PERCEIVING THE SPIRIT OF MANHATTAN’S CHINATOWN: 
A STUDY OF THE EVOLUTION AND PRESERVATION OF THE SIGNAGE 
DESIGNED FOR HISTORIC CHINESE ASSOCIATION BUILDINGS

Tianchi Yang

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree 
Master of Science in Historic Preservation

Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation 
Columbia University

May 2014
Table of Contents

Abstract......................................................................................................................................................... i
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................................................... ii
Notes............................................................................................................................................................... iii

Chapters
1. Introduction............................................................................................................................................... 1
2. Background: Origins of Signage and Historic Associations .............................................................. 6
   2.1 Signage in Traditional Chinese Architecture..................................................................................... 6
   2.2 Background of the Historic Associations .......................................................................................... 14
3. Historic Associations and The Evolution of Their Signage in Manhattan’s Chinatown .............. 28
   3.1 Historic Associations in Manhattan’s Chinatown............................................................................. 28
   3.2 Evolution of Signage for Historic Associations ............................................................................. 38
      3.2.1 Exterior Signs................................................................................................................................. 39
      3.2.2 Interior Signs................................................................................................................................. 52
4. Case Studies........................................................................................................................................... 55
   4.1 Lin Sing Association........................................................................................................................... 55
   4.2 On Leong Chinese Merchants Association....................................................................................... 61
   4.3 Chinese Consolidation Benevolent Association............................................................................ 68
   4.4 Lee’s Family Association .................................................................................................................... 75
5. Conclusion: Future of The Signage for Historic Associations......................................................... 81

Figures......................................................................................................................................................... 93
Bibliography.................................................................................................................................................. 157
Appendix A.................................................................................................................................................. 165
Appendix B.................................................................................................................................................. 170
Appendix C.................................................................................................................................................. 172
Appendix D.................................................................................................................................................. 195
**Abstract**

It is a common experience to be caught by the overwhelming signs when walking through the streets of Manhattan’s Chinatown. However, lying among the normal, modern commercial signage are some traditional signs, most of which are for historic family, district and merchant associations. Traditional signage plays an important role in Chinese architecture to identify a building or a place, and communicate the spirit of the place through calligraphy. In the early years of Chinese arrival to the East Coast of the United States, these kinds of association were founded for the purpose of allowing members to support each other, and the signage for them came into being as a tradition from China. If an analogy is drawn between the stores and restaurants of Manhattan’s Chinatown and leaves of a tree, then the associations will be the roots of that tree. Some of the surviving signs date back to the turn of the 20th century, and some are newer replacements in traditional or evolutionary forms. Yet hanging on the facades or the interior halls, they are rarely recognized with respect for their values to the association headquarters and Manhattan’s Chinatown.

The intent of this thesis is to uncover and interpret the signage for associations in Manhattan’s Chinatown so as to inspire the appreciation of this signage, which is closely tied up with the spirit of Manhattan’s Chinatown, by both Chinese and people from other cultures. To critically study the histories of evolution and preservation of this signage, including the changing ways of how the signage and buildings are related, this thesis will focus on four case studies: Lin Sing Association, On Leong Chinese Merchants Association, Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and Lee’s Family Association. The thesis then further discusses the significance of the signage for associations to Chinatown, the appropriateness and feasibility to preserve the extant historic signage, and other preservation issues of signage in the analysis and conclusion.
Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the help and generosity of the following individuals and groups, and I would like to thank them for supporting me all the way with my deep gratitude.

Foremost, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my advisor, Professor Andrew S. Dolkart, for his profound interest in this thesis topic, his insight, and for his patience in reading the drafts over and over again and editing word by word. Without his encouragement and advice, this thesis would not have reached the final stage.

Secondly, I would like to thank my readers, Professor Christopher P. Neville and Professor Yao Ding, who suggested various directions in the initial stage to further this thesis, and helped to improve the final product with insightful comments.

I would also like to thank those members of various historic associations in Manhattan’s Chinatown, who responded to my interviews with kindness, generously shared information about their associations and signs, and provided valuable special issues published by their associations. I am extremely grateful for the invaluable assistance provided by Eric Y. Ng, President of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, and Eddie Chiu, General Counsel of the Lin Sing Association, in collecting historic photos.

I would also like to thank Kevin Chu, Collections Assistant of the Museum of Chinese in America, for assisting me in researching in the archives.

Special thanks to my friend, Sirui Zhang, whose rich knowledge in Chinese architecture provided the initial source of inspiration to this thesis topic.

Last but not least, I wish to thank my parents, who encouraged me through all the ups and downs, for their support throughout my education.
Notes

1. The author adopts Hanyu Pinyin to transliterate special Chinese terms in this thesis. Hanyu Pinyin is the official phonetic system for transcribing the Mandarin pronunciations of Chinese characters into the Latin alphabet. The International Organization for Standardization adopted Pinyin as the international standard in 1982. However, there are many commonly known terms that have been transliterated with the Chinese Postal Map Romanization system, Wade-Giles system and some other systems, such as Canton, Peking and Taipei. Thus, while using Pinyin to transcribe Chinese terms in general, the author also uses or annotates with the commonly used terms and Chinese characters to help with comprehension. Regarding the associations’ names, the author adopts the associations’ own transcriptions that are based on their dialects, while Pinyin and Chinese characters are used to annotate if necessary.

2. Canton refers to Guangzhou, which is the provincial capital of Guangdong Province. Cantonese means a native or inhabitant of Guangzhou, a style of cooking originates in Guangzhou, or the dialect of Chinese spoken in Guangzhou and Hong Kong. However, nowadays, Cantonese is also generally used to refer to people from Guangdong Province.
Chapter 1:
Introduction

Manhattan’s Chinatown has always been recognized as one of the most venerable overseas Chinese settlements and the most influential Chinatown on the East Coast of the United States. Unlike other major Chinatowns of North America, such as those in San Francisco and Vancouver, the architecture of Manhattan’s Chinatown never adopted oriental features on a large scale. When Chinese immigrants began arriving in New York in significant numbers in the late 1870s, they settled in a neighborhood with pre-existing tenement buildings that had been built for German and Irish immigrants.¹ Not only did this built environment inhibit the construction of buildings with Chinese style, but also the linguistic, cultural, legal and conceptual hurdles faced by Chinese immigrants discouraged investment in architecture in the newly developing Chinatown. Manhattan’s Chinatown was architecturally claimed as a Chinese enclave merely by an occasional add-on system of cosmetic architectural treatments in Chinese style.² Notable cosmetic architectural additions to the existing buildings include flared overhanging eaves, tiled roofs, pagoda-like or tower-like structures atop buildings, red round columns, latticework, and symbolic dragon figures and cloud patterns. Visitors to Chinatown easily recognized these details as Chinese. However, one other element was often added to buildings, which was not

readily perceived by non-Chinese visitors and, thereafter, has been ignored. This is the signage, in Chinese characters, placed on building facades.

The Chinese signage in contemporary Chinatown is generally overwhelming to non-Chinese people who come to this “exotic” area for the first time. The massive, densely placed electric commercial signs that started to spring up in the nineteen-twenties and thirties actually impede the notice of some more valuable signs. A number of important traditional Chinese-style wooden signs are preserved in Manhattan’s Chinatown, especially at historic family, district and merchant association headquarters. Some of the historic signs are visible on the exterior of these buildings, but others are infrequently seen because they are preserved in the interior halls. On the other hand, these associations also have many post-WWII signs in evolved forms and of various materials, some of which are even designed contextually with the headquarters buildings. Although these newer signs have replaced many of the traditional ones, they continue to respond to the architectural developments in Chinatown, while absorbing features of signage from the various places that more recent immigrants come from, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China.

Historic family, district and merchant associations, founded in various periods from the 1850s to 1940s, have played a significant role in Manhattan’s Chinatown for the working-class Chinese, and defining the architectural features for this specific ethnic enclave. Signage initially created a traditional Chinese architectural element that helped to identify the locations of the

---

associations. It is a vital architectural feature of the buildings, applied by members of the Chinese associations to express the sense of Chinese architecture, the associations’ predominance in Chinatown, and the unity of each group. And from the spiritual perspective, the signs, as symbols of the historic associations, have inspired generations of Chinese immigrants.

Because few people have noticed this signage for the historic Chinese associations, it is never studied as an architectural feature or seriously retained with any preservation efforts. Many historic signs, as well as many historical documents, have been lost due to the frequent relocation of these associations. However, Manhattan’s Chinatown still presents a range of signs from different periods. Thus, the signage is a reflection and record of development in Chinatown. But, it is also this continuity of the signage that makes the values of the individual signs vary, and addresses more problems when preservation efforts are to be made.

This thesis studies the signage for thirty-nine historic family, district and merchant association buildings in Manhattan’s Chinatown, as well as the signage for the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, which has always been the unofficial government of Chinatown and a leader among the associations. This signage, as a whole, is a vital part to the development of Manhattan’s Chinatown. But the importance of individual signs still varies in consideration of historical and aesthetic values. Thus, through an overall investigation of the extant signs and the lost ones, this thesis intends to identify this signage and explore its relation to Chinatown’s architecture. The thesis will explore the significance of this signage as a whole, in terms of historic, aesthetic and social value. The importance of individual signs, as well as
their interaction with the association buildings, will be further discussed through four case studies: the Lin Sing Association, the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, and the Lee’s Family Association. These case studies are not capable of covering all the valuable signs, but these associations and their signage are the representatives of different types of association and signage.

It is important to examine the significance of the signage for historic associations in Manhattan’s Chinatown from the historic preservation perspective for four main reasons. Firstly, Manhattan’s Chinatown developed into a venerable overseas Chinese settlement in a unique trajectory because of its special immigration history and the special architectural environment of New York. Secondly, these historic associations have supported the development of Chinatown, and their signage is a symbol of the association and an element utilized to express the presence of Chinese groups through Chinese architectural feature. Thirdly, the signage itself, integrating Chinese characters, literature and calligraphy, is a record of the history that has occurred here. Lastly, this signage is one of the few Chinese architectural elements in Manhattan’s Chinatown, and the only one that is still evident as a group. From another point of view, examining the significance of this signage also makes a contribution to the preservation of Manhattan’s Chinatown in terms of what to preserve, in consideration of the fact that this Chinatown is both growing and fading.

Manhattan’s Chinatown is not the only Chinatown that has signage on historic association buildings, thus this thesis makes a good starting point for commencing with this kind
of study. This thesis hopes to inspire and set the basis for future studies on signage on historic association buildings in various Chinatowns, and for the appreciation and preservation of this significant aspect of the buildings in North American Chinatowns.
Chapter 2:
Background: Origins of Signage and Historic Associations

2.1 Signage in Traditional Chinese Architecture

The origin of the signage on historic Chinese association buildings in Manhattan’s Chinatown is traditional Chinese signage. Traditional Chinese signage is commonly known as *bian’ě* (bian: 匾 or 扁; e: 额) or *paibian* (pai: 牌; bian: 匾) in the Chinese language. According to *Shuowen Jiezi*, a 2nd-century Chinese dictionary, *Bian* (扁 as the original character) is composed of the door (户) and the bamboo-strips(册), and means the writing inscribed on or over the door. ⁴ *E* (额) is now generally considered the horizontal or vertical tablet hanging over the door. ⁵ And *pai* simply refers to a tablet. These single characters comprise the terms: *bian’ě*, *paibian* and *pai’e*, which refer to the inscribed horizontal or vertical tablet that is usually over the door, taking the space between the door and eave, or hanging in the center of a hall on the rear wall. At the same time, these single characters are also used in the same way as these terms to represent

---

⁴ *Shuowen Jiezi* is an early second-century Chinese dictionary compiled by Xu Shen in the Eastern Han Dynasty. It is a comprehensive Chinese character dictionary that analyzes the structure of the characters and gives the rationale behind them. But according to Japanese scholars, *bian* (扁) itself is already interpreted as the inscribed wooden tablet hanging over the door, since the 册 in 扁 is recognized as an enlarged bamboo strip (According to: Hideki Yamashita et al., “Design and Structure of the Framed Nameboard – Consideration on reconstructing the Framed Nameboard of the Imperial Audience Hall, Nara Palace,” *Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties Summary* (2008): 3.

⁵ Zhao Jinjie, “The Culture of Bian’ě in Qing Dynasty: A Case Study of Bian’ě in Jiangxi Province and Surrounding Areas” (Master’s Thesis, Fudan University, 2009), 3. The original meaning of *e* is forehead. Thus, the author also thinks that *e* may simply refer to the space above the door in the word *bian’ě*. However, since *bian’ě* basically stands for the inscribed tablet over the door, *e* was later used to refer to the tablet over the door as a single-character representative of *bian’ě*. 
traditional Chinese signage. The relation between traditional Chinese signage and architecture, especially the door, becomes obvious through comprehending the definition of these characters and terms. Traditional Chinese signage emerged as an adjunct to Chinese architecture. In other words, it came into being as an architectural element that utilized calligraphy for the identification of architecture.

The history of Chinese signage probably dates back to 201BC when the Prime Minister of the Western Han Dynasty, Xiao He, inscribed “Canglong” (green dragon) and “Baihu” (white tiger) on two gates.\(^6\) *Extensive Records of the Taiping Era* edited by Li Fang, describes how Xiao created an inscription over the door of the Front Hall of the Weiyang Palace.\(^7\) These two records indicate that early Chinese signage might simply have been an inscription over the doorway or gateway, while the independent tablet that bore the inscription might be a later development. The primary function of traditional Chinese signage, identifying an architectural complex, a building or a place, and the literary creation applied in the naming, are suggested in these records as well. In Chinese astrology, “Canglong” and “Baihu” represent the east and the west respectively because of their corresponding constellations. At the same time, dragon and tiger are the symbols of the power of the emperor. And with the colors used to describe them,

---

\(^6\) According to *Annotated Shuowen Jiezi* by Duan Yucai of the Qing Dynasty, “The writing of inscriptions was initiated by Xiao He, in the sixth year of Han’gao, inscribed two gates with ‘Canglong’ and ‘Baihu’.”

\(^7\) Li Fang, *Extensive Records of the Taiping Era* (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1986), 1574. *Extensive Records of the Taiping Era* is a collection of stories compiled under the editorship of Li Fang, first published in 978. The source of the story of Xiao He was stated as *Bizhen tu*, an article commenting on calligraphy, by Yang Xin (370-442).
green dragon and white tiger also represent auspicious creatures that can bless human beings. The naming, therefore, implies that people blended various subjects in the naming to express certain meanings.

With its two-thousand-year development, the functions and forms of Chinese signage were extended, integrating the arts of architecture, calligraphy, literature and engraving. In the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911), Chinese signage was highly developed and widespread. Apart from the identification of architecture, its functions had been extended into many aspects that were related to literary expression. In this situation, it became more than just signage. It was treated as artwork that was decorative and valuable due to the increasing meanings that people endowed it with. The signage often appeared in the form of inscribed wooden tablets that could be treated as independent objects to be sent as presents and hung more flexibly. The main body of the inscription was limited to two to six Chinese characters, while a preface and postscript of smaller characters could be applied on both sides of the major characters. The preface and postscript might include the calligrapher’s name, the date of composition, the sender’s name, and the receiver’s name. For example, the sign in Figure 1 is from the fifteenth year of the Jiaqing Period (1810). It contains both preface and postscript. The preface on the right side shows the receiver’s name, and the postscript on the left side indicates the sender, who was the calligrapher as well, and the date of composition. The main text, “He Fen Qi De” (河汾耆德), means that the receiver was a great teacher with a large number of successful students. The sender was a student
of the receiver and the sign was sent to celebrate the receiver’s sixtieth birthday. The receiver was a twenty-third-generation descendant of the original house owner of the twelfth century. This sign is hung in the west bay of the main hall because there is a hierarchy in the placement of the signs. A sign for the original house owner is hung in the central bay in the main hall, while this “He Fen Qi De” sign, as a secondary sign to the hall, could only be placed in a less important bay.

Stores utilized signage to represent themselves and their brand, functioning as a logo. Wooden tablets inscribed with complimentary or praising messages were sent to people on occasions such as the celebration of the opening of a business or a special birthday. The sign in Figure 1 is just such an example. Building owners applied tablets with inspiring messages to the building to express good wishes, certain ambitions, artistic conceptions or sentiments, and sometimes to encourage themselves. Such signs were also educational to future generations to some extent. For example, Figure 2 shows a sign with the characters “Qin Yi” (勤貽), meaning diligence. This sign indicates that the owner employed diligence as a discipline for himself, and as an edification for his descendants. Tablets with commendations were used to honor people’s noble character and achievements. This function was also integrated into the memorial gateway, a type of decorative architecture that evolved from other types of gateways and was peculiar to

---

8 Lin Sheng, Famous Tablets in China and Initial Exploration to the Chinese Tablet Culture (Shenyang: Liaoning People’s Press, 1992), 164.

the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911).\(^\text{10}\) Likewise, the inscribed tablet was a vital element to the memorial gateway.\(^\text{11}\) As shown in Figure 3, a memorial gate in the Temple and Cemetery of Confucius in Qufu is inscribed with “Jin Sheng Yu Zhen” (金聲玉振), commending the greatness of Confucius’s teachings. At the same time, these various functions of the signage were sometimes integrated with each other in a single sign.

Like many other architectural elements, traditional Chinese signage evolved from functional to the decorative. The frames of the tablet could be carved with various decorative patterns. The characters were inscribed with intaglio or positive engraving. Sometimes the calligrapher wrote directly on the tablet with ink. The wooden tablets were usually painted, while the characters might be gilded. Calligraphers, as well as prominent public figures, might write the characters for the name or message. These were then reproduced by sign manufacturers. A calligrapher could contribute to the artistic value of a sign, while a prominent public figure could contribute to the status of the sign; together these confirmed the status of the owner.

Because of the involvement of calligraphy, which is a special type of art in Chinese culture, traditional Chinese signage could be a work of art independent of architecture. However, even created as an independent object, Chinese signage was generally attached to the architecture. On the other hand, the locations of the signs became more flexible. The inscribed stone or brick tablets are usually set in a conservative way, embedded over the doorway or gateway. The


\(^{11}\) The memorial gateway is called *paifang* or *pailou* in Chinese. *Pai*, as mentioned before, refers to the tablet. Thus, it indicates that one major function of the memorial gateway is to bear the inscribed tablet.
inscribed wooden tablets, which are more diverse in form and more popularly applied, can be hung in front of the bracket sets, directly over the doorway, or on the beams, when they are put on the exterior of a building (*Figures 4-6*). In the interior, the wooden tablets can be hung on the wall or on the beam, mostly in the center of the hall, in which case visitors are able to see the inscribed tablet through the door opening while still outside the building (*Figures 7-8*). It is noteworthy that the wooden inscribed tablets are usually hung tilted forward so as to face slightly toward the ground level. This kind of placement makes it easier for visitors to observe the signs at a close distance as they approach the building. Since Chinese signage is usually placed in front of the bracket sets, this tilted placement is also probably due to the form of the bracket sets, which extend outward from the tops of columns to the eave.12

The ancestral halls built during the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911) in Guangzhou (Canton) and the larger Pearl River Delta area probably provided the most direct architectural sources for the historic association buildings in Manhattan’s Chinatown during the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century.13 From the 1870s to the mid-1940s, most of the Chinese immigrants in Manhattan’s Chinatown were not only Cantonese but were primarily from

---

12 These points are summarized by the author after viewing many photos of traditional Chinese signage in the architectural context, as well as books and articles discussing the culture of *bian’e* in China, such as: Lin Sheng, *Famous Tablets in China* (Shenyang: Liaoning People’s Press, 1992); Lin Sheng, “Initial Exploration to the Chinese Tablet Culture,” *Social Science Journal* 6 (1995): 120-126; Li Yanhua, “Elementary Discussion on the Horizontal Inscribed Board Culture,” *Journal of Chongqing Three Gorges University*, v.24 n.108 (2008): 130-134; Zhao Jinjie, “The Culture of Bian’e in Qing Dynasty: A Case Study of Bian’e in Jiangxi Province and Surrounding Areas” (Master’s Thesis, Fudan University, 2009).

