Homicide in Seattle's Chinatown, 1900-1940: Evaluating the Influence of Social Organizations

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ABSTRACT

The present study extends the understanding of how features of Chinese social organization influenced patterns of homicide in Seattle from 1900-1940. The findings illustrate that generalizations about Chinese violence fit pre-WWII Seattle homicide data: (a) Chinese homicide rates were high as a result of conflict between tong organizations involved in the vice industry; (b) the timing of tong events was driven by disputes among organizational chapters in different cities; and (c) homicide rates unrelated to tong violence were relatively low, but far higher than modern Asian rates. The findings suggest the importance of considering patterns of violence within particular ethnic groups to evaluate how ethnic social organizations influence violence.

Keywords: homicide, ethnicity, Chinese, social organization, tongs

Hawkins (1999) highlights that a problem in homicide research is to explain differences in patterns of violence among different racial or ethnic groups. He advocates comparisons of groups such as Asians that have not been extensively studied. The dearth of literature focusing on Asian violence is likely influenced by the difficulty of obtaining data with specific ethnic identifiers. In addition, some ethnic or racial groups such as Black Americans may get more attention than others because of the practical importance of resolving social problems among groups with high rates of violence. These biases are problematic theoretically, because by ignoring groups with low rates of violence in modern times (e.g., Asians) we limit our understanding of the factors that reduce interpersonal violence.

Studies of Asian violence in the U.S. are rare. However, researchers report low rates of Asian violence in the early 1900s (Beach, 1932; Brearley, 1932) as well as modern times (Block, 1985). In addition, reports from mainland China also show low (1-2 per 100,000), albeit increasing, homicide rates (Liu, et al., 2001). In this paper, I focus mainly on homicide cases involving Chinese victims and offenders occurring in Seattle from 1900 to 1940. Although multiple social, economic, and individual-level factors influence violence, I highlight how an understanding of Chinese social organization can help explain patterns of violence in pre-war Chinatowns. Thus, I rely on Ivan Light's (1977) influential comparative and historical generalizations of Chinese participation in the vice industry to evaluate the data. In general, the findings support Light's hypotheses about the magnitude and character of violence in Seattle's Chinatown; the baseline homicide rates for the Chinese were relatively low for all of the periods studied (albeit high as compared to modern rates), with dramatic spikes resulting from conflict between Chinese tong organizations. In addition, an understanding of the organizational nature of tong groups explains why the Chinese were involved in ritualized assassinations involving multiple offenders, and why the conflicts were linked to other Chinatowns. Finally, the data conform to Light's explanation for the decline of tong violence.

TONG ORGANIZATIONS AND VIOLENCE

To understand Chinese violence, it is important to understand the types and functions of various organizations in Chinatown communities. In general, the Chinese in early 20th century America were extremely self-reliant, and had strong self-help organizations. The ability to create and sustain effective organizations partly reflects the fact that from 1850 through the mid 1900s,

the majority of Chinese immigrants came from the culturally homogenous Kwantung province with strong informal social organizations already in place (Wong et. al., 1990). One of the most impressive achievements was the creation of the Chinese Six Companies. This organization, under guidance from China, eventually controlled most of Chinatowns' affairs. One important aspect of these organizations was their ability to arbitrate disputes, and reduce conflict between rival tong organizations. Regardless of such "peacemaking" activities, the Chinese community was by no means a place without conflict. Secret societies led to the emergence of tong organizations that also had great influence over Chinatown affairs, especially in earlier decades. In sum, there is substantial evidence that a particular set of social organizations were brought to the U.S. by Chinese immigrants, and these likely had a great impact on patterns of violence.[1]

Chinese Social Organization in Seattle's Chinatown

Three types of self-help organizations generally governed North American Chinatowns, and Seattle was no exception (Chin, 2002). The organizations can be categorized into 1) family associations (clans), 2) district associations (common speech-district groups) and 3.) tongs (secret societies). First, family organizations incorporated Chinese with the same surnames into the local organization, with central structures often located in San Francisco. Chin (2001) describes how the local branches in Seattle operated independently from the central organizations. In general, family organizations helped new immigrants find work, and particular organizations often controlled one occupational specialization (e.g., barbers). District organizations, with ties to specific districts in mainland China, had the power to influence all of the organizations. These organizations incorporated groups of merchants with common interests.

[1] Although there are numerous empirical examples of individuals rapidly creating and changing cultural rules, examples equally abound from historians and anthropologists who show cultural continuity and lags among social groups (Edgerton, 1971; Fischer, 1989; Nisbett and Cohen, 1994).

Chin (2002) discusses how this organization helped members with protection, shelter, loans, employment, settling disputes, and burial services.

Chinatown immigrants also brought with them the clan organizations (and related secret societies) that had existed for centuries in their home area of the Kwantung providence (Lamley, 1990). These organizations, emerging as Triads in Hong Kong and tongs in the United States, have a long history of engaging in criminal activities or selling protection to both legitimate and illegitimate business.[2] Concerning membership, American Chinatown tongs often incorporated individuals who were stigmatized based on ethnic affiliations and criminal histories. In addition, individuals who did not fit into surname and district organizations often turned to membership in tong organizations (Lyman, 1986). Like other organizational bodies in Chinatown, tongs exercised authority through financial and judicial structures. The judicial wing had power to collect fines and taxes, but also to resolve disputes and issue sentences. A number of authors describe how tong organizations protected their members who were arrested for carrying out their duties (Chan, 1975; McKanna, 2002; Lyman, 1986). Defense attorneys were hired to defend their members in court, going as far as using perjured testimonies to free their clients. Regardless of their organizational affiliations, Chinese and even some non-Chinese who testified for the prosecution were subjected to intimidation and sometimes murdered. Similar to Italian crime organizations, Lyman (1989: p 191) suggests how "loyalty to sworn brothers was the paramount secret society value, instilled in the members through an awesome initiation ritual, and enforced with unstinting vigor."

