healthcare benefits, and the state provided supplemental unemployment benefits, job retraining services, and, if needed, English language classes (Schippiani, 1986, p. 80-81). Under the Mature Industries Act, the Massachusetts Industrial Services Program (ISP), the Massachusetts Division of Employment Security (DES), and the Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services (JCS) were responsible for the allocation of funds, identification of employment opportunities, and establishment of job retraining programs (Ng, 1991, p. 24).

Despite all of Dukakis's hyped up promises to the commonwealth's working class, the state blatantly discriminated against the P&L workers. To substantiate a *prima facie* case of discrimination, a complainant needs a comparator who was treated better by the alleged discriminator in a similar situation. For the *ab mou*, the comparator was Colonial Provisions Company, which closed down three months after P&L and displaced 150 white male meatpackers. Within three days of the company's closing, the state established an emergency assistance center for

the meatpackers and another two weeks later, allotted \$350,000 for retraining programs for the displaced Colonial Provisions workers (Kiang & Ng 1989, p. 287). To quote its handbook, the DES was responsible for “bringing together local organizations with the workers, plant and union officials to assess the impact of layoffs and, if appropriate, design site-specific Emergency Assistance projects” (Ng, 1991, p. 25). Despite the trend in garment industry shutdowns and the media’s widespread coverage of factory shutdowns across Boston, the state speciously claimed that it was not aware of the P&L closing until more than four months after the fact (“Quick Help for Displaced Workers” 1986, p.10). Even so, the state did not establish an emergency assistance center for the *ab mou* until after they had demonstrated at the State House, over six months after P&L closed.

And still, the state would not release the \$350,000 entitled to the *ab mou* nor loosen its paternal grip on the garment workers, claiming that it knew what was best for them. The state rejected the workers’ demands and instead, drafted its own for the *ab mou* (“Through Strength and Struggle”). In its refusal to grant the workers their agency in developing their own retraining and language programs, the state negated the commitments it spelled out in its own literature:

Another major emphasis of dislocated workers programs is to involve the workers themselves in designing and helping to operate programs. Our experience has shown that programs are more successful at reaching individuals who most need services when members of the laid-off workforce are involved in outreach, assessment and program start-up activities. Where language barriers are significant problem, bilingual individuals from the workforce can be critical to aiding their former co-workers to enter training and job-search programs. (MA Division of Employment Security Report as quoted in Ng, 1991, p. 25)

Despite the state’s insistence on its own retraining programs, the *ab mou*, with the help of the support committee, pushed back a counterproposal (“Through Strength and Struggle”). At this point, due to the DES’s failure, the ISP charged JCS of Boston to take over as lead administrative agency for the P&L case (Ng, 1991, p. 26). To circumvent direct discussion with the garment workers, the city mandated that only support committee members could attend the July 1986 negotiation meeting over the proposals. By this time, the *ab mou* had become indignant with the city and state; as one worker retorted, “How could you call a meeting without us to discuss issues affecting us? Nobody should speak for us” (Feng & Yuen, 1987). Ignoring the state’s sanctions, fifty workers and supporters filed into the meeting and the *ab mou* lined up at the podium to demand their rights.

After months of negotiation and renegotiation, the workers and the state came to an agreement on August 27, 1986 on retraining and language programs that were most suitable for the *ab mou* (Ng, 1991, p. 32). Allocating \$350,000 to the P&L case, the state agreed to provide job related ESL classes with bilingual skills retraining, maintain worker decision power on types of retraining, establish a monitoring committee to evaluate programs, and guarantee job placement for

all workers (“Through Strength and Struggle”). Roxbury Community College (RCC) and other local institutions provided approved specialized language programs for the garment workers, and RCC staff met regularly with ISP and JCS as well as with the garment workers, the support committee, and the CPA to consistently tailor the *ab mou*’s programs to their desires and needs (“Through Strength and Struggle”).

Eighteen months after the closing of P & L, around 90% of the displaced workers have been retrained and 100% of the retrained workers were working in stable industries such as job services workers and daycare services. According to activist Lydia Lowe (1992), the success of the P&L struggle was due to its strong organization and incorporation of as many *ab mou* as possible in the decision-making process (p. 45). Furthermore, the movement cemented the foundation for a permanent Workers Center branch at the CPA (“Through Strength and Struggle”). In its essence, the P&L movement is a paragon of effective community organizing and leadership in action. Although the garment workers solicited help from the CPA, community members, and college students, it was ultimately the *ab mou*’s voice that blared through the loudspeakers at the rally and resonated through the microphones at the deliberation meetings with the city and state.

## 7. Tying It All Together with a Red Cord: “Ride a Cow While Finding a Horse”

There is an old Chinese saying: “Ride a cow while finding a horse.” This maxim, at its core, means that while you are looking for a horse, it is good for you to be riding a cow. Why? Because it is much better to be riding something, as slow as it may be, instead of walking to your destination. For the displaced garment workers, the P&L struggle entailed finding a cow, bridling it, and hopping on its back for an arduous ride, all the while seeking the horse that would carry them to achieving a sense of visibility and belonging in their community and in the U.S. “Rainbow Coalition.” By proving their strength in the P&L struggle, the *ab mou* raised the status of Chinese women in Boston Chinatown and reinforced their integral role in holding the community together. Furthermore, the *ab mou* made their politicized identities as racial minorities, subaltern women, and disenfranchised working class visible to the state and demanded the state to recognize their marginality. Whereas pluralist multiculturalism in the United States distinguishes minority groups as separate and distinct entities, the P&L struggle demonstrated that belonging in a multicultural democracy is found when minorities make themselves visible and realize their common institutionalized oppression as disenfranchised peoples. The labor movement also epitomized the tremendous gains that the *ab mou* achieved for their community, class, sex, and race through their leadership in community organizing. As best summarized by one community leader, “this fight affects us all... you are fighting together towards common goals – what you gain through that is so much more than you can give as an individual” (Tse, 1987).

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