13 This speculation is based on the fact that, among civil structures, the ancestral halls were more elaborate than average residential buildings.
eight counties in three neighboring regions, Siyi (四邑) district, Sanyi (三邑) district and Zhongshan County, which were all southwest of Guangzhou.

Generally, the ancestral halls in the Pearl River Delta area comprised a main gate, a memorial gateway, and several halls, chambers and pavilions. The Chinese signs were applied to almost all the individual buildings of the ancestral-hall complex. Wooden tablets were obliquely hung over the doorway, or stone tablets were embedded in the portion over the doorway. The memorial gateways carried the embedded tablets over the central gateways. The signs for main gates provided the name of the ancestral-hall complex. Other signs for halls, chambers and pavilions gave the names of the space, expressed certain spirits of the clan, or offered good wishes through the inscription. These functions were sometimes combined. The memorial gates usually bore inscriptions that expressed the clan’s spirits and honored the good character of the ancestors.\(^\text{14}\) The Chen’s Ancestral Hall in Panyu (Figures 9-12) demonstrates this use of signs. The sign over the main gate is inscribed with the characters “Chen Shi Zong Ci” (陳氏宗祠), which identifies the architectural complex as Chen’s Ancestral Hall. The inscription on the stone memorial gate, “Liu Chuan Guang Fan” (六傳光範), expresses commendation to the Chen’s clan. This ancestral hall enshrines the ancestor of the sixth generation, Chen Daoming. Thus, the inscription indicates that Chen Daoming’s descendants had great achievements so that they should be models for future generations. The sign in the main hall, “Shan Shi Tang” (善世堂), identifies this hall as Shan-shi Hall. “Shan Shi” also expresses the clan’s desire to benefit the

world, which further indicates the wish to always have great descendants. It is the traditional Chinese signs in these ancestral halls that provided the most direct sources for the early Chinese signs on the historic association buildings in Manhattan’s Chinatown.
2.2 Background of the Historic Associations

The historic associations in Manhattan’s Chinatown studied in this thesis are family, district and merchant associations, as well as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), a leader among the associations in Chinatown. These private voluntary associations, founded in various periods from the 1850s to 1940s, have played an important role in supporting and protecting New York’s working-class Chinese immigrants since the formation of the Chinese enclave along Mott, Pell and Doyers streets in the 1870s.

Such social organizations are widespread in other Chinatowns of North America as well. They were established in particular social contexts. In the late 1840s, Chinese first arrived in the United States in significant numbers. The early Chinese immigrants were mostly males who aimed to work in the United States and send money back to their families in China. A large number of them were introduced to work in the United States by their distant relatives or acquaintances who had already been working here for some time, but they rarely had immediate family members in the United States. Usually, only the wealthier men were able to bring their wives to the United States and to have the second generations here.\(^{15}\) The Chinese immigrants thus needed new types of social ties instead of the family tie to link individuals. The new social ties were the fundamentals of the voluntary associations. On the other hand, Chinese immigrants encountered the hostility of the larger American society. When they first arrived in this country, they received little protection from the American authorities. From the 1850s, anti-Chinese

\(^{15}\) Virginia Heyer, “Patterns of Social Organization in New York City’s Chinatown” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1953), 51.
sentiment began to accumulate because the Chinese labor population became conspicuous and white laborers saw the Chinese as an economic threat. In the 1880s, anti-Chinese agitators finally succeeded in obtaining Federal legislation against the immigration of Chinese labor. The enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 drove Chinese immigrants to form organizations which were based on their social ties, for the purpose of governing their communities by themselves and resisting unjust treatment. The family and district associations were formed for mutual aid, self-protection and self-government in areas where the government policies toward the Chinese communities and their residents were primarily discriminatory and the majority of the Chinese residents were faced with challenges in communicating with the larger society because of linguistic and cultural hurdles.\textsuperscript{16} The merchant associations, which used to be referred to as the tongs (堂), were usually formed with “underground” networks so that they could protect the Chinese communities from violence and promote their benefits in secret ways.\textsuperscript{17}

These voluntary associations, however, are not specific to overseas Chinese communities. On the contrary, these kinds of associations were modeled after a similar pattern of social organizations or units in China, but they were dramatically transformed under American conditions.\textsuperscript{18} These associations had their origin in China, especially the Pearl River Delta area where the majority of the early Chinese immigrants came from. When the Chinese immigrants

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}, 33.
\textsuperscript{18} Peter Kwong, \textit{The New Chinatown} (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), 82.
found themselves facing the action or inaction of the government in the United States, which was similar to the oppressive conditions that occurred in their hometowns, they utilized the familiar social structures that they had in China to form powerful social groups so as to achieve self-government and self-protection.

In the United States, the mutual aid organizations were not unique to the Chinese ethnic group. During the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, huge numbers of mutual aid organizations were formed by immigrants along geographic and religious lines. While the family associations and tongs were specific to the Chinese communities, the district associations were similar in type to the hometown associations of many other ethnic groups. In New York, a city with a large and diverse population of immigrants, many mutual aid organizations were formed by immigrants on the basis of their places of origin during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century. The most famous types are the landsmanshaftn organized by Jewish immigrants from the same towns or villages of Eastern Europe, and the Italian social organizations formed on the basis of town or province of birth. The landsmanshaftn provided health and death benefits and loans, and helped in securing employment and housing. The Italian social organizations also provided mutual aid in case of sickness and death, and became important social centers. The more prosperous organizations

20 Ibid., 654.
21 Caroline F. Ware, Greenwich Village, 1920-1930: A Comment on American Civilization in the Post-War Years (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 155.
from Italian towns or provincial societies often had their own clubrooms in storefronts that featured recreational activities as well.\textsuperscript{22} As the immigrant generation vanished, so did most of these hometown associations. In contrast, the Chinese communities, as well as some Latino immigrant groups, which have had a constant stream of new immigrants, still maintain a number of hometown associations.

\textit{Family Associations}

In Chinese culture, people place extensive value on the family (家: \textit{jia} or \textit{chia}) and its extended web of kinship in the patrilineal clan (族: \textit{zu} or \textit{tsu}).\textsuperscript{23} The family and patrilineal clan are two main components of the Chinese social and kinship structure. The concept of family and clan (家族: \textit{jiazu}) influences people’s closeness in a relationship. While the family is the basic and smallest unit of kinship, the \textit{zu} or patrilineal clan, is the extended family that is comprised of people who share the same surname and can trace their lineage to one ancestor who settled in a certain locality. The lineage concept based on the “\textit{zu}” or “\textit{tsu}” contributed to the formation of family associations.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{22} Ware, \textit{Greenwich Village, 1920-1930}, 155&161.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Jia} and \textit{chia} both mean family in Chinese. \textit{Jia} is in the Pinyin system while \textit{chia} in the Wade-Giles system. \textit{Zu} and \textit{tsu} both mean patrilineal clan in Chinese. \textit{Zu} is in the Pinyin system while \textit{tsu} in the Wade-Giles system. In most of the books that are referred to, “\textit{chia}” and “\textit{tsu}” were used. Thus, “\textit{chia}” and “\textit{tsu}” will appear in the quotations.
\textsuperscript{24} Family associations are also referred to as family name associations or surname associations since they are composed of members sharing the same surname.
In *The Common Descent Group in China and Its Functions*, Hsien-chin Hu gives a specific definition of the *zu* or *tsu*:

The *tsu* is a patrilineal clan including all who are descended from the distant ancestor. Generally, these are concentrated in one village or neighborhood, but not infrequently they scatter over a much wider area. Compared to the ‘chia’ it is a much larger but less tightly-knit organization. The member families of the ‘tsu’ own property in common, but this property is for religious, educational, and relief purposes rather than a means of livelihood.\(^{25}\)

The *zu*, especially in small towns and villages of southeastern China, had its own social and economic system to govern the members, independent of the formal political authorities. The ancestral hall was the common property of all the families and members of the *zu*. The ancestral hall was a vital place for the *zu*, used to perform sacrificial rituals for ancestors, hold conferences, and settle disputes among clan members. Thus, the *zu* was essentially a social unit of self-government.\(^{26}\) The family associations in the United States were modeled after the system of the *zu*, and the headquarters of family associations functioned in a similar way to the ancestral halls.

Before the mid-1940s, the Chinese immigrants in American Chinatowns were mainly from the Pearl River Delta, and those in New York’s Chinatown were primarily from the rural villages of eight counties in the west of the Pearl River Delta area. These eight counties are Taishan (台山), Xinhui (新會), Kaiping (開平) and Enping (恩平) in the Siyi district, Nanhai (南海), Panyu (番禺) and Shunde (順德) in the Sanyi district, and Zhongshan (中山) County.


which forms the eastern point of a triangle with Siyi and Sanyi. The Siyi district is referred to as Wuyi (五邑) when Heshan (鶴山) County, which is north of Xinhui and Kaiping, is included. A certain number of New York’s Chinese immigrants were from Heshan County as well. All of these counties are in the Guangdong Province, southwest of Guangzhou. The Sanyi district is close to Guangzhou, which is the capital of Guangdong Province and a metropolis in China, while the Siyi district is farther to the west (Figure 13). People from Guangdong Province, especially those from small towns and villages, have the strongest patrilineal clan ties among all Chinese. The rural villages in Guangdong Province are usually comprised of one or several patrilineal clans. The powers of these clans are predominant in their own villages. The clans in a village have an independent system to rule their members, deal with other clans in the village, and together administer their village.

The role of the patrilineal clan was particularly vital in the rural areas of Guangdong Province from the late Ming Dynasty (the early seventeenth century) to the nineteenth century because the power of the imperial court was declining in the south of China. Chinese cities were administered by officials assigned by the imperial court because in the highly centralized feudal system, cities were organized as regional administration centers rather than self-governing

______________________________

27 Heyer, “Patterns of Social Organization in New York City’s Chinatown,” 44. There will be other spellings of these county names in the thesis since the historic associations adopt different spellings rather than using Pinyin. 台山: Hoy Sun; 新會: Sun Wei; 開平: Hoy Ping; 鶴山: Hok Shan; 南海: Nam Hoy; 番禺: Pan Yee; 順德: Sun Tuck; 中山: Chung Shan; 恩平: Yan Ping. Taishan was called Xinning or Sunning (新寧) before 1914, and Zhongshan was called Xiangshan (⾹⼭) before 1925. Siyi means four counties, Sanyi means three counties, and Wuyi means five counties.

28 Kwong, The New Chinatown, 85.
municipal units.\textsuperscript{29} As a result, the farther an area was from the imperial court in Beijing, which was in the north of China, the weaker the central authority’s hold would be in that area. The smaller cities and counties in Guangdong province, therefore, lacked the central government’s administration and support, which should have provided primary political protection, assistance in economic development and arbitration for disputes. On the other hand, because of the anti-Manchu sentiment among the Hans in the south, the imperial court of the Qing dynasty had adopted repressive policies in the southeastern provinces since the collapse of the Ming dynasty in the mid-seventeenth century. In this situation, the clans, as the essential social units in the small towns and villages, assumed the major responsibilities of enforcing social stability, protecting the local residents, and adjudicating disputes involving business transactions and other matters. Some clans were even powerful enough to sponsor schools, to build halls in Guangzhou to provide residences for members who were taking the imperial examination, and to provide health services and other general welfare programs.\textsuperscript{30} The structure of a clan was also hierarchical. The influence of a clan relied not only on the physical power of the clan, but also on the power of its leaders. Powerful leaders could benefit their members in their interaction with


\textsuperscript{30} Kwong, \textit{The New Chinatown}, 83. The imperial examination was a civil service examination system in Imperial China to recruit staff for the state’s bureaucracy. It was developed in the seventh century to select the best candidates from a diverse population pool to serve as government officials. The examinations consisted of a series of tests at different levels: entry-level examinations, provincial examinations held in provincial capitals, metropolitan examinations held in the national capital, and palace examinations supervised by the emperor. Candidates who passed the provincial examinations were eligible to become government officials. This examination system continued to be used until 1905.
the outer world. The clan members were influenced by their own clans all the time. This informal political structure, framed by clans, thus became the administrative system that the early Chinese immigrants in the United States were most familiar with.

The American governments’ neglect and repression was similar to the situation experienced by Chinese immigrants in their hometowns. Chinese immigrants, when they became isolated in American communities in the late nineteenth century, knew how to react in order to protect and govern themselves. New Chinese immigrants from the Pearl River Delta area, who arrived in the United States either legally or, after 1882, illegally, usually tended to work and live where other clan members and fellow villagers had already settled. Thus, there were concentrations of people, who were from the same clan or village, sharing a common surname, creating new Chinatowns. In order to establish self-government and mutual-aid in Chinatowns, various groups with the same family names formed big, single family name associations or established allied family associations based on the concept of family and clan. The family associations assumed the clan’s responsibilities of providing political protection, employment, residence, welfare, arbitration for disputes and assistance in interaction with American society for their members. Similarly, the local governments in the United States acquiesced to such operations, permitting the family and other associations to regulate affairs in Chinatown communities.31

31 Kuo, Social and Political Change in New York’s Chinatown: The Role of Voluntary Associations, 21.
In the new environment of the United States, the structure of family associations was different from that of the patrilineal clans of China. The tie of kinship was not essential any more. The family associations included everyone sharing the same surname in a given locality. For example, the Lee’s Family Association in New York’s Chinatown allowed any Chinese resident with the Lee surname in New York to be a member, as long as they paid the initial membership fee and annual dues. But the size of family associations was limited by geographic boundaries. The family associations only had members in the cities where they were located. While all family associations with the same surname in different Chinatowns of the United States were allied, their operations were independent. They were only dominant in their own Chinatowns.

In New York, the family associations were generally big organizations with hundreds of members. Although the size of the family associations varied, most of them shared the same structural features. They were subdivided into smaller groups with less than one hundred members, which were called fang. A fang consisted of people from the same village in China. These people might belong to the same patrilineal clan. The primary meaning of fang is house or building. However, another meaning of fang is branch of a clan. The family association combined both meanings because a fang was both a branch of the association and the common apartment primarily for the bachelors or other male members belonging to the fang. In some cases, the association bought apartments and provided low rent housing to its fangs. The fang was also the rudiment of family associations. The family associations were developed by

---

comparing the fangs to form more powerful organizations. And the fangs were the basic units for the family associations to manage their members. The leading group of a family association, including a chairman, a vice-chairman and senators, usually comprised wealthy and prestigious individuals. They might be the leaders of other district associations and the CCBA as well.

**District Associations**

District associations are not unique to overseas Chinese communities. They were modeled on the pattern of provincial clubs or provincial associations in China. These provincial associations were formed because of migrations within China. In the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911), a large number of merchants travelled to other cities for business. In addition, people who reached the final level of the imperial examination would travel to the capital, Beijing, to take final exams. In these cases, the patrilineal clans were not able to provide residences for their members. Therefore, people, especially merchants and scholars from the same district or province began to build public buildings to house their fellow townsmen or provincials, provide entertainments, and stimulate communication. In Beijing, there were two types of such public buildings. One was the district or provincial club for examination candidates and scholars, and the other was for merchants. In other cities, the district or provincial clubs were mostly for merchants. Based on the public buildings, the provincial associations for merchants were formed to protect and promote their members’ interests in local trade.\(^{33}\)

The provincial associations are usually called *huiguan* (會館) or *gongsuo* (公所). *Huiguan* generally refers to a public architectural complex built by a group of people from the same place. *Gongsuo*, however, meant a government office in the mid-Qing period (1700s). Literally, the word “gong” means public and “suo” means place. It was not until the nineteenth century that *gongsuo* assumed its usage in reference to a non-governmental public building.\(^{34}\) But these two terms also further referred to a public association for people from the same place of origin, because the naming of the associations was based on not only the nature of the association, but also the nature of the gathering place of the members. Thus, there was a vital relationship between the building or place and the association itself by using the term for a building to refer to an association as well. In the United States, some family associations also adopted *gongsuo* in their Chinese names to represent the term “association,” because their associations were also established based on a public place for the members as an authority.

The district associations in the United States developed and functioned in a similar way to the family associations.\(^{35}\) The most obvious distinction between the district associations and the family associations was merely the inherent social ties used to bond the members: common place of origin for district associations, while common surname for family association. These two types of associations were of equal importance to the self-government and self-protection system that developed in American Chinatowns.

\(^{34}\) William T. Rowe, “The Public Sphere in Modern China,” *Modern China*, v.16, no.3 (1990), 317.

\(^{35}\) The district associations are also referred to as territorial associations in some books.
In each Chinatown there were a certain number of people with family names that were not of sufficient number to form an association. But in almost every Chinatown people could join a district association so as to get protection and assistance from a group. People in a Chinatown were usually from a limited number of districts in China. Thus, district associations could be formed corresponding to these districts. These district associations were like informal regional governments in Chinatowns. Large district associations, as they usually had more members, were more influential than large family associations in dealing with other associations and the larger American society. The family associations, however, were generally a more cohesive grouping and were more significant to most individuals.\(^{36}\) Therefore, when a Chinese immigrant arrived in a Chinatown, he would join a district association according to his place of origin, while he would also tend to join a family association of his surname, if there was one.

**Merchant Associations**

The merchant associations were different from the family and district associations that were recognized and permitted by the local governments. They operated beyond the local laws and regulations. The merchant associations, usually known as the tongs, were formed based on the secret societies in China. Literally, the word “tong (堂)” means hall or chamber.\(^{37}\) In the associations’ Chinese name, the “tong” was applied at the end of the name to represent the

---


\(^{37}\) Tong is Wade-Giles spelling, while the Pinyin spelling is tang. The Wade-Giles spelling is used because “tong” has become a special term to refer to these associations in the United States.
meaning of “association.” The title of merchant association was adopted by some tongs to substitute for the word “tong” around 1930, since tongs had gained such a bad reputation as centers of crime and vice. While many of their members were actually in business, the title was just a courtesy.38

Secret societies in China had always served as the vehicles for expressing discontent, protest and rebellion. Their activities were usually considered illicit by the Chinese government. In times of prosperity, the secret societies attracted poor peasants and the urban unemployed who engaged in illicit businesses such as gambling and prostitution. These businesses were the major source of income for the secret societies. In times of distress, they attracted newly impoverished peasants, merchants, soldiers, rebels and revolutionaries to resist the government.39

At the beginning of the Qing Dynasty (around 1640s), the Triad Society was formed to overthrow the foreign rule of the Manchus and restore the Ming dynasty. The Triad Society was the secret society from which the Chee Kung Tong, one of the most significant tongs in American Chinatowns, developed. The Triad Society named its branches as tongs. This was probably one of the reasons why the similar secret societies in the United States were often called tongs.

In the United States, the tongs were started as secret societies to protect self-interest with improper means when Chinese laborers began to work in the gold mines in California.40

38 Heyer, “Patterns of Social Organization in New York City’s Chinatown,” 95.
39 Kuo, Social and Political Change in New York’s Chinatown: The Role of Voluntary Associations, 29.
40 Heyer, “Patterns of Social Organization in New York City’s Chinatown,” 94.
When miners left the mines and began to build Chinese communities in cities, they continued developing the tongs in the new settlements. To promote their members’ interests, tongs began to engage in various kinds of illegal enterprises such as gambling, prostitution and narcotics smuggling, and to beat or murder competitors. After the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the tongs became influential in American Chinatowns due to their ability to resist hostility from the larger society. The tongs were capable of protecting their members and the Chinese communities because of income generated through illegal activities and their “underground” networks. Before the passage of the Magnuson Act of 1943, the tongs helped numerous Chinese laborers to enter the United States by illicit means known as the “immigration slot racket.”