[2] Lyman (1986) discusses the origins and evolution of secret societies in China, or Triads, and how these emerged in American Chinatowns. Triad societies have a long history in China dating back as far as the Sung Dynasty (960-1279). Although debates continue about why Triads played an important role in China, there is evidence to suggest the organizations emerged among Buddhist monks in response to conflict with the Emperor. Another interpretation highlights the importance of Triad societies in providing protection to groups in a social environment with weak state protection (Chu, 2002).

Tong organizations in the United States filled the niche of providing protection, but in being hired to defend the interests of gambling, drug, and prostitution businesses, the tongs in the U.S. became closely associated with the vice industry. It is thus unsurprising that the groups would compete for territories in U.S. cities, especially during the early 1900s when policing institutions were corrupt, and the demand for vice services was high. Gong and Grant (1930) and others have described the emergence of "tong wars" that occurred in Chinatowns from the 1850s through the 1930s. Like in other Chinatowns, tong organizations both emerged and competed in Seattle. Four major tongs emerged in Seattle (Hip Sing, Hop Sing, Suey Sing, Bing Kung), but the Bing Kung tong eventually became the most powerful.

Chinese Social Organization and Predictions about Homicide Patterns

The social organizations described above (clan, district, and tong) are the result of sets of cultural rules (social institutions) that define hierarchical positions and roles in social groups, and pattern different types of interactions. Due to these shared cultural rules among people from similar areas in China, some regularity in behavior among different immigrant populations is expected, even if the groups experienced different circumstances in various U.S. cities. In general, I argue that an understanding of Chinese social organization leads to a number of expectations about the character and magnitude of violence in *all* Chinese communities. In other words, although the Chinese faced diverse experiences in different American cities, their social organization led most communities to resolve their disputes and compete for resources in similar ways. Further, there were institutional links between Chinatown organizations that makes it difficult to understand violence in one city's Chinatown without attention to conflict in distant Chinatowns. In this section, I present Ivan Light's (1977) generalizations from his comparative

historical analyses of the vice industry among different ethnic groups. These allow me to generate expectations about what to find in the Seattle data.

Character of Tong Violence

Light's (1977) analysis of how the Chinese competed in the vice industry leads to a number of expectations about how Chinese violence occurred in most Chinatowns. First, at the most general level, tong organizations incorporated males into their ranks, and thus scaled up competition from the individual to the group. As a result, Light argues that the majority of violence in Chinese communities occurred between individuals from various tong organizations. *Thus, I expected to a large proportion of the Chinese cases to involve tong members, as well as involve a large proportion of cases with multiple rather than single offenders.* Further, Light (1977) attributes importance to cultural inertia, or the historical trajectories of social institutions. From this perspective, people solve their problems based on modifications of the social institutions available to them. Thus, Light expected to find that Chinese immigrants would enter the vice market with their tong organizations; tong organizations were secret societies already equipped to provision vice and the protection needed to sustain such illegal activities. In contrast, with extensive analysis of Black American social institutions, Light expected Blacks to enter the vice industry in a much different manner. Without a history of secret societies and organized crime groups, Light predicted smaller-scale participation of Blacks in the vice industry. *Thus, I expected to find that Black Americans were involved in the vice industry, but without formal large-scale organized groups, would be involved in far fewer homicide cases with multiple offenders.*

Light (1977: p. 472) claims that complex alliances knit the nation's tongs together, and petty local disputes led to both planned assassination and revenge killings. He argues that the purpose of violence was to resolve disputes, especially ones that threatened the reputation of individual tong groups and their alliances—even if the original dispute was in a different city. *Thus, I expected to find that many Seattle tong disputes had origins in other U.S. Chinatowns.* In addition, Light and others have described the tong organizations as highly concerned with upholding their group's reputation or honor. Chin (1996) and Lyman (1986) both discuss how institutional rules specified how to remedy disputes. In many cases, disputes were resolved peacefully through mediation mechanisms. In some cases, however, individuals who slighted the tong were condemned to death, whereby executioners or hit men were sent to carry out the sentence. This social system had potential to escalate out of control due to the "tit for tat" nature of revenge killings. Lyman (1986) describes how the murder of a tong member would often lead the victimized tong to seek out and kill the assassins, or bring them to the tribunal for punishment. Some of the Seattle newspaper articles discussing tong wars illustrated the tit for tat aspects of violence; the tongs kept score of the number of their member killed in relation to their rival tong. As a result of these rules, it was often difficult for Chinese district organizations to find resolutions to these ongoing disputes because warring parties did not want to appear that they were weak. *I expected to find evidence in the Seattle data for "tit for tat" violence, and other forms of ritualized killings that reflects the institutionalized notion of honor among tongs.*