---

Chapter 3: Historic Associations and The Evolution of Their Signage in Manhattan’s Chinatown

3.1 Historic Associations in Manhattan’s Chinatown

The private voluntary associations in Manhattan’s Chinatown formed and developed along with the settlement and growth of the Chinese population around Chatham Square in the historic Lower East Side. Before the mid-1870s, only a very small number of Chinese lived in New York City. An 1856 *New York Daily Times* article reported that there were roughly 150 Chinese in the city, mostly sailors living in two sailor boardinghouses on Cherry Street. The reporters also found a small number of Chinese employed by tea stores or engaged in selling cigars in the area below Chatham Square. The majority of these Chinese residents were probably brought to New York on ships involved in the China trade and other global trades, as New York became the major port of the United States during the early decades of the nineteenth century. At that time, few of them had come to New York from the West Coast by the overland route. Following this pattern, the number of Chinese in New York remained relatively small until 1870. An 1870 *New York Tribune* article claimed: “By a careful estimate the number of Chinese in the city is placed at only 200 … In no instance is one known to have come from San

The significant growth of the Chinese population in New York beginning in the early 1870s, however, was a result of the migration of Chinese laborers from the West Coast to the East Coast.

From the late 1840s to the 1860s, the first significant wave of Chinese immigration to the United States occurred. These Chinese laborers were primarily rural peasants from Guangdong Province on the southeast coast of China. During that time, frequent droughts, floods and famines in south China resulted in an insufficient supply of food and work opportunities for the dense population. The Taiping Rebellion (1850-64), an extensive peasant protest, further devastated and impoverished many parts of south China. Meanwhile, people in the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong Province (Figure 14) had long been exposed to foreign trade because the provincial capital, Guangzhou, became an open port in 1685 and remained the sole port of entry for foreigners and for the export of Chinese goods from 1757 to the end of the First Opium War in 1842. The resolution of the Opium War not only led to the opening of more ports along the southeast coast of China, but also forced these ports to be opened to the export of labor. The poor peasants in the Pearl River Delta area, who were already familiar with foreign customs, were willing to take the opportunity to seek better employment overseas.

Chinese laborers in the United States mainly worked as gold miners in the 1850s, and for the construction of the first Transcontinental Railroad in the 1860s. However, the rapid growth of the Chinese population and decreasing job opportunities due to the decline of the mines during this period gradually led to anti-Chinese prejudice among white laborers on the West Coast. The completion of the railroad in 1869 suddenly left around 12,000 Chinese workers unemployed and drove them to seek jobs in California cities, further intensifying job competition and anti-Chinese sentiment on the West Coast. As anti-Chinese sentiment and internal conflicts between the Chinese tongs increased, large numbers of Chinese laborers, who found themselves unable to make a living in California, began migrating to the less hostile Central States and to the East Coast from the early 1870s, taking advantage of the transcontinental railroad system that many of them had helped to build. New York City, with its rapidly expanding economy, became a major destination of these refugees.

In the early 1870s, when the Chinese population in New York began to grow dramatically, their settlement gradually shifted from the area near the west end of Cherry Street and below Chatham Square to the area above Chatham Square. It was at that time that New York’s historic Chinatown, which centered on Mott, Pell and Doyers streets, was initiated. In various studies about Chinese residents in New York, the Wo Kee Company is recognized as an important marker of the beginning of New York’s Chinatown. Jack Tchen noted in his book, *New York Before Chinatown* that: “In 1873, Mr. Wo Kee moved his general-goods store from Oliver near Cherry Street to above Chatham Square at 34 Mott Street. His store has generally
been credited as the beginning of New York’s Chinatown… We now know that this store’s move did not inaugurate the formation of a new community, but it did correspond with a major demographic change.”

On the other hand, the New York Times reported roughly 500 Chinese living in the historic Lower East Side in 1873. And according to the United States Census, there were 731 Chinese in New York County in 1880, 1,970 in 1890, and 4,696 in 1900. Although these numbers might be smaller than the actual number of Chinese in New York, they indicate the rapid growth of the Chinese population in New York during these decades. Most of these people settled only in the growing Chinese community above Chatham Square due to linguistic barriers, their tendency to stay with their countrymen, and prejudice from the outside. With the growth of New York’s Chinatown and its population, voluntary associations were gradually formed for this Chinatown’s self-government, mutual aid and self-protection. This association system was brought from San Francisco, but it developed independently for this specific Chinatown under New York’s conditions.

Most of Chinatown’s historic associations established in the nineteenth century lacked records for their exact date of establishment. They were initiated informally by a group of people

48 Tchen, New York Before Chinatown, 225.
50 United States Census Bureau: Census of Population and Housing, 1870; Census of Population and Housing, 1890; and Census of Population and Housing, 1900. The Chinese population might have been underestimated since the census only reported twelve Chinese in New York County in 1870, which was much smaller than the number the New-York Tribune reported. According to Tchen, immigrants who did not speak English might be underreported because of the simple inability of the census taker to locate and communicate with them.
sharing the same background, while the official registration of these associations was carried out at a much later time. Stories about the founders were passed on orally. According to the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association’s records, the earliest Chinese association in New York is the Hip Sing Association, which was a tong formed during the 1860s.\footnote{51} In the 1860s, only a small Chinese population existed in New York, but there were already people involved in illicit gambling, opium and prostitution enterprises. Although the formation of the Hip Sing Tong is shrouded in myth because of its secret nature, it is likely that this tong was formed by people engaged in vice enterprises. However, oral history of the Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association, passed on from generation to generation, claimed that it was founded in 1853, earlier than the founding of the Hip Sing Association. This early date for the founding of the association in New York may be confused with the fact that the Ning Yung Benevolent Association in San Francisco was founded in 1853.\footnote{52} Thus, the Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association in New York was probably founded in the late Tongzhi Period (1861-74) as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) recorded.\footnote{53}


\footnote{52} The Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association was also called Ning Yung Association when it was founded. This is a district association formed by people from Taishan (Hoy Sun) County. Taishan (台山) was called Xinning (新寧) before 1914, and Ning Yung (寧陽) was a laudatory name of Xinning.

\footnote{53} The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association’s records show that several associations were founded during the Tongzhi Period or Guangxu Period, while the exact years of founding are unknown. The Tongzhi Period refers to the period when Emperor Tongzhi ruled China, which is from 1861 to 1874. The Guangxu Period refers to the period when Emperor Guangxu ruled China, which is from 1875 to 1908.
There were thirteen more associations formed during the Guangxu Period (1875-1908), including seven family associations, two district associations, three fraternal societies, and the CCBA (Table 1). All the family associations were dominated by Taishanese because Taishan County was the place of origin of around eighty percent of the Chinese population in New York before the mid-1940s. The Lin Sing Association, which was the only district association comparable to the Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association, was not established until 1900. This association was formed by other small district groups to counterbalance the predominance of Taishanese in Manhattan’s Chinatown. The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association was officially formed in 1883 as the informal government and mediator for all associations in Chinatown, for the purpose of mediating business disputes and disputes between associations or individuals from different associations, controlling the dangerous and disruptive tongs, communicating with the local government, and resisting anti-Chinese legislation. The Chinese Free Masons, generally known as Chee Kung Tong, was a branch of San Francisco’s Chee Kung Tong. The On Leong Tong and Jin Lan Association were both affiliated with it when they were founded, while the On Leong Tong later became one of the two strongest tongs in New York’s Chinatown and a bitter rival of the Hip Sing Association. In the following four decades, other associations were formed as the number of people belonging to certain groups increased. It is

54 Heyer, “Patterns of Social Organization in New York City’s Chinatown,” 45. In the United States, about sixty to seventy percent of the Chinese were Taishanese before the mid-1940s. Taishan was the poorest and the farthest from Guangzhou among the eight counties in the Pearl River Delta area. The majority of Chinese laborers arrived on the West Coast during the late 1840s to the early 1880s were Taishanese, and many of them went to New York.
noteworthy that the small district groups comprising the Lin Sing Association gradually formed their own powerful associations, such as the Hok Shan Association, Chung Shang Association and Sun Wei Association, as the populations of their townsmen accumulated. These individual district associations kept their affiliation with the Lin Sing Association.

Most of these private voluntary associations were named directly after their family names or places of origin. For example, the Moy’s Family Association’s Chinese name is 梅氏公所: 梅 means the family name Moy, 氏 means surname, and 公所 means association; the Hok Shan Association (鶴山公所) directly adopts its members’ place of origin, Hok Shan (鶴山) in its name. Other associations tended to apply literary creation and allusion in their names, in order to express special histories related to them or their aspirations. Some family associations incorporated the places of origin or historical stories of their common ancestors, which were recorded in classical literature, in the association names. For example, the Lung Kong Tin Yee Association (龍岡親義公所), comprised of members with four surnames, Liu, Guan, Zhang and Zhao (劉、關、張、趙), adopted two terms, 龍岡 and 親義, in its name. 親義 means friendship and brotherhood, commemorating the brotherhood of Liu Bei, Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, and Zhao Yun, which was depicted in Romance of the Three Kingdoms, one of the most famous historical novels of China. 龍岡 was a small hill in Kaiping County of Guangdong Province, which was owned by the local Liu clan during the Kangxi Period (1661-1722) of the Qing Dynasty. In order to protect this hill from being occupied by invading neighbors, the Liu clan allied with the local Guan, Zhang and Zhao clans to build a temple on the hill for the worship of the four figures of
the Three Kingdoms. Such names of the family associations are shared by family associations with the same surnames in other American Chinatowns as well. Some district associations and tongs expressed their spirits or aspirations through their names. The Lin Sing Association, as an allied district association, named itself “Lin Sing” (聯成), meaning formed by unity. This name also expressed the spirit of unity of the association. The On Leong Tong (安良堂), expressed its aspiration to protect the common people and to pacify the immoral through the name, 安良, which had such a meaning in Chinese.

As organizations mainly consisting of working-class Chinese and small business owners, these private voluntary associations could not afford their own buildings in the years after their establishments. Although the associations were operated under the leadership of some wealthier merchants and prominent elders, their funds were generally limited to membership fees and annual dues collected from their members, and the returns from small investments. Moreover, the majority of the association’s funds were spent on purchasing residential space to provide temporary residences for new arrivals and long-term low rent housing for their members. In the early years of New York’s Chinatown, most associations only rented small apartments in tenement buildings, usually on the top floor, to serve as their offices or headquarters. Neither did they have the surplus funds to decorate the tenements in elaborate Chinese style as some restaurants did (Figure 15). However, even with very limited resources, many associations

\[55\] Only the tongs were the exception and had plenty of funds, because they were engaged in vice enterprises. This is one of the reasons why a tong could have an elaborate balcony in the early twentieth century. The On Leong Tong’s balcony is talked about in the Chapter 4.
created balconies in a semblance of a Chinese style by carrying out simple alterations to the fire escapes and adding corresponding roofs on their floors (Figure 16). Even in a built environment that was totally different from Chinese architecture, they tried to add Chinese architectural elements to the plain tenement facades with the careful arrangement of forms to resemble the atmosphere of Chinese halls. This kind of architectural display helped them to demonstrate their presence and importance in the community. A traditional Chinese wooden tablet inscribed with an association’s name was then placed within the balcony as a symbol of the association and its headquarters. This traditional Chinese architectural element was coordinated with the existing facade and other add-on elements in a traditional Chinese way. In the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, voluntary associations’ balconies, which were marked with traditional Chinese wooden signs over the central doorways or windows and under the cornices, dominated the streetscape of Mott and Pell streets.56

The larger and more powerful associations ultimately began purchasing as many properties as possible, showing their power and controlling businesses operating within their territories. They would first purchase a building for their headquarters, located in the territories they claimed, with members and allied associations’ donating toward the purchase. Eventually, they would try to buy adjacent buildings to form their substantial territories.57 The headquarters buildings were either built on the sites of old buildings, as the CCBA and the On Leong Chinese

Merchants Association were, or were alterations to older buildings, like the Lee’s Family Association, Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association and Gee How Oak Tin Association. The associations still placed their headquarters on one or two floors of the buildings, while renting out the other parts of the buildings for residential or commercial uses. At that point, when they applied signage to the new headquarters, they needed to consider the sign’s relation to both the headquarters floors and to the building as a whole. In the nineteen-twenties and thirties, industrialization, the development of new materials, the global modernization movement, as well as American commercial signage, gradually influenced the forms of signage adopted by these associations for their new headquarters. These factors all together led to the current diversity of signs, dating from the late nineteenth century to the twenty-first century. The signs appear at different locations on buildings, functioning as symbols of the associations and as indicators leading the members or other Chinese visitors to the headquarters.
3.2 Evolution of Signage for Historic Associations

This thesis identified forty historic associations in Manhattan’s Chinatown as the study group. Although there are more such associations in Chinatown, the study group is limited by the accessibility of the associations’ signs. All the associations in the study group, except the Jin Lan Association, have extant signs that the author was able to investigate, including signs on the exterior walls or in the interior halls or stairways. For the Jin Lan Association, a previous sign was found in a historic photo. The signs on these historic association headquarters buildings were studied as a whole and in relation to each other, while the value of individual signs was determined based on site investigations and research into their history.

In the site investigations, over one hundred signs were discovered, including seventy-eight exterior signs and twenty-six interior signs, some of which are historic and contribute to the ongoing development history of Chinatown signage. After conducting analyses of the types and locations of the signs, as well as their relationships to the buildings, the exterior signs were classified into seven groups, and the interior signs were classified into three groups. While some signs bear more than one characteristic relating to different groups, they are classified according to their major features.
3.2.1 Exterior Signs

*Traditional Wooden Tablets*

In total, six exterior signs in traditional Chinese wooden tablet form were discovered on the association headquarters buildings. These signs are applied to the buildings in diverse ways, and the signs themselves differ as well.

The sign at the Chin Family Association, which is on the top floor of 10 Pell Street, is the oldest exterior sign on an association building in Manhattan’s Chinatown (*Figures 17-19*). According to the preface on the right side of the sign, the sign was created in the winter of the twenty-sixth year of the Guangxu Period (1900), which was the year when this association was established (*Figure 18*). The postscript on the left side indicates that the calligraphy on the sign was written by Chen Botao (*Figure 20*), a prominent scholar and official of the Qing dynasty in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.\(^{58}\) Chen Botao was born in the Pearl River Delta River area. In the imperial examination of 1879, he won first place in the provincial examination of Guangdong Province, and achieved third place in the palace examination in 1892. As the most prominent figure of the Chen clans in Guangdong Province during that period, Chen Botao was invited by the Chin Family Association to compose the calligraphy for its sign. The main text, “Chen Shi Gong Suo” (陳氏公所), means Chin Family Association. Since Chen Botao was in China in 1900, the sign was probably created in Guangdong, and brought to New York by the association’s members. The Chinese characters on the sign were inscribed with

---

\(^{58}\) Chen is the Pinyin spelling, and Chin is the Wade-Giles spelling. They both represent the surname 陳.
positive engraving, and probably gilded, while the tablet was painted red. However, since it was completed, the sign has severely deteriorated. The sunlight has bleached the colors out. Cracking and spalling have occurred to the wooden tablet, especially on the lower left corner.

Within a balcony, the sign is placed in the center of the facade, over two central doors of the top floor. It is tilted forward, forming a triangle with the facade and eave. This kind of placement suggests that the sign was applied to the facade in a traditional Chinese way. Although there was no central doorway or window on this four-bay building, the sign was still placed in the center and over the doors. The sign is tilted forward in the Chinese way so that it can be observed by people walking on the street, reading the main words and recognizing it as the symbol of the Chin Family Association, even though it is far from the ground level. According to the Chinese secretary of the Gee How Oak Tin Association, Chen Jianping, who is a member of the Chin Family Association as well, the Chin Family Association and its sign have been at the same location since the founding of the association. The current character of this top floor is consistent with the early arrangement of the associations’ balconies, which consisted of altered fire escapes and add-on roofs over the fire escapes, in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century (Figure 21-23). The sign of the Chin Family Association reflects how traditional Chinese signage was applied to tenement facades in the early years of Manhattan’s Chinatown.

The sign of the Lin Sing Association at 47 Mott Street dates back to around 1928. It sits in the center of a second-story cornice which is in the style of a Chinese roof (Figure 24). The
wooden tablet is surrounded by iron sheets to fasten it on the cornice, which also protects the sign from weathering. Without preface and postscript, the main text for the Chinese name of the association, 聯成公所, is predominant on the sign, and the scale of the sign makes it predominant on the building facade. The characters were inscribed with intaglio engraving, which is an easier carving method compared with positive engraving because positive engraving requires the craftsman to cut out more wood. Instead of preface and postscript, there are engraved stamps on both sides of the sign. The sign on the right side, showing the Chinese characters, 恒林店製／粵東興隆街, indicates that the sign was made by a shop called “Heng Lin Dian” (恒林店) in Guangdong Province, and brought to New York by the members (Figure 25). The frame of this stamp is decorated with a wave motif and is in the shape of a curved piece of paper. There are two stamps on the left side. The characters comprise a Chinese idiom, 眾志成城, meaning unity is strength (Figure 26). “Unity is strength” is appropriate for the Lin Sing Association, since it is an allied district association formed by people of various places of origin other than Taishan. The term, “Lin Sing,” in the association’s name, also has a similar meaning, connoting that the association was formed with unity. The frames of these two stamps are also shaped in traditional Chinese patterns, including a fan shape and an irregular square shape. With these details, this wooden sign is symbolic and decorative, and communicates the association’s spirit and power.

The Hip Sing Association currently has four exterior signs on its building facade, among which the wooden-tablet one is the earliest (Figure 27). The association uses 16 Pell
Street, which is located at the intersection of Pell and Doyers streets, as its headquarters building. The headquarters is only located on the top floor of the building. Placed over the central doorway of the inside wall of a deep balcony, the wooden sign is protected from weathering, but almost invisible from the ground level. Although this placement is still similar to that in Chinese architecture, vertically taking the space between the doorway and eave, it does not identify the location of the association, but is a symbol for the members. The sign probably dates back to the early 1930s when the association changed its Chinese name from “Hip Sing Tong” to “Hip Sing Gong Hui.” A 1940s tax photos shows a sign placed at a more visible location under the eave of an add-on Chinese-style roof (Figure 28). This sign is probably the extant metal sign that is still located at the same place (Figure 29). While the wooden sign is at a shady location and almost invisible from the streets, the outer metal sign helps to clearly indicate the association’s location and claim the association’s prominence on Pell and Doyers streets.

The Soo Yuen Association’s wooden-tablet sign simply consists of black background and positive-engraved, golden characters for the association’s name (Figure 30). Like the combination of red background and golden characters, this is also a common color scheme for traditional Chinese wooden tablets. Red stands for good fortune, strength and vitality, gold for prosperity, and black for gravity and justice. The placement of this sign is also in an early style, as the sign is located over a central doorway and under the eave. This metal roof is constructed in a similar way to that of the Chin Family Association, which coordinates with the fire escape to form a balcony (Figure 31). But this roof has a more sophisticated design that incorporates
Chinese architectural elements such as the Chinese-style roof and the bracket sets between the columns and eave. The roof has a higher central bay and two lower side bays, corresponding to the converted central doorway and side windows. The composition of this roof is similar to that of an early Chinese restaurant, the Port Arthur Restaurant (Figure 32), and also similar to the typical top portion of a memorial gateway (see Figure 11).\(^{59}\) The sign in this kind of setting, therefore, may express a sense of dignity, as well as remind this allied family association’s members of the ancestral halls in their hometowns.

According to members of the Soo Yuen Association, the roof and sign have been at the current location since 1928 when the association’s headquarters was moved to the fifth floor of 68 Mott Street. However, the 1940s tax photo does not show the roof or sign. The roof and sign were probably added during the late 1940s to 1950s.\(^{60}\) It is unusual that an association would still choose to add a roof and sign in an old style after the mid-1940s. But the combination of these two elements does help to identify the association’s headquarters building and is an imposing presence on Mott Street.

---

\(^{59}\) The author speculates that the roofs of the Soo Yuen Association and the Port Arthur Restaurant might be modeled after memorial gateways. Some roofs of other associations are also composed of a higher central bay and two lower side bays, but in much simpler forms. The author is not sure if there is a relationship between these roofs, or if they really have one prototype. To study these roofs, further research focusing on this topic is needed.

\(^{60}\) Department of Buildings’ records show that there were three alterations taking place in the 1950s and one alteration taking place in the 1946. A late-1950s photo dimly shows the current balcony for the Soo Yuen Association (Figure 33).
The last two exterior wooden-tablet signs both belong to the Moy’s Family Association (Figures 34-36). One sign is located over the central window of the second floor. This sign was probably created when the association’s headquarters was moved to the current building in 1972. The golden characters for the association’s name are positively engraved on a black board. The tablet has a simple border of the same color as the characters (Figure 35). A fluorescent lamp of the same length as the tablet is installed above the tablet so that people will be able to recognize this symbol of the association even at night. The other sign is located over the ground-level doorway that leads to the upper floors. Since it is placed at a shady location, it is almost invisible to people passing the building. However, it is likely that this sign is intentionally placed at this location because the association may want to protect the sign and show it off at the same time.

The animated semi-cursive calligraphy on this sign was composed by Yu Youren, an outstanding calligrapher and famous Kuomintang (i.e. Taiwanese) politician. In 1957, Mei Shuceng, the president of the Mei’s Family Association and executive director of the Sino-American Cultural & Economic Association in Taiwan, invited Yu to create the calligraphy for the sign and presented the sign to New York’s Moy’s Family Association.⁶¹ The original calligraphy for the sign, made of ink on Xuan paper, is kept inside the headquarters (Figure 37).⁶² The main characters on the wooden sign were inscribed with intaglio engraving and shading at the edges of

---

⁶¹ Mei is the Pinyin spelling, and Moy is the Wade-Giles spelling. They both represent the surname 梅.
⁶² Xuan paper is a kind of paper originating in ancient China used for writing and painting. Its texture is suitable for conveying the artistic expression of both Chinese calligraphy and painting.
the characters. Without painting, the original color of the wood is evident. This is a high-style sign and one of the most significant in Manhattan’s Chinatown.

These six exterior signs, which are in traditional Chinese wooden tablet form, present various types of placement on tenement building facades. Some of them only have the function of identifying the association’s headquarters, while others are decorative and with high artistic values because of the calligraphy. Some signs have prefaces and postscripts, which present the dates of composition and names of calligraphers or senders. The date may indicate the year of founding or occurrence of other important events. The name may imply an association’s relation with an important figure. Thus, these signs are excellent records of the history of the associations. In many cases, these signs in Manhattan’s Chinatown are of the highest historical, aesthetic and social value.

**Signage as a Part of the Facade**

This group consists of nine signs that are either embedded in the building facade or carved on the facade material. Unlike the signs in other forms, these signs have literally become a part of the facade rather than just affixed to it. Through incorporating the signage of the association with the building, the association is claiming its ownership of the building and sometimes the domination of the territory around the headquarters building. Thus, this kind of sign only emerged when the associations were able to purchase buildings for their headquarters.
The earliest example of this kind of sign is on the top of the headquarters building of New York’s Chinese Free Masons (Figure 38). This is a stone sign bearing the English words, “CHINESE MASONIC BUILDING.” Above it are the Masonic symbols of a mason’s square and compass. Chee Kung Tong adopted “Chinese Free Masons” as its English name because the association was formed as a fraternal society. When the association had the building altered in 1938, the sign was applied in an American way to identify the association’s headquarters building and claim the building as the association’s property. This alteration was designed by an American architect, Sydney Schuleman. This sign reflects how American prototypes influenced the association’s decision on applying its signs on the building, and the fact that the association considered itself an American association of Chinese people.

From the mid-1950s to the early 1980s, several associations applied Chinese signs by embedding stone tablets inscribed with the associations’ names in the facades. Serpentine marble and white marble, as fine decorative materials, were used for the signs. The signs, either horizontally taking the top portion of the building or extending vertically along the building facade, clearly express the presence of the associations and strongly claim their ownership of the buildings (Figures 39-42). These signs still apply Chinese forms with calligraphies inscribed on the tablets. However, the scale and placement are more intentionally designed to coordinate with the entire building facade. And the layouts of the signs reflect, to some extent, that they were designed with reference to English signs on local buildings (Figure 43).
Blending the sign into the building body is also utilized in the design of several doorways, since the doorway is one primary carrier of Chinese signage. For example, the Moy’s Family Association and Leung Chung How Realty Corporation altered their ground-level doorways, which lead to the upper floors, by integrating signs for their associations into the building materials of the doorways (*Figures 44-45*).63

The idea of embedding signs in the building facade is not simply Chinese or American. It has existed in both cultures for a long time. However, this kind of application is an evolution in the signage system for Chinese associations headquarters. They emerged not only because the associations, as owners of the buildings, had the right to alter the facades, but also as a result of the associations’ desires to claim their power through this ownership. These signs play a substantial part in the design of building facades.

*Separate Metal Characters*

The signs in the form of separate Chinese characters, which are merely metal characters without tablets, form a relatively large group in the signage system of the historic associations headquarters. There are thirteen of them in Manhattan’s Chinatown. Like the signs blended into the building facades, these signs are an expression of the ownership of the buildings. But it is more convenient to attach the separate characters to the buildings and to control the spans

---

63 The Leung Chung How Realty Corporation is a family association. A Chinese association may use an English name according to its preference. The facts that the associations were usually registered as corporations and the large associations usually own many properties may have caused this association to use “Realty Corporation” in its name.
between individual words without tablets. Generally, these signs would take up the entire horizontal or vertical span of the building to claim the associations’ domination, while some emphasize the floors where the headquarters are located (Figures 46-47). These signs are either made of stainless steel or copper alloys. Most signs were made to show a golden appearance, while some stainless steel signs were finely polished to show a silvery color. In Chinese culture, the gold color is the most prestigious.

These signs began appearing in Manhattan’s Chinatown in the early 1950s. The adoption of the separate-character signs by the associations was a result of various influential factors. Before their appearance, there had already been English commercial sign with metal letters in use in America for a long time, and there had been such signs in China as well (Figures 48-49). The associations were following the trends of signs in their familiar building environments. Another important factor is that these signs could be machine-made by local sign manufacturers, saving the labor required by carving and time for transportation.

The qualities of the calligraphies of these signs differ a great deal. Some signs still bears calligraphy created by important figures, while some have characters designed by manufacturers. The Tong On Association invited a famous calligrapher in Hong Kong, Ye Guansheng, to compose the calligraphy for its sign in around 1957 (Figure 50).64 The date of this sign coincides with the immigrant population pattern in Manhattan’s Chinatown, since the number of immigrants from Hong Kong increased after 1950. A sign with calligraphy by a famous Hong

64 Information acquired from the counselor of the Tong On Association, Zhang Fuxiang, who used to be a journalist in Hong Kong.
Kong calligrapher was apparently appealing because of the popularity of the calligrapher among the new immigrants. In contrast, signs like those of the Wong Family Benevolent Association and Fay Chaw Merchants’ Association were produced and applied without thoughtful design (Figures 51-52). Their characters were just designed by manufacturers, and the manufacturers used existing fonts. Such signs are an industrial product.

**Signs in Tablet Forms but of New Materials**

The signs in traditional forms but of new materials take the form of tablet signs, but are made of plastics, metals or a mix of wood and these two materials (Figures 53-54). They are generally located on the floors where the association headquarters are located, either parallel to the facade or tilted forward. Some have artistic calligraphy, while others were commercially manufactured.

The oldest sign is the one on the top floor of the Gee How Oak Tin Association (Figure 55). It was created in 1926, and also bears the calligraphy of Chen Botao. The metal sign of the Hip Sing Association is probably another old sign of this type (see Figure 29). The dates of other signs are unknown, but they appear to be relatively recent. However, there are old signs of this type, which no longer exist, found in historic photos, and the type seems to have been popular from the late 1930s to the early 1950s. A 1940 tax photo shows three associations’ signs in the tablet form on Canal Street, which were hung over the windows of the floors where the associations were located (Figure 56). A 1950 photo also shows two associations’ signs in the
same form and placed in the same way on Canal Street (Figure 57). Another 1940s photo shows two associations’ signs in the tablet form on East Broadway (Figure 58). The materials of these signs cannot be identified from the photos. Except for the sign of the Jin Lan Association (Figure 54), these signs all tended to cover the whole width of the building, and the span between the windows of two floors.

**Separate Tablets**

There are four exterior signs classified as separate-tablet signs (Figures 59-62). The main feature of these signs is that the sign consists of several individual tablets bearing single characters. The tablets of a sign are generally detached. Only the sign of the Gee Poy Guo Association (Figure 62) has continuous tablets, while each stone tablet is framed by metal. The tablets have diverse shapes and locations. The Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association and Gee Poy Guo Association have normal square tablets that dominate the entire buildings (Figures 59 and 62). The sign of the Hok Shan Society (Figure 60) comprises red circles on a white background and is located next to an English sign over the doorway. The tablets of the Hoy Yen Association (Figure 61) are in diamond shapes and attached to the rails of a fire escape. These signs were all applied after 1980. Although this type of sign has a very short history, they represent an evolved style, which utilizes dynamic tablets that are in more shapes than just square. They also contribute to the ongoing development process of Chinatown signage.
“Commercial Signs”

There are four signs classified as “commercial sign” since their styles are very similar to the commercial signs surrounding them (Figure 63). They are generally new and large, and their only intention is to make passers-by recognize the location of the association. In the signage system of the historic associations, these signs have little value.

Exterior Guide Signs

The exterior guide signs are very simple and small signs made of various materials, including plastic, metal, stone or wood; others are merely stickers attached to glass (Figures 64-68). Thirty-six of these signs have been identified. There are also twelve interior guide signs, which are just functional and have little value.

Since the associations are located on the upper floors or basements of tenement buildings, of which the ground floors are crowded with small stores, the associations tend to put simple signs at the ground-level doorways to help lead visitors to their spaces. These signs are usually placed over or beside doorways. Some of these signs have both the Chinese and English names of the associations. This further reflects their guiding functions. However, these guide signs have little value to the associations or their headquarters buildings. Maybe the only notable sign of this type is the wooden sign over the doorway of the Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association’s headquarters building, which was created in the early 1950s to commemorate the contributions
of other East-coast Hoy Sun Ning Yung Associations to the purchase of the building in 1951 (Figure 68).

3.2.2 Interior Signs

*Traditional Wooden-tablet Signs*

Eleven interior signs in the traditional wooden tablet form, bearing association names, have been identified. Nine of these are inside the associations’ headquarters, generally placed in the center of a main wall of a gathering hall and on the top of the wall (Figure 69). This placement of the signs refers to that of traditional Chinese signage in Chinese architecture. These signs are the interior symbols of the associations and are an inspiration for the members. Two signs are placed in the stairways leading to the headquarters offices which are located in altered tenement apartments (Figure 70). To new visitors, this unusual placement is fresh and surprising since the scale of the signs is large in comparison to the narrow stairway and such signs are traditionally inside the gathering halls. But to the members, these signs may be just as inspiring as those in the gathering halls.

The earliest interior sign, which is also the oldest among all Chinatown signs, is the one at the central location of the gathering hall of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, dating back to 1883 when the CCBA was established (Figure 71). It bears the calligraphy of Zheng Zaoru, who visited the United States as an imperial envoy of the Qing government from 1881 to 1885. He sought to protect Chinese laborer’s rights in America. In 1882, as a
representative of the Qing government, he appealed to Congress to reject the Chinese Exclusion Act. Although the result was not ideal, it was due toEnvoy Zheng’s diplomatic skills that the period of immigration suspension was reduced from twenty years to ten years.\textsuperscript{65} The sign of the Lee’s Family Association dates back to 1898, and bears the calligraphy of Li Disheng, probably a prominent member of the association (\textit{Figure 72}).\textsuperscript{66} The sign of the Lin Sing Association dates to 1902, and bears the calligraphy of Zhao Kuiyi, a successful candidate in the imperial examinations at the provincial level, whose place of origin was Xinhui County in Guangdong Province (\textit{Figure 73}). The sign of the Leung Chung How Realty Corporation may also be an early one (\textit{Figure 70}). It bears the calligraphy of Lang Songjun, a calligrapher in the Guangdong Province.\textsuperscript{67} The sign of the Tsung Tsin Association dates to 1935 (\textit{Figure 74}). The dates of the other signs are either unknown or after 1980.

\textit{Wooden Tablets with Messages of Praise}

There are three traditional wooden-tablet signs that bear messages of praise instead of an association’s name. They are all in the gathering hall of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, hung on the secondary walls. They were sent by the presidents or vice president of

\textsuperscript{65} Huang Zunxian, “Memorandum No.29 to Envoy Zheng (1882),” \textit{Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present} (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 43-44. Although the period of Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was set to be ten years, the Act was renewed for ten years by the 1892 Geary Act, and made permanent in 1902. It was finally repealed by the Magnuson Act in 1943.

\textsuperscript{66} Li is the Pinyin spelling, and Lee is the Wade-Giles spelling. They both represent the surname 李.

\textsuperscript{67} Liang is the Pinyin spelling, and Leung is the Wade-Giles spelling. They both represent the surname 梁.
the Republic of China to honor the New York CCBA’s contributions to all Chinese people. These tablets are decorative and inspiring, rather than symbolic.

The earliest sign was sent by President Chiang Kai-shek in 1972 (Figure 75). The sign bears President Chiang’s calligraphy and message, “Tuan Jie Bao Guo” (團結報國), praising the CCBA’s help in uniting Chinese people and its dedications to the home country. Although the tablet is in a simple form, it has two finely carved support brackets. The second sign was sent by Lien Chan, once a chairman of Kuomintang and a vice president of the Republic of China, in 2000 (Figure 76). This sign bears Chairman Lien’s calligraphy and message, “Ze Pi Huan Yu” (澤被寰宇), praising the CCBA for the benefits it bestows on the whole world. The latest sign was sent by President Ma Ying-jeou in 2013 (Figure 77). This sign bears President Ma’s calligraphy and message, “Liang Gai Hua Guo” (亮蓋華國), honoring the CCBA as an important association to China. This sign also has two decorative support brackets carved with lion heads. While the earliest sign has an austere brown background and beige characters, the later two have gorgeous black-lacquered background and gilded characters. These sign not only indicate the Republic of China’s admiration for the New York’s Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, but also reflect the association’s support of the Republic of China.
Chapter 4:
Case Studies

4.1 Lin Sing Association

The Lin Sing Association, as indicated by its name, is an allied district association. “Lin Sing” (聯成) means “Lian He Er Cheng” (聯合而成) in Chinese, which translates as “formed by unity.”68 The formation of this allied district association was a result of the fact that Manhattan’s Chinatown was dominated by Taishanese, and people from other places of origin needed a powerful association that could be comparable to the Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association to protect their interests in the interactions and competition with the Taishanese as well as the outside world. As the self-government, mutual aid, and self-protection system developed in Chinatowns, it was especially important to be affiliated to a powerful association to get assistance in operating small businesses, obtaining employment and residence, and in competing with people from the more influential Taishanese group. Under the leadership of several influential merchants, such as Li Tao, Li Gongyu and Zhao Fengying, the Lin Sing Association was formed in 1900 by uniting people from various small district groups so as to achieve a powerful association.69 Any New York individuals, associations and business groups that were not Taishanese could be a member of the Lin Sing Association. Some small district groups later

68 Lian is the Pinyin spelling, and Lin is the Wade-Giles spelling; they both represent 聯. Cheng is the Pinyin spelling, and Sing is the Wade-Giles spelling; they both represent 成.

developed into larger district associations, but they continued to be affiliated with the Lin Sing Association. They benefited from and contributed to the Lin Sing Association at the same time.

When the Lin Sing Association was established, it rented the top floor of 36 Pell Street as its headquarters. A picture taken in about 1903 shows the balcony of this headquarters (Figure 78). This picture depicts a typical scene of a tenement building in New York’s Chinatown at that time: a store on the first floor, a Chinese restaurant with ornate balcony on the second floor, and an association with austere balcony on the top floor. The Lin Sing Association’s balcony was created by extending the fire escape to the whole floor, and adding a roof supported by slender columns. This roof had a higher central bay that was curved, and two symmetrical lower bays. The origin of this type of roof is unknown. But this shape, with a higher central bay, helped to highlight the association’s sign under the eave. The sign was placed in a traditional Chinese way, with the wooden tablet set over the central doorway and tilted forward. Although the surrounding setting was very simple, the sign, as a traditional Chinese architectural element with a similar placement to that in Chinese architecture, helped to identify this place in a Chinese way, to communicate the association’s spirit of unity through the name and calligraphy, and to remind Chinatown people of Chinese architecture.

This sign is the one now placed at a central position of the gathering hall of the Lin Sing Association’s current headquarters (Figure 79). The sign was salvaged and moved inside when the association constructed a new building in the late 1920s, while a new exterior sign was created and applied to the new facade. The preface indicates the sign was created in 1902, and
the postscript records the name of the calligrapher, Zhao Kuiyi from Xinhui County of the Pearl River Delta area. As a successful candidate passing the provincial examination of Guangdong Province in the imperial examinations, Zhao Kuiyi was a respectable scholar in Xinhui. In China, a scholar’s social status was much higher than that of a businessman, let alone a member of the working-class. Working-class people and small business owners constituted the majority of the Lin Sing Association. Thus, Zhao’s calligraphy contributed to the status of the sign and helped promote the status of the association. Because Xinhui was a major place of origin of the Lin Sing Association’s members, Zhao’s calligraphy also reflected a regional feature of this district association.70

In 1924, the Lin Sing Association decided to build a new building for its headquarters, since the building at 36 Pell Street was dilapidated and its top floor had become too small for the growing association. It was hard for the association to make this decision since it had very limited savings. In the following year, the association purchased three lots at 45 to 49 Mott Street. On the site were three unsightly, dilapidated wooden shacks that disfigured New York’s Chinatown. The purchase was supported by donations and loans from the association’s members and affiliated associations, which amounted to $20,000.71 In addition, the association took out a mortgage for $44,000 from the Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank.72 In 1926, the association realized it was already deep in debt, so that it decided to sell its property at 45 Mott Street to

70 According to Eddie Chiu, the general counsel of the Lin Sing Association, the association mainly consists of people from Xinhui County and Heshan County, and Hakka people.
provide funds for the erection of a modern apartment building on the site at 47 and 49 Mott Street. The second floor of the new building would serve as the headquarters of the association, while the other parts would be apartments and stores that would benefit the association’s members with low rents.