Timing of Tong Violence

Light's social organizational perspective led him to find regularizes in the timing of tong violence. First, tong violence began with the emergence or rival tongs competing over the vice

industry. *Thus, I expected to find evidence of tong violence when two tongs came in competition with one another.* Second, to explain the decline of tong conflicts in the late 1920s and 1930s, Light (1974) first considers the previously accepted hypothesis that balancing Chinese sex ratios led to less demand in the Chinese community for vice. Many authors writing before Light had stated that tong organizations declined with the reduction in demand for their services. Although Light acknowledges that this may have had some influence, he argues that most of the customers in Chinatowns were White (a population with a balanced sex ratio), and thus he favors an organizational and economic hypothesis. He argues that tong violence in Chinatowns infatuated Whites, and many came to Chinatowns in the hopes of seeing a raid on a gambling or opium den. Rubbernecking in the Chinese community led to the foundations for a legitimate Chinatown tourist industry, but large tong wars inhibited the full development of such a market. *Thus, similar to Light findings, I expected to find a decline of tong violence in the late 1920s. Further, this decline in violence should correlate with a rise in the non-vice tourist industry in Seattle's Chinatown.*

Low Rates of Non-tong Violence

Light (1977: p.471) argues that although Chinese migrant communities in the U.S. had sporadic and highly violent periods of tong violence, in general the Chinese communities had very low rates of non-tong violence. In considering the causes of these low "baseline" rates, some have argued that the Confucian family effectively controlled crime in Chinatowns (President's Commission, 1967: 74). Indeed, data on juvenile delinquency in the 1930s showed that Asian youths (mainly Chinese) from Vancouver were 15.6 times less likely to be involved in crimes as non-Asians (MacGill 1938). Others attribute importance to Chinese social organization

that endowed clan elders with the legitimate power to control their members (Lyman, 1986). Light and Wong (1975), however, argue that one should be cautious about cultural explanations without first considering the absence of Chinese families altogether for many periods, and thus the small population of young individuals. The authors discuss how the immigration of Chinese youth in the 1960s and 1970s did lead to gang violence and crime. In sum, although cultural arguments are plausible, demographic forces may often trump such cultural forces (Waters, 1999). *Regardless of the causal mechanisms, I expected to find low homicide rates involving non-tong offenders.*

ANALYSES OF SEATTLE HISTORICAL DATA AND HOMICIDE CASES

In this section, I evaluate how well the Seattle data fit the historical generalizations of Chinese social organization discussed above. Data come from two main sources. First, homicide data were collected from coroners' reports as well as from descriptions of homicide cases in Seattle newspapers. An attempt was made to find all of the homicide cases, thus the dataset likely contains a high proportion of all of the cases that occurred in the years of interest. The analyses are disaggregated by ethnicity, and from the total number of cases from 1900-1950, information about the victims ethnicity is available for 94.7 percent of the cases. However, the offender's ethnicity is known in only 77.2 percent of the cases because many of these cases went unsolved by the police, and thus a suspect was never found. Although missing data are problematic, there are likely fewer missing cases that involved the Chinese. Because Chinese victims and offenders could be more easily identified by their physical characteristics, it is likely that the police and newspapers obtained and recorded ethnic information. Concerning cases

related to tong organizations, many of these were high profile gun battles occurring during the day in Chinatown. As a result, it is likely that both the police and the media documented most of these events.

The second main source of data comes from historical analyses of Seattle's Chinatown and vice industry. Specifically, I rely on insightful details about Seattle's tong organizations as described by a tong interpreter named Eng Ying Gong. Tong organizations employed interpreters such as Gong to help them deal with English-speaking justice officials. Gong was hired by the Hip Sing tong in Seattle, and he provides detailed historical evidence about the competition between Seattle tongs, and such information helps explain the spikes in Seattle homicide rates among the Chinese (Gong and Grant, 1930). In general, I find that Gong's description, as well as the case data, supports most of Light's claims.

Evaluating the Character of Chinese Violence

The vice industry flourished in the "bachelor society" of early Seattle (Berner, 1991), and there is evidence that Chinese tongs were in control of much of this industry. With a high demand for vice, and little police intervention,[3] the Chinese became heavily involved in the vice industry. Historians highlight that the Chinese tong organizations imported and smuggled women from China into North America to work as prostitutes (Lyman, 1986). In addition to prostitution establishments, the first Chinese immigrants in Seattle started gambling establishments by the early 1900s. Much gambling went on behind closed doors, but Chinese operated an open "lottery" similar to keno where customers bet on daily numbers. As shown below, the nature of

[3] De Barros (1993) argues that Seattle's vice community was allowed to flourish because of police corruption. In exchange for police tolerance of vice, operators would pay a fixed price on a regular basis. De Barros cites an article from the Seattle Times that explained how the police staged fake raids and arrests. Chambliss' (1978) recent ethnographic study of the Seattle vice industry suggests that police corruption has persisted in Seattle.

Chinese tongs in Seattle (as well as other Chinatown tongs) fits Light's generalizations regarding intra-tong cooperation and inter-tong competition.

Ethnic Comparisons

As expected, the majority of Chinese cases involved tong conflict (19 out of 28 cases, or 69%). In contrast, there were no cases involving Blacks where the newspaper mentioned links with organized crime groups. Of course it is possible that some of the interpersonal disputes among Blacks did involve conflicts between such crime groups, but the police did not learn such facts. However, additional data address this issue. Out of the nineteen total tong-related cases, eleven involved multiple offenders; three involved three offenders, and one case involved five offenders. In conformance to Light's claims regarding Blacks and the vice industry, *none* of the forty-seven cases involved multiple offenders. Finally, it is of interest that a greater proportion of the Chinese cases were intra-ethnic (88.9%) as compared to Black cases (74.5%). This pattern likely reflects the nature of inter-ethnic social relations, as well as the fact that mainly Chinese were involved in tong organizations.