The new building was designed by Charles S. Clark as a common modern apartment building with a plain facade. Decorative add-on elements were only applied to the second floor to show the location of the headquarters. A balcony was designed with three archways, and a projecting, tiled cornice in Chinese style was added above the archways. Above the cornice, a wooden-tablet sign was placed in the center (Figure 80). This sign was created in about 1928 when the new building construction was finished. At the same time, the original sign from 36 Pell Street was salvaged and moved inside the new building.

The 1928 sign remains at the same location today (Figure 81). This wooden sign is wrapped by iron sheets on three sides in order to fasten it onto the cornice, which also helps to protect the back of the sign from weathering. With its large scale, this red sign dominates the building’s facade, showing the power and spirit of the Lin Sing Association. Because the sign is placed on the projecting cornice of the second floor, it is easy for people to observe on the street, even though the tablet is parallel to the facade rather than tilted forward. The traditional way of placing the sign under the eave is not suitable here since the depth of the cornice is limited by the

---

74 The balcony was designed by Clark. The archways are on the same plane as the facade, so they should be a part of the facade that Clark designed. It is unsure whether the tiled cornice was designed by Clark or built by the association.
fire escapes and the story is too low to accommodate the large sign. This placement of the sign is unique, but still coordinates with the other Chinese architectural elements to express the sense of Chinese design.

Unlike many other associations that lost their previous signs during relocations, the Lin Sing Association preserved its old sign from 36 Pell Street as a historic symbol of the association when moving to the new headquarters. The scale of the sign, which was suitable for hanging in the interior hall, might have contributed to the preservation of this historic sign as well. Although the interior space of the headquarters has been altered several times, the sign is always placed at an important, central location in the gathering hall (*Figure 82*). At present, the interior sign is still treated as the most important symbol of the Lin Sing Association, while the exterior sign is somewhat neglected. The interior environment helps to protect the old sign, while the later, exterior sign deteriorates in the outside environment. Because the exterior sign was badly deteriorated, it was repainted in 2010, which made it much brighter. However, the repainting was carelessly conducted since the red surface is not smooth and the gilt characters are covered by a darker paint (*Figure 83*).

The Lin Sing Association preserves two signs with great historic value in Manhattan’s Chinatown. The generations of these signs reflect the development of this influential Chinatown association. Currently, the exterior sign helps to identify the association’s headquarters building and indicates the location of the association, while the interior sign is recognized as the most important symbol of the association. The interior one is well preserved, while the exterior one is
suffering from deterioration and poor treatment. Although it is the environment that mainly affects the conditions of the signs, the association’s attitude towards the signs also determines how well the signs are preserved.

In a traditional Chinese architecture context, wooden-tablet signs are usually protected from weathering by flared eave. The current exterior sign for the Lin Sing Association, however, is exposed directly to sunlight, rain and wind, causing it to deteriorate at a faster rate. In addition, the repainting conducted in 2010, though helping protect the wood material of the tablet, has changed the appearance of this important historic sign. Thus, it is necessary to carry out a restoration and regular maintenance of the sign. Conservators specialized in conservation of traditional Chinese signage could be invited from Mainland China or Taiwan to restore the sign to its original color and design a maintenance plan for the sign. Then the Lin Sing Association should carry out maintenance on a regular basis with the guidance of conservators.
4.2 On Leong Chinese Merchants Association

The On Leong Chinese Merchants Association, commonly known as the On Leong Tong (安良堂), is one of the most influential fraternal societies in the United States and the most powerful merchant association in the New York Metropolitan area. It is hard to tell the accurate time when the On Leong Tong was formed, but some Chinese records indicate that the On Leong Tong was founded by Situ Meitang and his fellows from the Chee Kung Tong in 1893, and American studies show that the On Leong Tong had already existed in New York’s Chinatown before 1899.75

From the late 1880s, the tongs in New York’s Chinatown became active as Chinatown experienced rapid expansion, disputes between different interest groups could not be resolved peacefully, and illicit operations such as the “immigration slot racket” were needed to help Chinese laborers enter the United States.76 The On Leong Tong and Hip Sing Tong became the strongest tongs in New York, and were well known to American society because of their periodic tong wars before the 1930s. Since these two associations gained very bad reputations as tongs, they changed their names to substitute the word “tong” in about 1930. The On Leong Tong changed its name to “On Leong Gong Shang Zong Hui” (安良工商總會), which meant On Leong Merchants Association; and the Hip Sing Tong changed its name to “Hip Sing Gong Hui”


(協勝公會), which meant Hip Sing Public Association. Although the nature of these associations was not changed, the new names were appropriate to the character of each group’s members. Most of the On Leong Tong’s members were in profitable businesses, while many of Hip Sing Tong’s members were laundrymen, laborers or seamen.  

The On Leong Tong dominated Mott and Bayard streets while the Hip Sing Tong dominated Pell and Doyers streets. The author’s investigation traces the On Leong Tong’s headquarters to three locations which are all on Mott Street. Before 1919, the On Leong Tong’s headquarters was located on the top floor of 14 Mott Street. Although when the On Leong Tong’s headquarters was set up here is not known, a New York Tribune article in 1900 indicated that the headquarters had been here before 1900. The article reported that, on February 12th, 1990, the On Leong Tong gave a dinner for its American business, political and other friends at 14 Mott Street to mark the closing of the New Year festivities. This building was just south of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association headquarters building at 16 Mott Street, while the Lee’s Family Association headquarters was located on the other side of the CCBA headquarters. A photo before 1914 shows the three buildings at 14 to 18 Mott Street when these associations’  

77 Virginia Heyer, “Patterns of Social Organization in New York City’s Chinatown” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1953), 95. The change of name discussed here is the Chinese name, which is related to the name on signage. In English, On Leong Tong adopted the title “Merchant Association” at an earlier date. In a 1900 New York Tribune article, the association was referred to as On Leong Tong Chinese Merchants’ Club (“The On Leong Tong Dinner,” New-York Tribune (1900-1910), February 13, 1900, 6); and in a 1919 New Building record (NB 278-19), the On Leong Tong Chinese Merchants’ Association. It seems that the association just eliminated the word “Tong” from their English name at some point.  

headquarters were all located here (Figure 84). The On Leong Tong had a much more elaborate balcony than the other associations. The balcony was decorated with woodcarvings, which were usually only adopted by high-end Chinese restaurants. The woodcarvings, however, were not in Chinese style, since there was an eagle in the center and cartouches on either side. In the photo, a Chinese character, 良, can be clearly seen inside the balcony. It is very likely a character on the sign for the On Leong Tong. This sign was vertical and placed on the right side of the doorway. A sign that was neither horizontal nor over the doorway was rare among the early signs of associations in New York’s Chinatown.

In 1919, the On Leong Tong demolished a four-story building at 41 Mott Street to construct its new headquarters building (Figure 85). The building was designed by Robert R. Rahmann and included some Chinese architectural features. Red lattice patterns painted on a green background were adopted on the roof, balcony and spandrel panels. A small octagonal pavilion, which also looked like a single-story pagoda, was placed on top of the building. No sign of the On Leong Tong is evident on this headquarters building.

On November 8th, 1950, an outbreak of fireworks and the drumming music of the dragon dance marked the opening of the new On Leong Chinese Merchants Association headquarters building at the southwest corner of Mott and Canal streets. The New York Times described this building as a “handsome Chinese-American styled building, topped with a lighted,
three-roofed pagoda.” \(^{79}\) The top structure was designed in the form of a tower over the entrance gate of a Chinese city wall rather than in the form of a pagoda (Figure 86).

This new headquarters building was designed by Andrew J. Thomas, a famous and important architect who designed millions of dollars worth of housing projects for John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in New York City and popularized the garden apartment. \(^{80}\) Thomas designed numbers of model projects that aimed at improving housing conditions by incorporating landscaped gardens into the apartment complexes, such as the Dunbar Apartments in Harlem, the Thomas Garden Apartments in the Bronx, and the Towers, the Chateau and Linden Court in Jackson Heights, Queens. The Thomas Garden Apartments, which bears his name, was designed with a carefully planned Japanese garden that led people to all of the units through a series of Japanese-garden elements, including a course of running water, charming bridges and concrete lanterns. \(^{81}\) Andrew Thomas was an important architect who was able to capture the right expression for each of his designs. As Albert Melniker commented, “He was one who knew his mind and expressed his feeling of architecture… Buildings to him were an expression of what he considered fine.” \(^{82}\)

Thomas referred to the Imperial Palace and city walls in Beijing for the design of the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association headquarters building. “Mr. Thomas said he spent months

---


in research at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the New York Public Library and Northwest Airlines, in St. Paul, Minn., in order to catch the proper atmosphere for translating into the design of the new trade center.” As a result, Thomas’s design showed a prevalence of Chinese motifs and colors on this three-story building and the iconic tower (Figure 87).

The Mott Street front is faced with cream-colored cast stone similar to Mankato stone, and the Canal Street front is faced with red brick. Both facades are enlivened with Chinese-style balconies at the second and third floors (Figure 88). The white balcony rails are similar to those at the Imperial Palace in Beijing. Inside the balconies, red columns are applied, accentuating the orientalism and enriching the cream-colored facade. Roofs with square-end rafters and up-flying wings extend outward above the red columns of the third floor. The same rafters are also applied beneath the balconies to create a similar type of eave for the lower floors. There are corner casement windows on either side of the balconies of the Mott Street front. Another balcony of the same type is located at the tower-level of the Mott Street front, attached to a parapet wall. The roofline corresponds with the tower as well as the facade, resembling the main features of a Chinese city wall.

The tower on the rooftop, though not authentic, has properly designed roofs that are covered with tiles of a golden yellow color and carried by flared overhanging eaves with exposed red and yellow wood rafters. In a drawing published in the New York Times, Thomas even placed

---

84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
a sign on the tower (see Figure 87). This sign was placed in a traditional Chinese way, over the central opening of the first level and under the eave. Thomas’s design of this sign reflected that, in an American architect’s perspective, signage was an important feature in traditional Chinese architecture. This sign designed by Thomas, however, was not adopted by the association.

When the new On Leong Chinese Merchants Association headquarters building was finished in 1950, it displayed a primary sign made of separate gilt, metal characters, “安良工商總會” (Figure 89). This sign was placed above the roof of the third floor on the Mott Street facade. The span between characters and the scale of characters were calculatedly designed so that the sign coordinated with the space between the roof and balcony (Figure 90). In this way, the sign not only identified this building as the association’s headquarters, but also indicated that the headquarters was located on the third floor. There might be two major reasons why the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association adopted this sign instead of the sign designed by Thomas. Firstly, the sign it adopted was of a larger scale and in a better location that helped to identify the building. Secondly, the design of a separate-character sign might have referred to the sign on the main gate of the Nationalist Government Headquarters of the Republic of China in Nanjing (see Figure 49).

A vertical, secondary sign that utilized the same separate characters was later applied above the ground-level entrance leading to the upper floors (see Figure 88). A metal frame was used to make the sign obvious on the building facade. Compared to the primary sign, the vertical
The sign is more visible to people passing the building. It also helps to guide visitors to the floor where the association headquarters is located.

The two signs currently on the building facade are the only extant signs for the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association. The association might have lost its previous signs when it changed its name or relocated its headquarters. This situation makes the primary sign more valuable to the association since it is the association’s sole historic sign. This sign is also important to this iconic Chinese-American building because of the way it was designed to coordinate with the facade. And this sign is significant in Manhattan’s Chinatown because it inaugurated a new era of utilizing separate-character signs on association headquarters buildings. However, this sign is currently experiencing deterioration. The gold paint has almost entirely vanished (Figure 91). It is necessary to have the characters gilded again so as to protect the metal characters from further deterioration and to retrieve the glittery appearance of the sign. Regular maintenance will also be needed to maintain the sign in good condition and to preserve it for the future.
4.3 Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association

The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) of New York has always been recognized as the informal government in Manhattan’s Chinatown, which helps to govern and protect all Chinese people in the New York metropolitan area. As early as 1869, community leaders, such as Zhao Fengying, had planned the formation of an association which could play a leading role and represent all Chinese groups in the New York area.\(^6\) This association was not officially established until 1883 when the imperial court of the Qing dynasty established a consulate in New York City.\(^7\) In 1883, the Zhong Hua Gong Suo (中華公所) officially registered with the Qing government. “Zhong Hua” means China and “Gong Suo” means public place or government office, reflecting the association’s nature as the “City Hall” of Chinatown. In 1890, the association registered with the government of New York State as “The Chinese Charitable and Benevolent Association of the City of New York.”\(^8\) The association then started to take the responsibility of governing Chinatown and its people, mediating disputes between various associations, balancing and controlling the dangerous tong powers, communicating with the local government, and protecting the interests of the local Chinese population.


\(^8\) The English name of the association has been changed. “The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association” is used in this thesis as the contemporary name.
According to the CCBA’s records, the association’s earliest headquarters office was located in the Consulate that the Qing government set up in Manhattan in 1885. In 1888, the CCBA moved its headquarters to a building it purchased at Chatham Square. However, because most of the association’s early documents have been lost, there is no detailed information about the early headquarters.

In 1894, a building at 16 Mott Street was purchased and served as the CCBA headquarters until 1960 (Figure 92). The CCBA only used the third and fourth floors, while the other floors and basement were rented out. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the CCBA also maintained a Joss House in this building for the worship of traditional Chinese deities. According to a photo taken before 1914 (Figure 92), the Joss House was located on the fourth floor since there was an English sign with the words “CHINA TOWN MAIN TEMPLE” attached on the balcony rail. With the expansion of Chinatown in the late nineteenth century, it became a destination for tourists, and its temples, known to non-Chinese as joss houses, was one of the major tourist attractions. This is probably why an English sign for the Joss House at 16 Mott Street was hung on the balcony rail. The balcony, with an altered fire escape and an add-on roof, was similar to those of many other Chinese voluntary associations. At that time, the CCBA’s offices might also have been located on the third floor, although no sign for the association was found to demonstrate this. Both the Joss House and the balconies on the

89 “The Erection of the Chinese Building” Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association Special Issue, 1900, 56.


building facade were eventually removed. A 1929 photo shows a facade without balconies of 16 Mott Street (Figure 93). A tablet sign placed over the central doorway of the top floor then indicated that the CCBA’s offices were located there.92 The sign was placed tilted forward so that passers-by on the street could recognize the characters, 中華公所, on the tablet (Figure 94). Without the envelopment generated by the balcony, this sign identifies the entire building as the CCBA headquarters. It is unfortunate that this early exterior sign for the CCBA no longer exists.

In the late 1920s, the CCBA purchase a building at 60-64 Mott Street to accommodate the New York Chinese School it maintained.93 In 1953, the CCBA decided to use the site of 60-64 Mott Street to build a new headquarters.94 The construction of the new building started in August 1959 so as to ensure the opening on October 10, 1960.95 The Double Ten Day is the National Day of the Republic of China. This new building would also serve as the Chinese Community Center to promote greater friendship among the 40,000 Chinese in the New York metropolitan area, and continue to accommodate the New York Chinese School for children learning Chinese language and culture.96

92 A 1934 building alteration record shows that the CCBA had its offices on the fourth floor and a meeting room on the third floor, and maintained a school on the first floor.
96 Ibid.
Andrew S. Yuen was the chief architect of the new CCBA headquarters building. He was assisted by Lv Weicai and Huang Bingzhao.\textsuperscript{97} They originally designed a pagoda roof that emphasized Chinese features, but the CCBA decided against building this pagoda.\textsuperscript{98} The CCBA headquarters building ultimately became a planar, minimalist Modern structure that used limited Chinese architectural features (\textit{Figure 95}). The major decorative features include a series of window guards shaped in traditional Chinese lattice patterns, two octagonal windows on the top floor, and a cloud-shaped cap over the ground-level entrance. Originally, there were Chinese-style lion sculptures on either side of the ground-level entrance (\textit{Figure 96}). The lion sculptures were later removed (\textit{Figure 97}). By comparing \textit{Figures 95, 96 and 97}, it can also be seen that the guide sign for the CCBA, placed over the ground-level doorway, has been changed, while the primary sign for the CCBA building on the top floor remains.

The primary sign for the CCBA headquarters building bears the calligraphy of Xu Baiyuan, who was the Minister of Finance of the Republic of China from 1954 to 1958 and represented the Republic of China as Executive Director of the International Monetary Fund from 1958 to 1960 (\textit{Figure 98}).\textsuperscript{99} This coincides with the fact that the construction of the CCBA headquarters building was approved and supported by the government of the Republic of


\textsuperscript{98} Braden Phillips, “The Once Invisible City: Chinatown,” \textit{Metropolis} v.9, no.6 (January 1990): 83.

The main body of the sign comprises four separate metal characters, “Zhong Hua Da Lou” (中華大樓), meaning the “Chinese Building” in English. This name represents more than the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (中華公所). It identifies the building not only as the CCBA headquarters building, but also as a building dedicated to serving all Chinese in the New York area. Being a sign that is mainly used to identify the building, the design of the sign is incorporated into the design of the building. The four Chinese characters terminate the four red piers which extend from the second floor to the fourth floor and frame the window bays in an austere way. The characters fill the blank area between the piers and rooftop, like an extension of the piers. In this way, the sign also dominates the building facade.

The CCBA headquarters is located on the second floor, consisting of a gathering hall, a meeting room, a library, and several offices. The gathering hall presents a collection of traditional Chinese wooden-tablet signs, including one sign bearing the name of the CCBA and three signs bearing messages of praise. The interior sign bearing the name of the CCBA is the oldest sign among all association signs in Manhattan’s Chinatown and the most important symbol of the CCBA (Figure 99). This sign, created in 1883 and bearing the calligraphy of Envoy Zheng Zaoru from the Qing government, represents the establishment of the CCBA in 1883. It is currently placed at a central location of the gathering hall, emphasized by two red, decorative columns. The historical photos of the previous headquarters building at 16 Mott Street indicate that this sign was probably never placed outside. The interior environment might have

---

100 “The Erection of the Chinese Building,” 56.
contributed to the maintenance of the bright appearance of the lacquered board and gilt characters.

The other three wooden tablets bearing messages of praised are hung on the secondary walls of the gathering hall (see Figures 75-77). They were sent by the presidents or vice presidents of the Republic of China in 1972, 2000, and 2013. The presidents’ calligraphies help to confirm the status of the CCBA in Manhattan’s Chinatown. Such wooden tablets with messages of praise are not typical functional signs, but in form is a derivative of the architectural wooden-tablet sign, which is still affiliated with building. This kind of sign was extensively applied in traditional Chinese architecture since they could be treated as decorative artwork. The three wooden tablets for the CCBA are decorative objects on the interior walls as well as evidence of the association’s importance to overseas Chinese people. They also reflect the continuation of the culture of traditional Chinese wooden tablets in Manhattan’s Chinatown.

Although the CCBA has lost some previous signs, it still preserves a variety of signs which reflect the importance of the association and its history in different periods. The exterior primary sign and the interior sign bearing the association’s name are important symbols of the CCBA. The wooden-tablet signs bearing messages of praise are rare examples of the decorative traditional Chinese wooden-tablet signage in Manhattan’s Chinatown. Each of these signs has its own values. But they have greater values when they are regarded as a whole, because these signs, which are in diverse forms, present a timeline of the association and imply the continuation of a
specific type of traditional Chinese culture in an overseas Chinese community. This also reveals the importance of the preservation of an association’s signs from different periods.
4.4 Lee’s Family Association

The New York Lee’s Family Association was founded in 1899 by people sharing the surname Lee, so as to govern, assist and protect the Lees living in New York. Since its founding, the association has grown into not only one of the largest and most powerful family associations on the East Coast, but also one of the most influential in the entire United States. The Lee’s Family Association’s headquarters relocated only once. It was not until 1977 that the association moved from 18 Mott Street to its new, modern headquarters building at 41 Mott Street.