Inter-city Tong Disputes

As expected, tong organizations often retaliated for killings or events that occurred among their chapters from different cities. Of the nineteen total tong events, twelve events precipitated from five major disputes occurring outside the city of Seattle. The first, and most dramatic dispute, occurred in 1917. Gong writes that between 1910 and 1917 the Chinese Peace Society controlled tong violence by enforcing an armistice between rival tongs (Gong and Grant, 1930). The society at this time was headed by leaders of all the tongs, and with a neutral

chairmen, was able to arbitrate the majority of disputes between the organizations. However, in 1917, some peculiar chain of events led up to one of the largest tong wars of the 20th century that even the Chinese Peace Society could not control. The story begins when Mar Tuck, a smuggler of Chinese prostitutes, experienced trouble with the U.S. border patrol. As a result, he fled to San Francisco, and made a name for himself when he robbed a gambling establishment in the presence of eight or ten tough "boo how doy," the Chinese term for tong fighters. The stunt gained him admission into the Suey Sing tong, and soon was the leader of a group of fighters. However, a truce between the tongs reduced the need for assassins, thus Tuck and his fighters went to the Northwest to find action. Tuck's group also found peaceful conditions between the tongs in the Northwest, but joined with some restless gunmen from the Hip Sing tong. These gunmen were persuaded by Tuck to join his tong, the Suey Sings. The Hip Sing organization agreed to let the gunmen switch tongs if they paid up on their past membership dues. Gong describes how a courtesy existed between tongs that allowed one tong to collect money from a rival tong member. However, the gunmen would not pay these dues, and the conflict finally erupted into violence. Gong describes scenes of all out war in Seattle, where men (some wearing bulletproof vests) chased and shot at one another. When an armistice finally limited the violence, Chinatown residents were able to leave their hiding places and return to the streets after months of being under siege. Gong reports that over seventy men had been killed and hundreds wounded in Chinatowns throughout the West, with massive monetary costs to both factions. Articles in the Seattle Post-intelligencer confirm these events, and I find that six homicide cases occurred are associated with this case in Seattle during 1917.

Second, the next set of inter-city tong disputes involved the well-documented case of tong conflict in San Francisco. In August of 1921, a member of the Hop Sing Tong from San

Francisco allegedly stole a slave girl belonging to a member of the opposing Suey Sing Tong (Chan, 1975). The Suey Sing council, with reported alliance with the Bing Kung tong, declared war on the Hop Sings to avenge the injustice perpetrated against one of their members. Chan (1975) shows how the event led to "ten months of tit-for-tat violence" that spread into Chinatowns throughout California and into Nevada. Five Chinese men were killed in California; two in Los Angeles, two in Stockton, and one in Sacramento. According to the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, a prominent Chinese individual spread the word that members of the Hop Sings planned to kill two members of the Bing Kung tong in Seattle. The dispute did indeed come to Seattle as evidenced by the two tong-related events in 1921.

Third, a set of cases involved revenge for a killing that occurred in Butte, Montana. The Hip Sing tong had agreed with other tongs that no other organization could be created in Butte, Montana. When the Bing Kung tong violated the agreement, a tong war emerged between the former allies. On the same day, both tongs in Seattle had been notified by long distance telephone (Lee, 1948: p. 7), and the next morning three Hip Sing members were killed in Seattle.

Fourth, in 1924, another inter-chapter war occurred as a result of the large tong war between the On Leong and Hip Sing tongs on the East Coast. This dispute occurred when two factions emerged within the On Leong tong, and one of the groups asked to join the Hip Sings. At the On Leong national convention in Pittsburgh, a move was made to expel the disgruntled faction. However, the process was complicated by the fact that these members had legal title to a substantial amount of the tong's property. Further, the Hip Sings were attempting to give membership to the On Leong faction members. An assassination attempt in Cleveland, and other troubles led to the buildup of tension between the groups. On October 7, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Organization attempted to get both tongs to sign peace treaties to

assure all parties that no violence would occur. The leaders said that they had no power to sign such documents, and the refusal led to killings later that night in New York. War spread to other areas, and on Oct 10th reached Seattle with a killing of an On Leong tong member.

Finally, in the last inter-chapter case, a San Francisco tong dispute in June of 1926 led to a killing in Seattle on July 15th. The origins of the dispute occurred after the assassination of a former Hop Sing member. The victim's family paid $1,000 for the murder of his assassin (a Hop Sing). The Seattle Post-Intelligencer writes that the there was never any organizational dispute between the tongs, but the Bing Kungs, being traditional enemies of the Hop Sings, decided they would be blamed for the murder of the Hop Sing assassin. Thus, they decided to strike the Hop Sings first by killing two of their members. Even though the Hop Sings had yet to respond, the Seattle Bing Kungs also acted first, and killed a Hop Sing member. The newspaper reported that two more tong killings immediately followed this case in Berkeley, CA

Institutionalized Patterns of Dispute Resolution: Self-Help Violence and Peacemaking