Before 1943, when Chinese women were not allowed to join their husbands in America, the Lee’s Family Association consisted of large numbers of bachelor fangs. The fangs, as the basic units of family association, assisted the family association in governing its members, helped keep the members in touch with their families in China, and provided economic support by raising donations. The association itself, however, was responsible for bigger issues, such as adjudicating disputes, holding membership meetings to make major decisions, and celebrating important Chinese festivals and the birthday of their common ancestor, Lao Zi.\textsuperscript{101} Thus, the fangs of the association were like the households, while the headquarters was like an ancestral hall of a patrilineal clan in China. The headquarters was not a social center but a formal place for association business and meetings. It is relatively small, taking a single floor of a tenement building. Although what the Lee’s Family Association’s original headquarters at 18 Mott Street

\footnote{101 The Lee’s Family Association traces its common surname, Lee, to Li Er. Li Er is commonly known by the name Lao Zi, who was the founder of philosophical Taoism and one of the greatest philosophers of the Spring and Autumn period (770B.C. – 476B.C.).}
looked like is unknown, a description of family associations’ headquarters written by Virginia Heyer in 1953 may give an insight into the character of the interior:

In most headquarters there is a large front room which is used for the membership meetings. In this there is a shrine of an important family ancestor, usually a historic figure of an early dynasty. The walls are lined with Chinese style chairs, and large Chinese tables are placed in the center of the room. The walls are decorated with embroideries made by the wives of members and sent from China, and if the association is fortunate it may have one or more Chinese painting. Two or three smaller rooms serve as offices, conference rooms or record rooms. Most associations have a small kitchen where tea is made or food is cooked by the officers or janitors when they are working in the room … most associations hold their banquets not in these headquarters but in restaurants.¹⁰²

Before 1977, the Lee’s Family Association used the second floor of 18 Mott Street for association business (Figure 100). In the beginning, the association rented the floor to serve as its headquarters. It was not until 1924 that the association purchased the building, continuing to use the second floor, while renting out the other parts as apartments and stores. This purchase was made possible by raising ten-thousand-dollar loans from the membership.¹⁰³ The association created a balcony by altering the fire escape and adding a flat, slightly inclined cornice (Figure 101). Under the eave, there was a tilted sign placed in the center of the facade.

In the following decades, the financial power of the Lee’s Family Association gradually grew, and the association began to dominate a considerable number of buildings and shops on

the upper end of Mott Street.\textsuperscript{104} In the late 1970s, the association decided to relocate its headquarters building to its major territory, upper Mott Street. In 1975, the building at 41 Mott Street was purchased from the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association. Instead of erecting a new building, the Lee’s Family Association chose to alter the old six-story building built by the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association in 1919. The Lee’s Family Association’s ambition to have a grand headquarters building was clearly shown through the selection of an architect. It invited Chun Wei Foo, a preeminent Chinese-American architect in New York, to design the alteration. In 1972, Chun Wei Foo, as a partner in the firm of Horowitz & Chun, designed Confucius Plaza, which is an iconic high-rise, middle-income housing project in Manhattan’s Chinatown.

The new headquarters building is a modern structure with white marble facade (\textit{Figure 102}). The sign, consisting of five separate, serpentine-marble tablets embedded on the left side of the facade, extends from the second floor to the sixth floor. The tablets are in the shape of squares with concave corners, and they are as high as the windows. On each tablet is inscribed a gilt Chinese character. These characters comprise the name of the Lee’s Family Association, “Lee Shi Zong Fen Suo” (李氏總分所), which is different from the old name “Lee Shi Gong Suo” (李氏公所). The new name indicates the association’s role in the branches of the Lee Family Association in the United States: while the San Francisco branch takes the leading role over the nation, the New York branch is the leader of the Lee Family Associations on the East

\textsuperscript{104} Kwong, \textit{The New Chinatown}, 89.
Coast. A vertical tablet on the second floor shows that the calligraphy was composed by Lee Man Bun (李文彬), a former chairman of the New York Lee’s Family Association and an active civic leader in the Chinese community. Above the windows on the sixth floor, there are three symmetrically placed, decorative, serpentine-marble tablets carved with phoenix and floral patterns.

There was no doubt that the Lee’s Family Association’s major intention was to address its development and power through its grand sign as well as the distinguished modern facade. Chun Wei Foo, on the other hand, utilized a thoughtful design to help express this message. Although the tablets of the sign are oversize, they are appropriately integrated with the entire facade and are a major decorative feature on the street front. The design of the sign itself respects the forms of traditional Chinese signage, while it was adapted to coordinate with the five-story-high space. The vertical space that the tablets occupy corresponds to the elevator shaft inside so that the sign has independent space unencumbered by windows. The vertical emphasis of the signage is balanced by the horizontal emphasis of the black-framed windows. The top horizontal tablets with decorative carvings also help to moderate and balance the large-scale tablets. The Lee’s Family Association’s headquarters building, thus presents a fine design that incorporates the association’s sign with the building facade by integrating the sign in the design of a modern facade.

The headquarters occupies the sixth floor of the building, while the other parts are rented as residential or commercial space. The headquarters has a similar layout to the old
headquarters of family associations as described by Heyer. There is a large front hall with a shrine of important family ancestors at the back. What is different is that the front hall has become a social center for the members on ordinary days. Members can have tea, chat with their friends, or play mahjong in this front hall. Behind the front hall are several rooms serving as offices and a conference room. In front of the front hall is another open office. On one wall of this office, there is a historic sign of the association inscribed with the old name, “Lee Shi Gong Suo” (李氏公所) (Figure 103). The preface indicates that the sign was created in the winter of 1898, and the postscript shows that the calligraphy was composed by Li Disheng. This sign is probably the one placed in the balcony of the old headquarters at 18 Mott Street. An antithetical couplet with complimentary message, inscribed on two vertical wooden tablets, is hung on both sides of the sign.\textsuperscript{105} Since the appearance of this antithetical couplet is well preserved, it is unsure whether it was once placed outside, although it is likely that the couplet has always been placed along with the historic sign. This couplet was created in 1899 and sent jointly by several fangs. The postscript on the left tablet shows that Nanxi Fang (南溪房), one of the Lee’s Family Association’s fangs, was one of the senders. The information on the sign and couplet together indicates that these objects were probably created to mark and celebrate the establishment of the New York Lee’s Family Association.

\textsuperscript{105} The antithetical couplet is a Chinese literary form that developed from Chinese poetry. It is a pair of lines of poetry which adhere to certain rules, such as correspondence in metrical length and in properties of characters. In traditional Chinese architecture, an antithetical couplet is usually inscribed on two vertical tablets hung on either side of the doorway, which sometimes corresponds to a sign over the doorway.
The old wooden-tablet sign was once a symbol of the association and helped to identify its headquarters. While the current building facade bearing the new sign became the symbol of the association, the old sign lost its major functions. The old sign is no longer an exterior architectural element that identifies the headquarters. However, it still has great historical and symbolic value to the association. As an important item to the association, it is preserved in the interior of the headquarters, appearing as a decorative object on the wall.

The two signs of the Lee’s Family Association, representing two different stages of the association, are both valuable to the association. Although they were created for the same purpose, to identify and indicate the place where the headquarters was located, they are not incompatible. When the new sign assumed the function of identifying the headquarters building, it did not mean that the old sign was no longer needed. The old sign could serve the building in other ways so it was preserved. And the signs coexist and serve the headquarters in different meaningful ways.
Chapter 5: Conclusion: Future of The Signage for Historic Associations

The signs for historic associations in Manhattan’s Chinatown form a special group that is significant to the social development and architectural development of Manhattan’s Chinatown. These signs, as an architectural element, help to indicate the locations of the association headquarters, to identify the association headquarters buildings, to decorate the exteriors or interiors of the association headquarters, or to physically represent these historic associations. They are significant to Manhattan’s Chinatown as important symbols of the historic associations which have supported generations of Chinese immigrants and reinforced the development of Manhattan’s Chinatown into the most influential Chinatown on the East Coast of the United States. They are significant as an application of a specific type of Chinese cultural resource in an American context. This Chinese cultural resource was introduced from China by the early Chinese immigrants and developed in the special architectural environment of Manhattan’s Chinatown.

The exterior signs are also significant as an architectural element that enriches Chinatown architecture and, in coordination with other Chinese architectural elements, contributes to the architectural development in Manhattan’s Chinatown. Originating from traditional Chinese wooden-tablets signs, these signs evolved over time as the associations changed, absorbing new features from other types of signage while retaining some features of traditional Chinese wooden-tablet signage. In this process, the interaction of these signs with
building facades also changed and evolved, which makes the signs a special architectural feature to Manhattan’s Chinatown. The early traditional Chinese wooden tablets applied on building facades reflect the initial efforts of the associations to adapt traditional Chinese signage to New York’s building environment for the purpose of indicating their locations in multi-story tenement buildings as well as displaying Chinese architectural features along with other adapted Chinese architectural elements. Even though some of these signs no longer function as signs that identify a specific place as the association headquarters, they are still important symbols of the historic associations. The later evolved exterior signs reflect the associations’ new approaches to applying signs to their building facades in order to demonstrate their presence. At the same time, the signs present new interactions with buildings; they are the products of development, change and new demands. Many associations developed and became capable of purchasing their own headquarters buildings, so that they were in need of signs in new forms to not only indicate the locations of their headquarters but also demonstrate their ownership of the buildings. In this situation, signs that extend over the entire facade, including the signs blended into building facades and those utilizing separate metal characters to dominate the building facades, were developed and became popular in more recent signage applications. Signs in tablet forms, but made of new materials, were employed, reflecting the fact that the associations still fully respected the forms of traditional Chinese signage but were willing to use newly available materials and techniques for manufacturing their signs. The separate-tablet signs were developed to satisfy the associations’ new demand for flexibility and aesthetic. Even the “commercial signs”
were developed as a result of the associations’ demand for attracting the attention of passers-by among the crowded commercial signs.

However, the significance and availability of the signage for historic associations in Manhattan’s Chinatown are not limited to the Chinese population, because it ultimately reflects a piece of the history of America. Even though the Chinese characters on the signs are generally not legible to non-Chinese, the forms and colors of the signs and the interactions of the signs with architecture, which have been discussed and interpreted in this thesis to help non-Chinese to perceive and appreciate these signs, are legible to anyone from any cultural background. It was the author’s major intention that this thesis would inspire the appreciation of this signage by both Chinese and non-Chinese through the exploration of the history, evolution and significance of this signage, and result in the preservation of these historic signs.

While this group of signs keeps developing because of the need for new signs as associations grow and relocate, investigation into the history and current condition of historic signs finds that many important historical signs have been lost due to change of association names and relocation of association headquarters, and many extant signs are suffering from deterioration. This is a result of the fact that their significance has not been fully appreciated. Among this group of signs identified in this thesis, there are important examples with high historical, aesthetic and social value, which ought to be properly preserved for future generations, as a reflection of the history of the Chinese in New York and as examples of the cultural heritage of Chinese artwork in America. The value of a sign is determined by its history, the calligraphy it
bears, and how its form and interaction with the building were designed. Therefore, based on the research into these signs, this thesis hopes to set a series of criteria to help judge the significance of an individual sign, so as to suggest to the historic associations which signs to preserve. If a sign meets one or more of the following criteria, then it will be determined significant. Criteria B, C, D and E are considered independent of the date of a sign.

- **Criterion A: Age**

  A sign will be determined significant if it was created before 1943 because of its historical value. In 1943, Congress passed a measure to repeal the discriminatory exclusion laws against Chinese immigrants and to establish an immigration quota for China of around 105 visas per year.\(^{106}\) 1943 is a turning point for the Chinese population as well as the historic Chinese associations in the United States. A sign made before 1943, which is more than fifty years old, is an important historical object from the old era.

  Examples:

  - The interior sign of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, created in 1883 (see Figure 71).
  - The exterior sign of the Chin Family Association, created in 1900 (see Figure 18).
  - The exterior sign of the Lin Sing Association, created in around 1928 (see Figure 24).

• **Criterion B: Calligraphy**

A sign will be determined significant if it bears calligraphy of a prominent calligrapher, an important figure in China, or an important Chinatown leader who contributed to the development of Manhattan’s Chinatown. Calligraphy of such persons contributes to the artistic value and social status of a sign.

Examples:

- The exterior sign of the Chin Family Association, bearing the calligraphy of Chen Botao, a prominent scholar and official at the end of the Qing dynasty (see *Figure 18*).

- An exterior wooden-tablet sign of the Moy’s Family Association, which is over the ground-level doorway (see *Figure 36*). It bears the calligraphy of Yu Youren, an outstanding calligrapher and famous Kuomingtang (i.e. Taiwanese) politician.

- The exterior sign for the Lee’s Family Association headquarters building, bearing the calligraphy of Lee Man Bun, an active civic leader in Manhattan’s Chinatown (see *Figure 102*).

• **Criterion C: Literary Creation in the Name or Message**

A sign will be determined significant if it is a primary sign of an association and artistic literary creation is applied in the name of the association, or if it is a tablet with a message which was composed with artistic literary creation.
Examples:

- The exterior and interior signs of the Lin Sing Association, the name of which expresses the spirit of unity of the association by the term, “Lin Sing” 聯成, meaning formed by unity (see Figures 81-82).
- The primary sign of the Lung Kong Tin Yee Association, the name of which commemorates the brotherhood of their common ancestors (see Figure 42).
- The interior wooden tablets with messages of praise of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. These messages are four-character Chinese idioms composed with artistic literary creation (see Figures 75-77).

• **Criterion D: Design of the Form of A Sign**

A sign will be determined significant if the design of its form embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type or period, possesses high aesthetic value, or makes a remarkable contribution to the ongoing development process of Chinatown signage.

Examples:

- The primary exterior sign of the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association (see Figure 90). This sign inaugurated a new era of utilizing separate-character signs on association headquarters buildings in Manhattan’s Chinatown, and embodies the distinctive characteristics of this type of sign.
o The exterior sign of the Hok Shan Society (see Figure 60). This sign possesses high aesthetic value, and embodies the distinctive characteristics of the separate-tablet signs which are designed in an evolved style with dynamic tablet forms.

• **Criterion E: Design of the Interaction with Building**

  A sign will be determined significant if the design of its interaction with the building is innovative and possesses high aesthetic value, or embodies the distinctive characters of a type or period.

  Examples:

  o The exterior sign of the Soo Yuen Association (see Figure 30). This sign, designed in coordination with a balcony which consists of an altered fire escape and add-on roof, embodies the distinctive characters of this type of interaction of a sign and building facade.

  o The exterior English sign on the top of the headquarters building of the Chinese Free Masons (see Figure 38). This sign is a pioneer and representative of the signs which are embedded in the building facade to be a substantial part of the facade for the purpose of claiming the ownership of a building.

  o The exterior sign for the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association headquarters building (see Figure 95). This sign embodies the distinctive characters of the
separate-characters signs: the sign can be flexibly designed to corporate with the
design of the building.

• **Criterion F: Event**

A sign will be determined significant if it was created to commemorate a special event
of the association or Manhattan’s Chinatown. This special event includes the formation of an
association, but not the opening of a new building.

Examples:

- The black wooden-tablet exterior guide sign of the Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association,
  which was created to commemorate the contributions of other East Coast Hoy Sun
  Ning Yung Associations to the purchase of a building (see *Figure 68*).

- An interior wooden tablet with message of praise of the Chinese Consolidated
  Benevolent Association, which was sent by President Ma Ying-jeou (see *Figure 77*).
  It commemorates the first official visit of a president of the Republic of China to the

The significant individual signs then should be preserved along with the other
architectural elements which they are designed in coordination with, and maintained in good
condition by the associations as far as possible. The associations could work with conservators
specializing in traditional Chinese wooden-tablet signage conservation, such as experts from the
Guangdong Cultural Relic Bureau in Mainland China and the National Palace Museum in Taipei, local object conservators, and experienced sign manufacturers to conduct restoration of deteriorated signs and regular maintenance of the significant signs. The conservators from China could help to restore deteriorated signs, make maintenance plans and train local conservators for wooden-tablet signage conservation, and local conservators and experienced sign manufacturers could be involved in regular maintenance.

In cases of replacement of a significant extant sign with a new sign because of relocation or change of name, the association could try to preserve the sign in the interior of its headquarters as an historical object and decoration to the interior hall. If it is not feasible for the association to preserve the sign by itself, the association could seek support from Chinese-focused or city-wide museums, such as the Museum of Chinese in America in Chinatown, Museum of the City of New York and New-York Historical Society, to save the sign and exhibit the sign as an important object to Manhattan’s Chinatown. The Museum of Chinese in America has been collecting old Chinatown shop signs, and helping with saving the association signs would as well enhance its signage collection.

On the other hand, the preservation of the signs, which are an architectural element affiliated with architecture, could rely on the preservation of buildings. The signs which are designed in coordination with finely designed buildings ought to be preserved along with the buildings as far as possible. There are currently no New York City Landmarks in Chinatown that specifically reflect the history of the Chinese community. However, there are association
buildings eligible to be designated for a special aesthetic, cultural or social value. The On Leong Chinese Merchants Association building, designed by a prominent architect, exhibits distinctive and well-designed architectural features of the Chinese community, and thus possesses great aesthetic and cultural value. The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association building, as the “City Hall” of Chinatown, has a special social value to the development of this special ethnic enclave of the city. The Lee’s Family Association building, incorporating Chinese signage and patterns into the design of the entire facade, embodies a special cultural and aesthetic interest as part of architectural development of Manhattan’s Chinatown. Efforts need to be made to propose these buildings for local landmark designation, while the signs for these association buildings should be preserved as important symbols of the buildings.

In terms of interpreting and promoting the signage on historic association buildings in Manhattan’s Chinatown, for the benefit of both residents of this Chinese community and visitors, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) and the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA), which are responsible for preserving Chinese cultural heritage and propagating Chinese culture, should take the leading roles. In order to increase awareness of this important architectural feature of Chinatown, they should share the history of these signs and interpret them as Chinese signage in the context of American architecture. After the passages of the Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act of 1943 and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the influx of new immigrants and investments resulted in the expansion of Manhattan’s Chinatown and the growth in the financial power of larger associations. However, as the community
becomes larger and more diverse and is no longer isolated from the larger society, new immigrants depend less on the historic associations and American-born Chinese rarely join the historic associations. This has led to the waning importance of many smaller historic associations, as well as the general decline in the function of these associations in the community. As the importance of the historic associations in the community decreases, so does community members’ attention to the associations. Therefore, it is necessary to stimulate the appreciation of the signs by Chinese community members as well as interested visitors. Correspondingly, the associations will be more aware of the need to preserve their signs because of external attention and interest.

To realize the interpretation and promotion, the CCBA and MOCA could publish brochures, which introduce the history of selected signs along with the history of the associations and features of various signage categories, under joint efforts and with assistance from other historic associations. These brochures could be distributed among the community members, and displayed at MOCA, and at stores and restaurants for interested visitors to pick up. The same contents could be published on the websites of the CCBA and MOCA. MOCA could hold special exhibitions focusing on the historic associations, while displaying a few physical signs borrowed from the associations as well as historic photos of association buildings and signs. Walking tours introducing history, architecture and signage of the associations could also be organized by the CCBA and MOCA, and walking tours focusing on the calligraphy of the signs could be offered to students learning calligraphy in the New York Chinese School.
This thesis, focusing on signage in Manhattan’s Chinatown, wishes to benefit future studies and preservation of the signage for historic association buildings in other Chinatowns. In other North American Chinatowns there is signage for similar historic association buildings which developed in their own architectural and social contexts (Figures 104-107). In general, the signage for Chinatown historic associations is a symbol of the spirits of mutual aid and unity of the overseas Chinese people. Meanwhile, the signage in an individual Chinatown is a reflection of the history of the local Chinese population as well as a specific architectural feature of these Chinatowns. It is hoped that the criteria set for determining significance of individual signs in Manhattan’s Chinatown and the preservation recommendations could also become a reference for preserving the important signs in other Chinatowns.
Figure 1: A sign from the fifteenth year of the Jiaqing Period (1810). The preface on the right side shows the receiver’s name (golden characters), and the postscript on the left side indicates the sender (golden characters), who was the calligrapher as well, and the date of composition (black characters).¹

Figure 2: A sign from the second year of the Xianfeng Period (1852). This sign is inscribed with an inspiring message of “diligence.” It indicates that the owner employed diligence as a discipline for himself, and as an edification for his descendants.²

Figure 3: The “Jin Sheng Yu Zheng” memorial gate in the Temple and Cemetery of Confucius in Qufu, Shandong Province. The inscription commends the greatness of Confucius’s teachings.³

Figure 4: A sixteenth-century inscribed wooden tablet is hung in front of the bracket sets of the fifteenth-century Golden Hall at Wudang Mountains.⁴


⁴ Lin, Famous Tablets in China, 215.
Figure 5: A mid-nineteenth-century inscribed wooden tablet is hung over the doorway of a late-eighteenth-century residential building in Shanxi Province

Figure 6: Horizontal inscribed wooden tablets of various periods are hung on the beams of the exterior porch of the twelfth-century Hall of the Holy Mother

5 Lin, Famous Tablets in China, 175.
6 “Bian’e of the Shengmu Hall of the Song Dynasty,” last modified February 8, 2011, http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:%E5%AE%8B%E4%BB%A3%E5%9C%A3%E6%AF%8D%E6%AE%BF%E5%8C%BE%E9%A2%9D.JPG.
Figure 7: A late-sixteenth-century inscribed wooden tablet is hung on the back wall, in the center of a hall of the Zhou’s Ancestral Hall in Suichang County, Zhejiang Province.\(^7\)

Figure 8: Inscribed wooden tablets are hung on the beams in the interior of the main hall of a late-sixteenth-century residential architectural complex.\(^8\)

\(^7\) Lin, *Famous Tablets in China*, 219.
Figure 9: The Chen’s Ancestral Hall in Panyu, Guangdong Province

8 Ibid., 154.

9 Yang Yang, “The Architectural Form Study of Ancestral Halls in Canton” (Master’s Thesis, South China University of Technology, 2013), 70.
Figure 10: The Chen’s Ancestral Hall’s main gate

Figure 11: The Chen’s Ancestral Hall’s memorial gateway

Figure 12: The sign in the main hall of the Chen’s Ancestral Hall


11 Ibid.

12 “The Chen’s Ancestral Hall in Shilou, Panyu,”
Figure 13: An 1887 map of the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong Province shows the counties in the Siyi district, Sanyi district and Zhongshan County. The blue ones are in the Siyi district, and the red ones are in the Sanyi district.  

---

Figure 14: A map showing the southeastern coastal provinces of China, which were the major geographic sources of Chinese labor to the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century. The majority of these Chinese laborers were from Guangdong Province, while the proportion of people from Fujian Province was much smaller.¹⁴

Table 1: 40 associations in the study group

(red: Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association; orange: family association; blue: district association; green: merchant association/fraternal society)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Associations</th>
<th>公会 (Chinese Name)</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Hip Sing Association</td>
<td>協勝堂／協勝公會</td>
<td>1861-1874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association</td>
<td>合山寧陽會館</td>
<td>1861-1874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association</td>
<td>美國紐約中華公所</td>
<td>1883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Chinese Free Masons</td>
<td>洪門致公堂</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Leung Chung How Realty Corporation</td>
<td>梁忠孝宗親會</td>
<td>1884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Lung Kong Tin Yee Association</td>
<td>龍岡親義公所</td>
<td>1888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Wong Family Benevolent Association</td>
<td>黃氏宗親會</td>
<td>1890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. On Leong Chinese Merchants Association</td>
<td>安良工商總會</td>
<td>1893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Lee's Family Association</td>
<td>李氏總分所</td>
<td>1899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Lin Sing Association</td>
<td>美東聯成公所</td>
<td>1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Chin Family Association</td>
<td>陳颖川堂/陳氏公所</td>
<td>1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Moy's Family Association</td>
<td>梅氏公所</td>
<td>1875-1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Eng Suey Sun Association</td>
<td>伍胥山公所</td>
<td>1875-1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Jin Lan Association</td>
<td>金蘭公所</td>
<td>1875-1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Hok Shan Society</td>
<td>鶴山公所</td>
<td>1875-1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Tong On Association</td>
<td>東安公所</td>
<td>1910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Soo Yuen Association</td>
<td>淵源公所</td>
<td>1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Tai Pun Residents Association</td>
<td>大鵬同鄉會</td>
<td>1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Tsung Tsin Association</td>
<td>崇正會</td>
<td>1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Tai Look Merchants Association</td>
<td>大陸總商會</td>
<td>1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Yee Shan Benevolent Society</td>
<td>番禺同鄉會</td>
<td>1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Chung Shan Association</td>
<td>中山同鄉會</td>
<td>1921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Gee How Oak Tin Association</td>
<td>至孝篤親公所</td>
<td>1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Sze Kong Association</td>
<td>師公工商總會</td>
<td>1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Hoy Yen Association</td>
<td>海晏同鄉會</td>
<td>1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Yee Fong Toy Association</td>
<td>余風采堂</td>
<td>1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Fay Chaw Merchants' Association</td>
<td>惠州工商會</td>
<td>1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Nam Yang Association</td>
<td>南陽公所</td>
<td>1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Gee Poy Kuo Association</td>
<td>朱沛國堂</td>
<td>1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Chee Tuck Sam Tuck Association</td>
<td>至德三德公所</td>
<td>1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Sam Kiang Charitable Association</td>
<td>三江公所</td>
<td>1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Lum Sai Ho Association</td>
<td>林西河堂</td>
<td>1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Hoy Ping Hong Hing Association</td>
<td>開平同鄉會</td>
<td>1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Nam Shum Association</td>
<td>南順同鄉會</td>
<td>1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Sun Wei Association</td>
<td>新會同鄉會</td>
<td>1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Yan Ping Association</td>
<td>恩平同鄉會</td>
<td>1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Fung Loon Benevolent Association</td>
<td>鳳倫公所</td>
<td>1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Chew Lun Association</td>
<td>昭倫公所</td>
<td>1941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Fukien American Association</td>
<td>福建同鄉會</td>
<td>1942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. Goon Shee Association</td>
<td>阮氏公所</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 15: The Chinese Tuxedo Restaurant at the corner of Doyers Street and the Bowery. Located on the second floor, it had an ornate balcony with Chinese wooden carvings of dragons and lattices.\(^{15}\)

Figure 16: A scene on Mott Street (c.1895): most top-floor fire escapes were altered into balconies with curved or flat cornices by the associations. There were signs under the cornices.\(^{16}\)


\(^{16}\) Image source: New York Public Library Digital Gallery.
Figure 17: Balcony of the Chin Family Association on the fifth floor of 10 Pell Street.

Figure 18: Sign of the Chin Family Association at 10 Pell Street. Main text: “Chen Shi Gong Suo” (陳氏公所); “Shi” means surname; the characters on the sign were written from right to left, which was an old Chinese sequence of writing. Preface on the right side indicates the date of creation: 1900; postscript on the left side indicates the calligrapher: Chen Botao.
Figure 19: Balcony of the Chin Family Association at 10 Pell Street. The sign is located in the center of the facade, over the central doors, and tilted forward.

Figure 20: Chen Botao (1855-1930), calligrapher of the sign of the Chin Family Association, a prominent scholar and official at the end of the Qing dynasty (1892-1911).  

Figure 21: The balcony with altered fire escaped and add-on roof for the Chin Family Association at 10 Pell Street (Photo: 1933).¹⁸

Figure 22: On the top floor of 36 Pell Street, there is the balcony and sign of the Lin Sing Association (c.1903).\textsuperscript{19}

Figure 23: The balcony of the Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association at 5 Mott Street; there is a sign under the cornice (c.1909).\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{19} Image source: Library of Congress.
\textsuperscript{20} Image source: New York Public Library Digital Gallery.
Figure 24: The Lin Sing Association’s exterior sign, sitting on the central location of the cornice. Text: “Lin Sing Gong Suo” (聯成公所), meaning Lin Sing Association. The wooden tablet is surrounded by iron sheets to fasten it on the cornice (49 Mott Street).

Figure 25: The stamp indicating the sign was made by a shop called “Heng Lin Dian” (恒林店) in Guangdong Province.

Figure 26: Two stamps with characters “眾志” “成城”, which comprise a Chinese idiom that means unity is strength.
Figure 27: A Hip Sing Association sign in the traditional Chinese wooden tablet form. Text: “Hip Sing Gong Hui” (協勝公會), meaning Hip Sing Public Association (16 Pell Street).

Figure 28: In a 1940s tax photo, there is a sign under the eave (16 Pell Street).\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{21} Image source: 1940s Tax Photo, Municipal Archives, New York City Department of Records.
Figure 29: Signs on the Hip Sing Association building at 16 Pell Street. The inside one is the wooden-tablet sign, while the outside one is a metal sign and probably the same one as in Figure 28.

Figure 30: The sign of the Soo Yuen Association at 68 Mott Street, consisting of black background and golden characters for the association’s name, and located over a central doorway and under the cornice. Text: “Soo Yuen Gong Suo” (溯源公所)
Figure 31: The metal roof of the Soo Yuen Association incorporates Chinese architectural elements such as the Chinese-style roof and the bracket sets between the columns and eave.

Figure 32: The Port Arthur Restaurant located on the second floor of 7-9 Mott Street had a cornice with Chinese roofs. The photo was taken circa 1899.  

Figure 33: A late-1950s photo dimly shows a balcony that is the same as the current balcony of the Soo Yuen Association (68 Mott Street).\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{23} Ostrow, Manhattan’s Chinatown, Postcard History: New York, 41.
Figure 34: Moy’s Family Association headquarters building. The primary sign is over the central window of the second floor of 53 Bayard Street.

Figure 35: The tablet has a simple border of the same color as the characters. A fluorescent lamp of the same length as the tablet is installed above. Text: “Mei Shi Gong Suo” (梅氏公所)
Figure 36: An exterior sign of the Moy’s Family Association at 53 Bayard Street. The postscript indicates that the calligraphy was created by Yu Youren in 1957.

Figure 37: The original calligraphy work by Yu Youren, after which the sign was reproduced by the manufacturer.
Figure 38: A sign for New York’s Chinese Free Masons on the top of its headquarters building at 22 Mott Street.

Figure 39: On the top is a serpentine sign for the Sam Kiang Charitable Association headquarters building at 25 Division Street (c.1956).
Figure 40: The sign of the Lee’s Family Association extends vertically along the facade of its headquarters building at 41 Mott Street (1977).

Figure 41: On the top is a white-marble sign of the Tai Pun Residents Association at 51 Bayard Street, and on top of the second floor balcony is a sign indicating the association’s location (1982). The calligraphies were composed by different people.
Figure 42: On the top is a serpentine sign of the Lung Kong Tin Yee Association headquarters buildings at 23 Division Street (1983).

Figure 43: A building on Canal Street, it has an English sign embedded on the top of the facade.
Figure 44: A sign embedded above the doorway of the Moy’s Family Association headquarters building at 53 Bayard Street (c.1972).

Figure 45: A sign embedded on the doorway of the Leung Chung How Realty Corporation headquarters building at 76 Mott Street (c.1970s). The sign only has a single word “Leung” (梁), presenting the family name of this association.
Figure 46: On the top is the separate-character sign of the Leung Chung How Realty Corporation headquarters building at 76 Mott Street.

Figure 47: The sign of the Fukien American Association headquarters building extends vertically throughout the building (125 East Broadway).
Figure 48: Various English commercial signs with individual letters on Broadway in New York, before 1910.24

![Broadway Signage](image1.png)

Figure 49: Separate-character sign on the main gate of the Nationalist Government Headquarters of the Republic of China in Nanjing, c.1946.25

![Nanjing Sign](image2.png)


Figure 50: The sign “東安公所” on the second floor of the Tong On Association headquarters building was modeled after calligraphy work of a Hong Kong calligrapher, Ye Guansheng (27 Division Street).

Figure 51: The sign of the Wong Family Benevolent Association (24 Bowery).

Figure 52: The vertical sign is for the Fay Chaw Merchants’ Association headquarters building at 65 East Broadway.
Figure 53: The plastic sign of the Yee Fong Toy Association on the second floor of 81 Bayard Street.

Figure 54: The Sze Kong Association’s metal sign with green tablet and yellow characters on top of the windows of the second floor (31 Division Street).
Figure 55: A sign for the Gee How Oak Tin Association’s headquarters building on the top floor of 62 Bayard Street.

Figure 56: Top sign: Jin Lan Association (金蘭公所); Middle sign: Sun Wei Association (新會同鄉會); Lower sign: Nam Shum Association (南順同鄉會).\(^{26}\)

\(^{26}\) Image source: 1940s Tax Photo, Municipal Archives, New York City Department of Records.
Figure 57: Left sign: Yee Fong Toy Association (余風采武溪公所); right sign: Chew Lun Association (昭倫公所). 27

Figure 58: Left sign: Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association (台山寧陽會館); right sign: Lung Kong Tin Yee Association (龍岡親義公所). 28


Figure 59: The sign of the Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association headquarters building at 33 Mott Street, extending vertically at the angle of the building (1986).

Figure 60: The right sign for the Hok Shan Association has separate tablets (1991; 42 Mott Street)
Figure 61: The tablets of the Hoy Yen Association’s sign are attached to the rails of fire escape (1997; 16 Mott Street).

Figure 62: The sign of the Gee Poy Guo Association is on top of its headquarters building at 156 Canal Street.
Figure 63: The green sign is for the Hip Sing Association at 16 Pell Street. It looks like the commercial signs surrounding it.

Figure 64: The Hoy Yen Association’s plastic guide sign beside the ground-level doorway (16 Mott Street).

Figure 65: The Tong On Association’s metal guide sign over the ground-level doorway (17 Division Street).
Figure 66: The Chew Lun Association’s guide sign made of stickers over the ground-level doorway; it contains both the Chinese and English names of the association (94 Mott Street).

Figure 67: The Lin Sing Association’s stone Chinese sign and English metal sign over the ground-level doorway (49 Mott Street).

Figure 68: The Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association’s black wooden sign over the ground-level doorway (created in the early 1950s; 33 Mott Street).
Figure 69: The interior sign of the Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association, placed in the center of a main wall of the gathering hall (33 Mott Street).

Figure 70: An interior sign of the Leung Chung How Realty Corporation, placed on the top of a wall in the stairway leading to the headquarters offices (76 Mott Street).
Figure 71: The interior sign of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association at 62 Mott Street (1883).

Figure 72: The interior sign of the Lee’s Family Association at 41 Mott Street (1898).
Figure 73: The interior sign of the Lin Sing Association at 46 Mott Street (1902).

Figure 74: The interior sign of the Tsung Tsin Association at 1 Division Street (1935).
Figure 75: The sign sent by President Chiang Kai-shek to the CCBA in 1972. Main text: “Tuan Jie Bao Guo” (團結報國), praising the CCBA for helping unite Chinese people and dedicating itself to the home country (62 Mott Street).

Figure 76: The sign sent by Chairman Lien Chan to the CCBA in 2000. Main text: “Ze Pi Huan Yu” (澤被寰宇), expressing how the CCBA benefits the whole world (62 Mott Street).
Figure 77: The sign sent by President Ma Ying-jeou to the CCBA in 2013. Main text: “Liang Gai Hua Guo” (亮蓋華國), honoring the CCBC as an association important to China (62 Mott Street).
Figure 78: A balcony with the sign of the Lin Sing Association on the top floor of 36 Pell Street in 1903.  

Figure 79: The old sign from 36 Pell Street is now a central focus of the gathering hall of the Lin Sing Association’s current headquarters. Under the sign are flags of the United State and the Republic of China, and a statue of Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of the Republic of China.

29 Image source: Library of Congress.
Figure 80: A 1940s tax photo shows the Lin Sing Association’s headquarters building with its exterior sign.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{30} Image source: 1940s tax photo, Municipal Archives, New York City Department of Records.
Figure 81: The facade of the Lin Sing Association’s headquarters building in 2014.

Figure 82: A historic photo showing the old sign located at a central position of the gathering hall of the Lin Sing Association’s headquarters. The arrangement of this interior space is different from the current one (Figure 79).\textsuperscript{31}

Figure 83: A photo taken in 1999 shows that the Chinese characters on the current exterior sign for the Lin Sing Association was gilt (47 Mott Street).\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{32} Image source: New York Public Library Digital Gallery.
Figure 84: Before 1919, the On Leong Tong headquarters was located at 14 Mott Street (at right). A Chinese character, 良, which might be on a sign, can be clearly seen inside the balcony on the floor. Beside the building was the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association headquarters building at 16 Mott Street. On the other side of the CCBA headquarters building was 18 Mott Street, where the Lee’s Family Association was located (Photo: before 1914).\(^{33}\)

---

\(^{33}\) Image source: George P. Hall & Son Photograph collection, New-York Historical Society.
Figure 85: The On Leong Chinese Merchants Association was located at 41 Mott Street between 1919 and 1950. This photo was taken in the 1960s. The building was altered in the late 1970s to be the headquarters building for the Lee’s Family Association.34

Figure 86: The On Leong Chinese Merchants Association headquarters building at 83 Mott Street, the southwest corner of Mott and Canal streets.\textsuperscript{35}

Figure 87: A sketch shows Andrew J. Thomas’s design for the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association headquarters building.\textsuperscript{36}

Figure 88: The Mott Street facade of the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association headquarters building. There is a primary separate-character sign above the roof of the third floor. On the left is a vertical, secondary sign utilizing the same separate characters over the ground-level entrance.
Figure 89: This 1951 photo indicates that the separate-character sign was already on the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association headquarters building facade when the building was finished in 1950.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{37} Chinese American Weekly, v.10, n.428, February 8, 1951.
Figure 90: The separate-character sign with calculatedly designed scale of characters and span between characters. This photo also shows that the characters are gilt.  

Figure 91: The gold paint on the primary sign for the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association has almost entirely vanished.
Figure 92: The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, in the middle, was located at 16 Mott Street. On the top balcony rail is a white board with the words “CHINA TOWN MAIN TEMPLE.” (Photo: before 1914).  

---

Figure 93: The CCBA headquarters building (16 Mott Street) in 1929.\textsuperscript{40}

Figure 94: The tablet sign placed over the central doorway of the top floor showed the Chinese characters “中華公所” (16 Mott Street).\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{40} Image source: New York Public Library Digital Gallery.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
Figure 95: The CCBA headquarters building at 62 Mott Street. It is a planar, minimalist Modern structure that uses only limited Chinese architectural features.
Figure 96: An old photo showing the CCBA headquarters building at 62 Mott Street.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{42} Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association Special Issue, 1900, cover.
Figure 97: The ground-level entrance of the CCBA headquarters in 2014.