Numerous attributes of the tong cases provide indirect evidence for the institutional nature of tong killings. In general, the tongs displayed their commitment to self-defense and protection through the use of self-help, or retributive violence. Taking into account that the police had limited knowledge about the details of most cases, there is substantial evidence that the tong cases were ritualized, deliberate, and calculative. First, like other tong organizations, Seattle tongs employed assassins to perform their killings. In one of the Seattle cases, two suspected offenders were assassins wanted for other tong killings in Seattle and Portland. Next, numerous cases in the sample illustrate the "tit for tat" nature of tong violence, and provides some evidence that tong groups attempted to protect the reputation of their group. As shown

above, five major tong disputes occurring in different cities led Seattle tongs to avenge their tong chapters with violence. Further, four of the nineteen tong cases involved revenge for a prior killing. In some cases, the offender in one case became the victim in another case. An example of this occurred when two offenders killed a person on June 11, 1917. A few months later, one of these offenders became the victim in a second tong-related case. To further substantiate the symbolic nature of tong assassinations, many of the offenders were shot multiple times. Of six cases reporting number of gunshots, two cases involve the victim being shot five times, one case four times, and another 6-7 times. Of the two other cases, one victim was shot eleven times, and the other victim was "shot again after he had fallen."

Although many cases illustrate ritualized violence, numerous examples in newspapers articles and in Gong's writings substantiate that Seattle tongs were also influenced by peacemaking structures to *control* or regulate conflict. For example, the events leading up to the 1917 tong war illustrate the ritualized ways that tongs treated each other, as well as how they sought alliances. At the time Mar Tuck was causing trouble, both the Hip Sings in Portland and the Suey-Hops in Seattle had their New Years banquet. The news of violence reached the Suey-Hop banquet that was attended by Hip Sing members. Upon hearing the news, a Hip Sing leader announced: "As a representative of the Hip Sing Tong I wish to thank the Suey-Hops for their courtesy in inviting us to this splendid dinner, and most earnestly request that our hosts will allow us to depart." The rival tongs granted each other safe passage back to their own territories, after it became clear that war was near. In another example, the Hop Sings of Seattle shot a Hip Sing tong member by mistake. Because violence was directed at specific targets, and mistakes could lead to further revenge killings, it is unsurprising that the offending tongs made the following statement in the newspaper: "We killed him by mistake. Very Sorry."

The Chinese Peace Society had to resort to sophisticated measures to end the worst tong wars. To end the 1917 tong war, clever messengers negotiated a twenty-four hour truce by posting two announcement posters (*chun hung*) stating the fighting must stop. At a specific time, two separate messengers went into each tong headquarters with the truce posters, while at the same time a telephone line was patched between the parties. Thus, both leaders could set their organizational seal on the posters at the same exact time, with neither side claiming an advantage. This example clearly illustrates the "face saving" nature of Seattle tongs.

Evaluating the Rise and Decline of Tong Violence

Figure 1 displays ethnic-specific homicide rates through time. The most startling finding is the extreme homicide rates found among Chinese from about 1910-1925. The highest Chinese rates are linked to organized violence between tong groups, as shown by the lines representing both tong and non-tong violence. For comparative purposes, I provide homicide rates for Whites and Blacks. In general, the White rates are comparatively low, whereas Black homicide rates are high in Seattle during all of these periods. Of particular interest here is to show how the spike in Chinese tong violence generally conforms with Light's expectations.

[Insert Figure 1]

The first tong case in the data occurred in 1910. Thus, it is likely that the origins of tong violence in Seattle are associated with the emergence of new competing groups in the vice industry. Gong reports that the first tong in Seattle emerged in the late 1800s when members of the Hip Sing tong in Portland established a branch there. Once established in Seattle, Gong says that the Hip Sings were the only tong there for twenty years. He writes that Seattle did not witness a tong killing until 1910, when other tongs became established in the city. After the

Portland World's Fair in 1904 and the Yukon Pacific Exposition in Seattle, Chinese began to emigrate north from cities in California. Gong reports how the Bing Kung tong was the first new tong to move to Seattle, but with their flourishing wealth, they had a dearth of fighting men. The Bow Leong tong also lacked fighting men, so they merged with the Bing Kung to form a strong organization in Portland and Seattle. Soon after, the Hop Sings and the Suey Sings also became established in Seattle. However, these groups soon formed alliances. The Hop Sings and Suey Sings made a formal organization alliance with one another (became known as the Suey-Hops), and the Hip Sings and Bing Kungs, although less formal, agreed to help one another in a time of need.

Concerning the decline of tong violence in the late 1920s, I find substantial support for Light's explanations. Similar to the cases described by Light, Seattle merchants associated with the District organizations such as Chong Wa had an interest in mediating the disputes between tongs. However, in years prior to the 1920s, Chin (2001 p.61) writes how the powerful Bing Kung tong in Seattle had considerable influence over Chong Wa. The balance of power changed when the restaurant industry finally began to draw large numbers of White tourists with the creation of "chop-suey" and improved sanitary conditions. With ties to emerging wealthy restaurant owners, the Chinese Peace Society finally became strong enough to control the tongs during the 1920s. The merchant organizations soon became strong enough to clean up the vice image of Chinatown, and replace it with the legitimate restaurant and gift industry. As a result, the tongs started calling themselves "merchant organizations" and shifted their business from vice to food service.

As shown in Table 1, the Chinese population like other Chinese populations in the U.S. had severely skewed sex ratios that began to even out through time. Thus, it is plausible that the

shifting sex ratio reduced demand for vice. However, there is substantial evidence to support Light's explanation, because Whites were important customers in the Seattle vice industry. Chin (2001) illustrates that in the late 1920s there was an emerging Chinese restaurant and entertainment industry oriented towards Seattle Whites. In 1923, Charlie Louie built a Chinese opera house, but soon found that booking prizefights was more lucrative. In 1929, he converted it into a restaurant and dance hall that became one of the cities more popular nightclubs, especially for White customers (Chew, 1994). In the 1930s, numerous Chinese nightspots opened for both Asian and non-Asian customers including the King Fur Café, Mar's Café, Twin Dragon Café and Danny Woo's New Chinatown Restaurant. Some of these areas became popular black jazz nightclubs. Of course, some vice activities remained in Seattle's Chinatown into the post WWII years,[4] but was likely kept under control because of the vice establishment owners who also had a stake in legitimate industries such as tourism and providing services for other immigrants (Fujita-Rony, 2003).

[Insert Table 1]

Evidence for Low Rates of Non-tong Violence?

In my sample, eleven cases were unrelated to tong violence. Although these rates are substantially lower than tong homicide rates, they are comparable to Black rates and far higher than the White rates. However it is important to note that two of the eleven cases occurred in ships in the port of Seattle, and were possibly less influenced by the Chinatown social organizations. Further, two cases involved offenders who were clearly insane, and another two cases involved robberies. Once disaggregated, only five cases involved disputes within Seattle's

[4] Gambling continued in Seattle's Chinatown until the early 1990s when the federal District Attorney General threatened to confiscate the Kong Yick Buildings for illegal gambling (Chin, 2001).

Chinatown.[5] Regardless, these data cast some doubt on Light's assertion that non-tong homicide rates were low.

To help understand the cause of these high rates, I consider why non-tong violence occurred during the early periods of the study. The relative proportion of young males in the Chinese population and the sex ratio may help explain some of the violence during these periods. Table 1 shows that there were highly skewed sex ratios among the Chinese. For example, in 1900 there were about 33 males to every one female in the Chinese community. Indeed, there is an association between the non-tong homicides and the changes in sex ratios. As the sex ratio began to even out, the baseline homicide rates fell. It is also important to consider the proportion of young males in the Chinese populations through time, but unfortunately, age-specific population data are sparse. Chew (1994) states that the median age among Chinese in the state of Washington was 45 in 1910 and 42 in 1920. He writes that the Seattle population was likely similar to the state as a whole. This pattern is at odds with the non-tong homicide data. Because there was a general increase in the number of young individuals through the 1930s and 40s, we should predict an increase in rates at these times rather than in the early 1900s. In sum, the sex ratio data correlates in the intuitive direction with changes in the non-tong homicide rates, but the likely trend of more young Chinese through time in Seattle does not.

Non-tong homicides were highest in the early years before 1910. Although the sex ratio was highly skewed, this period as compared to later periods likely had a smaller proportion of young men. To explain the contradictory demographic relationship, I speculate that social institutions, in conjunction with changes in Chinatown employment, provide a better explanation for the temporal patterns associated with the non-tong homicide data. At the turn of the century,

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[5] Two cases involved offenders thought to be insane at the time of the event. Seven cases involved interpersonal disputes, but two of these occurred outside of the cultural context of Seattle's Chinatown on a ship in Seattle's port.

there were few tong organizations nor a legitimate dining industry provided substantial employment. As discussed above, the restaurant industry did not emerge until the 1920s in Seattle. Although, Taylor (1994: p. 115) provides evidence that tongs provided substantial employment opportunities, rival tong organizations only arrived after 1910. Thus, after 1910 there were opportunities for men to compete cooperatively in tongs, rather than with more individualistic strategies. Further, once the restaurant industry emerged, employment opportunities improved throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In sum, it seems that the changes in Chinese social organization directly influenced employment opportunities, and these in turn help explain the non-tong rates of violence.

DISCUSSION

With substantial historical information about Chinese social organization in both Seattle and other parts of the United States, I found that the majority of violence in the Seattle's Chinatown emerged from conflict between tong organizations. Brought with immigrants to oversea communities, the tong organizations became involved in the supply of prostitution, drugs, and gambling. The lucrative vice industry led to the formation of numerous tong organizations that often competed with each other. As detailed here, the tong organizations had links to other Chinatown organizations, and numerous dispute resolution mechanisms were intact to prevent violent conflict. However, on occasion, such mechanisms failed, and war was declared between the tongs. Such disputes led to very high homicide rates in Chinatowns across the country because of the "face-saving" nature of the organizations; appearing weak to others might invite further transgressions. In this study, tong violence continued until the organizations

became more involved in the legitimate tourist trade. In addition, the tongs were likely brought under control by other organizations gaining more power from the shifting economy.

To interpret the causes of the violence, I assumed that tong organizations are founded upon complex sets of rules that influence how the groups resolved disputes both within and between organizations. Although there were few data to evidence the *direct* influence of organizational rules, I was able to find regular patterns of behavior in the Seattle data that conforms to more detailed historical and ethnographic accounts. In other words, most of the generalizations proposed by Light (1977) in his broad analysis of the Chinese vice industry were substantiated in a more detailed study of violence in one city. I believe such regularities were largely the result of the similar social organizations (and supporting institutional rules) that existed in most, if not all American Chinatowns. Of course, in arguing that social organizations influence violence, I do not mean to neglect other important socio-economic and demographic variables. The main purpose was to illustrate that social organizations are cultural systems that interact with other variables to influence the character, magnitude, and timing of violence. In the next section, I illustrate the benefits of first understanding the cultural systems among different communities and organizations before drawing conclusions from socio-economic data.