Figure 98: The primary sign for the CCBA headquarters building, the signature on the left side indicates that the calligraphy was composed by Xu Baiyuan.
Figure 99: The interior sign bearing the name of the CCBA is placed at a central location of the gathering hall, emphasized by two red, decorative columns (1883).
Figure 100: The Lee’s Family Association, at left, was located on the second floor of 18 Mott Street (Photo: before 1914).43

43 Image source: George P. Hall & Son Photograph collection, New York Historical Society.
Figure 101: The balcony of the Lee’s Family Association’s headquarters; under the eave there was a tilted sign placed in the center of the wall.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{44} Image source: George P. Hall & Son Photograph collection, New York Historical Society.
Figure 102: The facade of the Lee’s Family Association’s new headquarters building at 41 Mott Street.
Figure 103: The horizontal tablet is the old sign of the Lee’s Family Association (1898). The vertical tablets show an antithetical couplet sent by fangs of the association (1899).
Figure 104: Headquarters of the Chinese Six Companies in San Francisco’s Chinatown. There is a black sign for the association on the first floor.45

Figure 105: Headquarters of the Ning Yung Benevolent Association in San Francisco’s Chinatown. There is an embedded sign for the association on the third floor.46

Figure 106: Headquarters of the Chong Wa Benevolent Association in Seattle’s Chinatown. There is a sign for the association on the top of the building.47

Figure 107: Headquarters of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in Washington, DC’s Chinatown. There is a sign for the association on the second floor.48


Bibliography

English-Books


**English-Dissertations and Theses**


**English-Journals and Newspapers**


“Chinatown to Lose Wooden Shakes On Mott Street: Lin Sing Association Gets Court’s Permission to Sell Part of Realty; To Erect Modern Apartments.” *New York Herald Tribune*, July 15, 1926. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.


Rowe, William T. “The Public Sphere in Modern China.” *Modern China* v.16, no.3 (1990): 309-29.


**English-Museums and Libraries (Historic Photos)**

Municipal Archives, New York City Department of Records, 1940s Tax Photo and 1980s Tax Photo.

Museum of Chinese in America.

Library of Congress.

Museum of the City of New York.

New York Public Library Digital Gallery.

**Chinese-Books**


Chinese-Theses


Chinese-Journals and Newspapers

*Chinese American Weekly*, v.10, n.428, February 8, 1951.


Chinese-Special Issues

68th Anniversary Special Issue of Fukein American Association.

80th Anniversary Special Issue of Sam Kiang Charitable Association.


Japanese-Journals


Websites

Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, “Details Information about the CCBA-NY.”

Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, “Doyers Street.”

Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, “Mott Street.”

Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, “Mott Street.”


Jia Guo. “The Chen’s Ancestral Hall in Shilou, Panyu.”

Library of Congress, “Guangdong quan sheng shui lu yu tu.”
http://www.loc.gov/resource/g7823g.ct003392/.


United States Department of State. “Repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, 1943.”

Wikipedia. “Bian’è of the Shengmu Hall of the Song Dynasty.” Last modified February 8, 2011,
http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:%E5%AE%8B%E4%BB%A3%E5%9C%A3%E6%AF%8D%E6%AE%BF%E5%8C%BE%E9%A2%9D.JPG.


Wikipedia. “File: Chen Botao.jpg.” Last modified September 11, 2010,


Interviews

Chen, Jianping (Chinese Secretary of the Gee How Oak Tin Association and a member of the Chin Family Asssociation). Interview by author, January 24, 2014, New York, NY.

Chiu, Eddie (General Counsel of the Lin Sing Association; Chairman of the Lin Sing Association from 2004 to 2006). Interview by author, November 5, 2013, New York, NY.

Lee, Quock Y. (Counselor of the Lee’s Family Association and a senator of the Hip Sing Association). Interview by author, November 5, 2013, New York, NY.

Ng, Eric Y (President of the Chinese Consolidate Benevolent Association; he has served as President of Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association, Hip Sing Association, Chinese Free Masons, Eng Suey Sun Association in New York, National Eng Suey Sun Association and the World Eng Family Association in the past two decades). Interview by author, January 9, 2014, New York, NY.

Appendix A – Maps for Historic Associations in Manhattan’s Chinatown

A map of Manhattan’s Chinatown showing the locations of the forty historic associations

Legend

1. Historic Association
2. Lin Sing Association
3. On Leong Chinese Merchants Association
4. Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association
5. Lee’s Family Association

Map source: NYC Open Accessible Space Information System
http://oasisnyc.net/map.aspx
A map showing historical locations of the Lin Sing Association

Legend

- 1900 - 1928
- 1928 -

Map source: NYC Open Accessible Space Information System
http://oasisnyc.net/map.aspx
A map showing the historical locations of the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association

Legend

- 1919
1919 - 1950
1950 -

Map source: NYC Open Accessible Space Information System
http://oasisnyc.net/map.aspx
A map showing the historical locations of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association

Legend

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1894 - 1960</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1960 -</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Map source: NYC Open Accessible Space Information System
http://oasisnyc.net/map.aspx
A map showing the historical locations of the Lee’s Family Association

Legend

[Blue] 1899-1977

[Red] 1977 -

Map source: NYC Open Accessible Space Information System
http://oasisnyc.net/map.aspx
## Appendix B – Table of Historic Associations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Associations</th>
<th>公会</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hip Sing Tong/ Hip Sing Association, Inc.</td>
<td>協勝堂／協勝公會</td>
<td>Fraternal society/merchant association</td>
<td>16 Pell Street</td>
<td>1861-1874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association</td>
<td>台山寧陽會館</td>
<td>District association: Taishan (台山)</td>
<td>33 Mott Street</td>
<td>1861-1874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association</td>
<td>美國紐約中華公所</td>
<td>Informal “City Hall”</td>
<td>62 Mott Street</td>
<td>1883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Free Masons</td>
<td>洪門致公堂</td>
<td>Fraternal society/merchant association</td>
<td>22 Mott Street</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leung Chung How Realty Corporation</td>
<td>梁忠宗親會</td>
<td>Family association: Leung (梁)</td>
<td>76 Mott Street</td>
<td>1884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lung Kong Tin Yee Association</td>
<td>龍岡親義公所</td>
<td>Family association: Liu, Guan, Zhang and Zhao (劉、關、張、趙)</td>
<td>23 Division Street</td>
<td>1888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wong Family Benevolent Association</td>
<td>黃氏宗親會</td>
<td>Family association: Wong (黃)</td>
<td>24 Bowery</td>
<td>1890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Leong Tong/ On Leong Chinese Merchants Association</td>
<td>安良工商總會</td>
<td>Merchant association/fraternal association</td>
<td>83 Mott Street</td>
<td>1893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee's Family Association</td>
<td>李氏總分所</td>
<td>Family association: Lee (李)</td>
<td>41 Mott Street</td>
<td>1899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lin Sing Association</td>
<td>美東聯成公所</td>
<td>District association: allied</td>
<td>49 Mott Street</td>
<td>1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chin Family Association</td>
<td>陳勢川堂/陳氏公所</td>
<td>Family association: Chin (陈)</td>
<td>10 Pell Street</td>
<td>1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moy's Family Association</td>
<td>梅氏公所</td>
<td>Family association: Moy (梅)</td>
<td>53 Bayard Street</td>
<td>1875-1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eng Suey Sun Association</td>
<td>伍胥山公所</td>
<td>Family association: Eng (伍)</td>
<td>5 Mott Street</td>
<td>1875-1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jin Lan Association</td>
<td>金蘭公所</td>
<td>Fraternal society/merchant association</td>
<td>22 Mott Street</td>
<td>1875-1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hok Shan Society</td>
<td>鶴山公所</td>
<td>District association: Heshan (鶴山)</td>
<td>42 Mott Street</td>
<td>1875-1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tong On Association</td>
<td>東安公所</td>
<td>District association: Dongguan and Bao’an (東莞、寶安)</td>
<td>27 Division Street</td>
<td>1910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soo Yuen Association</td>
<td>溯源公所</td>
<td>Family association: Lei, Fang, Kuang (雷、方、鄺)</td>
<td>68 Mott Street</td>
<td>1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tai Pun Residents Association</td>
<td>大鵬同鄉會</td>
<td>District association: Dapeng (大鵬)</td>
<td>51 Bayard Street</td>
<td>1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsung Tsin Association</td>
<td>崇正會</td>
<td>District association: Hakka (客家)</td>
<td>1 Division Street</td>
<td>1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association</td>
<td>Member District Association</td>
<td>Family Association</td>
<td>Year of Establishment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tai Look Merchants Association</td>
<td>Merchant association: Panyu</td>
<td>Family association: Chen, Hu and Yuan</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yee Shan Benevolent Society</td>
<td>District association: Zhongshan</td>
<td>District association: Hakka</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chung Shan Association</td>
<td>Family association: Yee, Yiu, and Lam</td>
<td>District association: Haiyan</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sze Kong Association</td>
<td>District association: District association: Zhongshan (中山)</td>
<td>District association: Ha</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gee Fong Toy Merchants Association</td>
<td>Family association: Guangzhou</td>
<td>District association: Huizhou (惠)</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoy Yen Association</td>
<td>District association: Nanyang (南)</td>
<td>District association: Nanyang</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nam Shum Association</td>
<td>Family association: Nam Shum</td>
<td>District association: Nanhai and Shunde</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Kiang Charitable Association</td>
<td>District association: Sam Kiang</td>
<td>District association: Fujian (福建)</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lum Sai Ho Association</td>
<td>District association: Lum Sai Ho</td>
<td>District association: Fujian (福建)</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoy Ping Hong Hing Association</td>
<td>District association: Kaiping (开平)</td>
<td>District association: Kaiping</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chew Lun Association</td>
<td>District association: Tang, Tan, Xia and Xie</td>
<td>District association: Tang, Tan, Xia and Xie</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fung Loon Benevolent Association</td>
<td>District association: Fu Jian (福建)</td>
<td>District association: Fu Jian</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chee Tuck Sam Tuck Association</td>
<td>District association: Epping (恩平)</td>
<td>District association: Epping</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Kiang Association</td>
<td>Family association: Xue and Situ</td>
<td>Family association: Xue and Situ</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lum Sai Ho Association</td>
<td>Family association: Xue and Situ</td>
<td>Family association: Xue and Situ</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chew Lun Association</td>
<td>Family association: Fu Jian (福建)</td>
<td>Family association: Fu Jian</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fung Loon Benevolent Association</td>
<td>Family association: Fu Jian (福建)</td>
<td>Family association: Fu Jian</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chee Tuck Sam Tuck Association</td>
<td>Family association: Xue and Situ</td>
<td>Family association: Xue and Situ</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix C – Signs on Historic Association Buildings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Associations</th>
<th>Exterior Signs</th>
<th>Interior Signs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Hip Sing Association</td>
<td>Exterior: 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>協勝公會</td>
<td>- Traditional wooden tablet: 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sign in tablet form but of new material: 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- “Commercial sign”: 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Guide sign: 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exterior: 4**
- Traditional wooden tablet: 1
- Sign in tablet form but of new material: 1
- “Commercial sign”: 1
- Guide sign: 1

**Interior: --**
2. Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association 台山寧陽會館

**Exterior:** 3
- Separate tablet: 1
- Guide sign: 2

**Interior:** 1
- Traditional wooden-tablet sign: 1

3. Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association 紐約中華公所

**Exterior:** 2
- Separate metal characters: 1
- Guide sign: 1

**Interior:** 4
- Traditional wooden-tablet sign: 1
- Wooden tablet with message of praise: 3
4. Chinese Free Mason’s

洪門致公堂

**Exterior: 3**
- Signage as a part of the facade: 1
- Sign in tablet form but of new material: 2

**Interior: --**
5. Leung Chung How Realty Corporation
梁忠孝宗親會

**Exterior:** 2
- Separate metal characters: 1
- Signage as a part of the facade: 1

**Interior:** 1
- Traditional wooden-tablet sign: 1

(A historical photo showing an exterior sign before 2000)

6. Lung Kong Tin Yee Association
龍岡親義公所

**Exterior:** 1
- Signage as a part of the facade: 1

**Interior:** --
7. Wong Family Benevolent Association
黄氏宗親會

**Exterior: 2**
- Separate metal characters: 1
- Guide sign: 1

**Interior: 1**
- Traditional wooden tablet sign: 1

8. On Leong Chinese Merchants Association
安良工商總會

**Exterior: 2**
- Separate metal characters: 2

**Interior: --**
9. Lee’s Family Association
李氏總分所

**Exterior: 1**
- Signage as a part of the facade: 1

**Interior: 1**
- Traditional wooden-tablet sign: 1

10. Lin Sing Association
美東聯成公所

**Exterior: 3**
- Traditional wooden tablet: 1
  - Guide sign: 2

**Interior: 1**
- Traditional wooden-tablet sign: 1
11. Chin Family Association
陳穎川堂／陳氏公所

**Exterior:** 1
- Traditional wooden tablet: 1

**Interior:** --

12. Moy’s Family Association
梅氏公所

**Exterior:** 3
- Traditional wooden tablet: 2
- Signage as a part of the facade: 1

**Interior:** 1
- Traditional wooden tablet sign: 1
13. Eng Suey Sun Association
伍胥山公所

**Exterior:** 1
- Separate metal characters: 1

**Interior:** 1
- Guide sign: 1
| 14. Jin Lan Association  
金蘭公所 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exterior:</strong> --</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interior:</strong> --</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A 1940 tax photo showing a historical sign of the Jin Lan Association on the top floor.

| 15. Hok Shan Society  
鶴山公所 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exterior:</strong> 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Separate tablet: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Guide sign: 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interior:** --
16. Tong On Association
東安公所

**Exterior:** 2
- Separate metal sign: 1
- Guide sign: 1

**Interior:** 1
- Guide sign: 1

17. Soo Yuen Association
溯源公所

**Exterior:** 2
- Traditional wooden tablet: 1
- Guide sign: 1

**Interior:** 3
- Guide sign: 3
18. Tai Pun Residents Association
大鵬同鄉會

**Exterior:** 3
- Signage as a part of the facade: 2
- Guide sign: 1

**Interior:** --
19. Tsung Tsin Association
崇正會

Exterior: 2
- Sign in tablet form but of new material: 1
- Guide sign: 1

Interior: 1
- Traditional wooden-tablet sign: 1

20. Tai Look Merchants Association
大陸總商會

Exterior: 2
- Separate metal characters: 1
- “Commercial sign”: 1

Interior: --
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Exterior</th>
<th>Interior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Yee Shan Benevolent Society</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>番禺同鄉會</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Exterior:</strong> 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Separate metal characters: 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Guide sign: 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Chung Shan Association</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>中⼭⼭同鄉會</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Exterior:</strong> 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Guide sign: 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Interior:</strong> 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Guide sign: 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
23. Gee How Oak Tin Association
至孝篤親公所

**Exterior: 3**
- Sign in tablet form but of new material: 1
- Separate metal characters: 1
- Guide sign: 1

**Interior: 1**
- Guide sign: 1
24. Sze Kong Association
師公工商總會

**Exterior:** 1
- Sign in tablet form but of new material: 1

**Interior:** --

25. Hoy Yen Association
海晏同鄉會

**Exterior:** 2
- Separate tablet: 1
- Guide sign: 1

**Interior:** 2
- Traditional wooden-tablet sign: 1
- Guide sign: 1
26. Yee Fong Toy Association
余風采堂

**Exterior: 2**
- Sign in tablet form but of new material: 1
- Guide sign: 1

**Interior: --**

27. Fay Chaw Merchants’ Association
惠州工商會

**Exterior: 1**
- Separate metal characters: 1

**Interior: --**
28. Nam Yang Association
南陽公所
(Ongs Family Association
鄧氏宗親會)

**Exterior: 2**
- Sign in tablet form but of new material: 1
- Guide sign: 1

**Interior: 1**
- Guide sign: 1

A historical photo showing a historical sign of the Nam Yang Association
29. Gee Poy Kuo Association
朱沛國堂

**Exterior:** 1
- Separate tablet: 1

**Interior:** 1
- Traditional wooden-tablet sign: 1

30. Chee Tuck Sam Tuck Association
至德三德公所

**Exterior:** --

**Interior:** 2
- Guide sign: 1
31. Sam Kiang Charitable Association
三江公所

**Exterior: 2**
- Signage as a part of the facade: 1
- Guide sign: 1

**Interior: --**

32. Lum Sai Ho Association
林西河堂

**Exterior: 2**
- Guide sign: 2

**Interior: --**
33. Hoy Ping Hong Hing Association
開平同鄉會

**Exterior:** 3
- Guide sign: 3

**Interior:** 1
- Traditional wooden-tablet sign: 1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Exterior</th>
<th>Interior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Nam Shum Association</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>南順同鄉會</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exterior: 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-“Commercial sign”: 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Guide sign: 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interior: --</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Sun Wei Association</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>新會同鄉會</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exterior: 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Separate metal characters: 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Guide sign: 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interior: --</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
36. Yan Ping Association
恩平同鄉會

**Exterior:** 2
- “Commercial sign”: 1
- Sign in tablet form but of new material: 1

**Interior:** 1
- Guide sign: 1

37. Fung Loon Benevolent Association
鳳倫公所

**Exterior:** 1
- Guide sign: 1

**Interior:** --
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>38. Chew Lun Association 昭倫公所</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exterior:</strong> 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sign in tablet form but of new material: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Guide sign: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interior:</strong> --</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>39. Fukien American Association 福建同鄉會</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exterior:</strong> 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Separate metal character: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Signage as a part of the facade: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interior:</strong> --</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>40. Goon Shee Association 阮氏公所</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exterior:</strong> 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Guide sign: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interior:</strong> --</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix D – Significant Signs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant Sign</th>
<th>Satisfied Criteria</th>
<th>Photo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Exterior sign of the Chin Family Association (Traditional wooden tablet)</td>
<td>A, B, E, F</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Photo" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Exterior sign of the Lin Sing Association (Traditional wooden tablet)</td>
<td>A, E</td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Photo" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Exterior sign of the Hip Sing Association (Traditional wooden tablet)</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Photo" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This list is limited by the author's research into the backgrounds of these historic associations' signs. There may be other significant which are not included in this list.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4. Exterior sign of the Moy’s Family Association (Traditional wooden tablet)</th>
<th>5. Exterior sign of the Soo Yuen Association (Traditional wooden tablet)</th>
<th>6. Exterior sign of the Lee’s Family Association (Signage as a part of the facade)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A, B</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>B, D, E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Exterior sign of the Lung Kong Tin Yee Association (Signage as a part of the facade)

8. Exterior sign of the Chinese Free Masons (Signage as a part of the facade)

9. Exterior sign of the Sam Kiang Charitable Association (Signage as a part of the facade)

10. Exterior sign of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (Separate metal characters)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exterior sign of the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association (Separate metal characters)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Exterior sign of the Tong On Association (Separate metal characters)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Exterior sign of the Gee How Oak Tin Association (Sign in tablet form but of new material)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>C, D, E</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A, B, C, D, F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exterior sign of the Yee Fong Toy Association</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>(Sign in tablet form but of new material)</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exterior sign of the Hok Shan Society</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>(Separate tablet)</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exterior sign of the Hoy Sun Ning Yung Association</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>(Guide sign)</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Interior sign of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (Traditional wooden-tablet sign)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Interior sign of the Tsung Tsin Association (Traditional wooden-tablet sign)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Interior sign of the Lee’s Family Association (Traditional wooden-tablet sign)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
20. Interior sign of the Lin Sing Association (Traditional wooden-tablet sign)

21. Interior sign of the Leung Chung How Realty Corporation (Traditional wooden-tablet sign)
<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22. Interior sign of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Wooden tablet with message of praise)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B, C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Interior sign of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Wooden tablet with message of praise)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B, C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Interior sign of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Wooden tablet with message of praise)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B, C, F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>