What Do We Gain from Empirical Descriptions of Social Organizations?

Many researchers are skeptical of paradigms that focus on cultural explanations for violence. Such criticisms are often based on the notion that data on culture (or institutional rules) are difficult to obtain, or are qualitative and difficult to operationalize in quantitative studies. In addition, some researchers find that cultural explanations lead to non-scientific explanations, or simply pulling culture out of the hat when needed to explain unexpected findings. These

criticisms may be valid in some contexts, but I illustrate below the pitfalls of drawing conclusions without considering the "context" of organizations and institutions.

Ethnicity. Ethnic groups not only differ in their aggregated demographic characteristics such as per capita income, but also in their organization. In this study, there is support for Light's (1977) hypothesis; numerous ethnic groups took advantage of the demand for vice, but how such services were supplied depended on the different types of organizational structures readily available to different ethnic members. The Chinese had secret societies in their communities, and such structures are clearly a pre-adaptation to proving illegal services. In contrast, Black immigrants coming to Seattle also became involved in the vice and entertainment industry, but did not have pre-existing secret criminal groups to organize people on a large scale. To me, these "facts" go very far in explaining why Chinese cases involved multiple offenders, and Black cases involved one-on-one disputes, with single offenders. To many readers this may seem obvious, but this may be because of the hindsight gained from the detailed description provided about tong groups.

Socio-economic Trends. It is interesting to consider how the interpretations of the data would differ if I simply used the coded dataset to evaluate how well temporal changes in employment, discrimination, and poverty correlated with ethnic-specific crime rates. For example, as Seattle's economy slumped in the Great Depression, did rates of violence increase for all ethnic groups? I propose that a simple quantitative analysis without organizational "context" would do well to explain much of this variation *if* one focused on ethnic-specific indicators of economic success. Historians have shown the tremendous burden faced by Blacks in Seattle, especially with the loss of service jobs during the Great Depression (Taylor, 1994). In contrast, as shown above, the Chinese were successful in creating an ethnic economy to serve

and entertain White patrons. This may have buffered the Chinese from the hardships of the slumping economy that certainly had a toll on Black Seattleites. In sum, such patterns would explain the lower homicide rates among the Chinese as compared to Blacks during the Great Depression. However, while the general economic data do well with some of the patterns, one would be hard pressed to explain the magnitude of Chinese violence from 1917 into the mid 1920's. Even acknowledging economic hardships in combination with skewed male sex ratios might lead one to wonder why the Chinese offender rates were over 150 per 100,000. In hindsight, however, the explanation becomes clear; tong organizations were periodically at war with one another, and warfare clearly can lead to extreme patterns of violence.

In the analyses of tong organizations, I conclude that many tong conflicts are best conceptualized as warfare. In general, tongs had ongoing disputes in the vice industry that occasionally became volatile. The organizations had mechanisms to resolve disputes peacefully, and other organizations such as the Chinese Peace Society created treaties between the disputants. However, like in other wars, serious events such as public insults, assassinations, or breaches of treaties forced groups into mutually deadly fights. Schelling's (1966) influential work on large-scale conflict illustrates that nations or organizations must protect themselves by illustrating to all parties about their *commitment* to use defensive force. When all actors have perfect information, and behave rationally, warfare is avoided because of the known certainly that other parties are committed to full out war. However, on occasion wars break out by mistake, or flukes of history, and all parties are forced into war. More importantly, due to the extreme loyalty of tong members, along with their ability to cooperate at large scales, these wars indeed resulted in large numbers of deaths. As shown above, many cases in the Seattle dataset occurred in this manner. The 1917 tong war illustrated how conflict brought on by a few trouble-

makers brought large organizations into a war, and once started, was difficult to bring under control. In sum, once the cultural and political nature of tong organizations is presented, it is easier to see why so many Chinese died in early Seattle history relative to their small population base.

Social organization and social disorganization. Social disorganization theorists have stressed that residential mobility and economic hardships can lead to the disorganization of normative rules or values that help reduce crime and violence. However, critics quickly pointed out that it is important to know beforehand the types of organizational principles that govern the society. For example, social disorganization may cause more violence in a highly moral community such as a New England village, but *less* violence in an town of the American South where personal and family honor dictate violent dispute-resolution (Cohen, 1998). In this case, the highly organized Chinese community had organizations that both resolved disputes (e.g., Chinese Peace Society), but also tong organizations who at times were forced to display their willingness to use extreme violence. It is interesting that the re-organization of the Chinatown economy seemed to have led to the disorganization (or at least re-organization) of the tong organizations. In sum, the data illustrates how only looking at census data could lead to problematic conclusions; the Chinese homicide rate was highest when the community was the more organized and the economy strong, and lower as the community became disorganized with White consumerism and the national and city economies plummeted.

Broader Implications

The main conclusion in this paper is that I could use historical and ethnographic generalizations of ethnic-specific social organizations to understand homicide cases in one city across four

decades. Light's (1977) assumptions about social organizations and culture in general led him to conclude that different ethnic groups, with particular histories are different in their ability to deal with social problems. Just like in the San Francisco and Los Angeles, Chinese and Black immigrants to Seattle had different ways of dealing with economic hardships. Although both saw the potential gains from the vice industry, they had different organizational structures to cooperate and compete. In sum, I conclude that social organizations can be understood empirically, and implemented in violence research in an objective manner to evaluate specific expectations. Of course, the field of violence research is already moving in this direction. Baumer, et al. (2003) have recently conducted a quantitative analysis of robbery homicides using generalizations from Anderson's (1999) ethnographic description of informal "code of the streets." It turns out that Anderson's description of "honor" and rules used to both remedy disputes and protect one's status are not simply epiphenomenal or restricted to one Philadelphia inner-city neighborhood. This study is similar; early Chinese immigrants created Chinatown organizations, and these in turn patterned violence in predictable ways across place and time.

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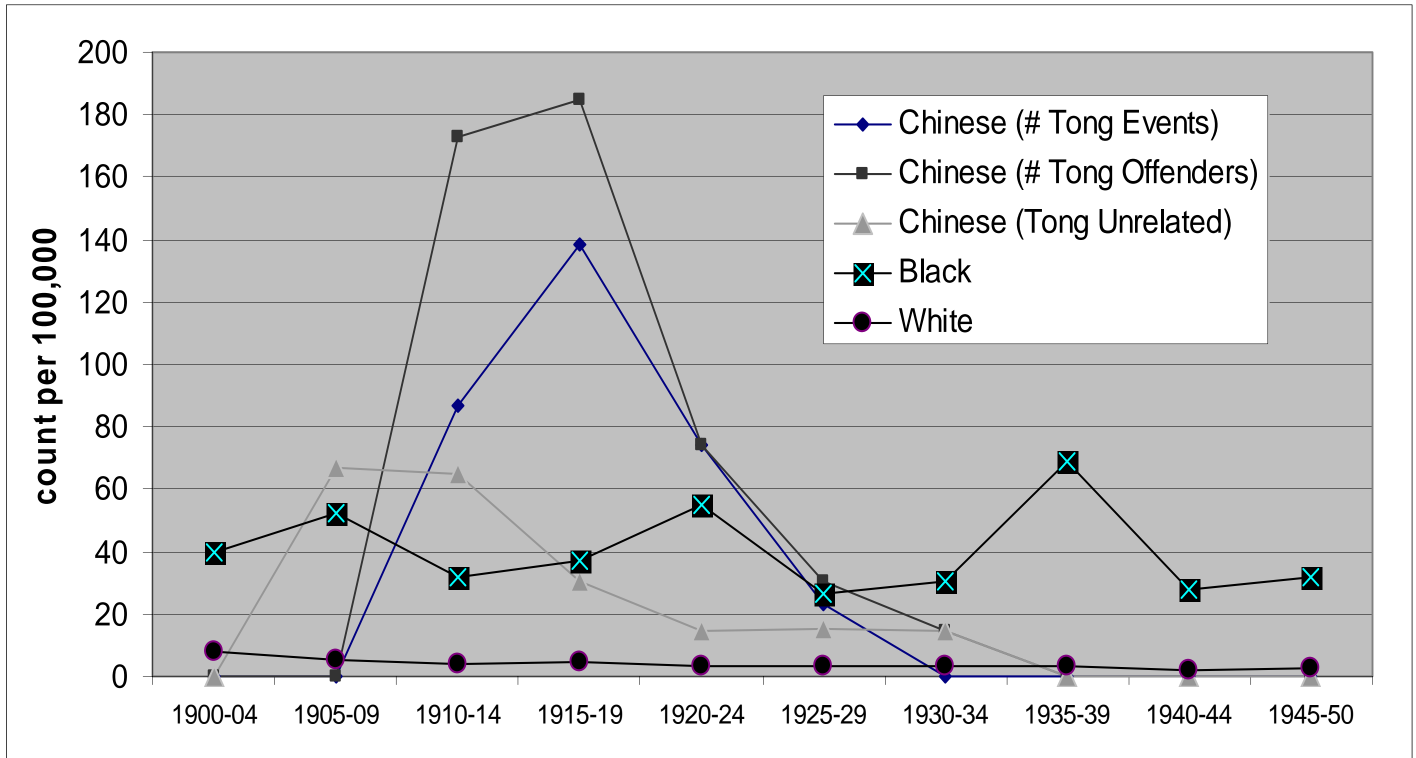

Figure 1. Ethnic-specific Homicide Rates. Note: The rates for "tong events" are lower than "tong offenders" because of multiple offenders. In most cases, there was only one victim per event.

	1900-04	**1905-09**	**1910-14**	**1915-19**	**1920-24**	**1925-29**	**1930-34**	**1935-39**	**1940-44**	**1945-49**
Tong Events **(# offenders)**	0	0	4 (**8**)	7 (**10**)	5 (**5**)	1 (**4**)	1 (**1**)	0	0	0
Historical events and major inter-city tong disputes			**1910**: Rival tongs emerge in Seattle	**1917**: Gunmen led by Mar Tuck create major dispute in Northwest.	**1921**: Dispute emerging from case in San Francisco involving slave girl. **1922**: Dispute in Butte, MT about control of tong territory . **1924**: Large tong conflict on East Coast between On Leongs and Hip Sings.	**1926**: Family put out $1000 reward for removal of their relative's assassin.				
Non-tong Homicide Events		D=1 R=1	D=1 R=1 I=1	D=2	I=1	D=2	D=1			
Chinese Population (male/female) **[Chinese Sex ratio]**	399/12 **[33/1[**		860/72 **[12/1[**		1,180/181 **[6.5/1]**		1000/350 **[2.9 / 1]**		1,350/450 **[3/1]**	

Table 1. Longitudinal Homicide and Demographic Data. (D=Dispute-related; R=Robbery-related; I=Insanity-related).