

DAY OF THE DRAGON

The Chinese Community's Participation in the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition

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Seattle's 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition (AYPE) was promoted as a gateway to the rich resources of Alaska, the Yukon, and Asia. Henry E. Reed, one of the exposition's directors, stated that the plan was to "bring the shores of the Pacific together in trade." Europe was doing far more trade with Asia than the United States could then muster, and the fair organizers hoped to correct this imbalance. If Americans could see Asian products and people up close at the exhibition, argued the organizers, then they could figure out how to sell more American goods in the overseas Asian market.

Besides promoting Asian trade-something that would be beneficial for all-leaders of Seattle's Chinese community were anxious to participate in the fair for another reason. After decades of anti-Chinese sentiment in the latter half of the 19th century and the vigilante expulsion of entire Chinese communities on the West Coast-including Seattle-the fair provided an opportunity for the Chinese to gain acceptance in the broader community.

In the preceding decades the United States and China had signed several treaties that opened the door to Chinese immigration. The U.S. wanted cheap labor and the Chinese were willing to provide it. Although many American laborers were recent immigrants themselves, they railed against the Chinese for taking jobs away from white workers. Anti-Chinese agitation on the West Coast reached a frenzied peak in 1885-86. In February 1886, 350 Chinese workers in Seattle were rounded up and taken down to the waterfront to be sent out on the next ship. The Chinese merchants who remained behind helped to gradually rebuild the community; these were the men who supported Chinese participation in the AYPE.

The Chinese business community viewed the exposition as an opportunity to help the United States government see the wisdom of easing immigration laws. The Chinese and non-Chinese business communities both agreed that Asian trade was a boon to Seattle. While most working people still harbored negative feelings about Chinese laborers, there appeared to be a growing interest in Chinese holiday celebrations, tong wars, and elaborate funerals and parades. During the first decade of 1900s Seattle newspaper headlines began to take on a more positive tone-e.g., "party of distinguished Chinese given a Royal Welcome to the United States" and "Advent of Chinese Baby Causes Feasting: More than Two Hundred Attend Dinners Given in Honor of Chin Lung Ying, son and Heir of Chin Keay. (Chin Keay was the secretary of the Chinese Consulate and a strong AYPE supporter.) The Chinese were making social and financial progress in Seattle.

Two particular merchants-Ah King and Goon Dip-were instrumental in organizing the Chinese Village and China Day for the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. Ah King had arrived in San

Francisco in 1877 and soon moved to the Pacific Northwest to work in the logging camps. In 1897 Ah King opened a restaurant in Seattle. By 1906 he had founded the King Chong Lung Company, a wholesale and retail business selling Chinese groceries and dry goods at 217 Washington Street in Seattle. Ah King sponsored the exposition's Chinese Village pavilion and directed construction of buildings to house the Chinese exhibits and amusements on the exposition grounds. He supplied many of the Chinese curios exhibited at the fair.

In December 1908 Ah King traveled to China to select goods for the exhibit and recruited workers for the fair-concession workers, actors, and acrobats. He paid their passage, put up the money guarantees, obtained the necessary bonds, and paid each of the workers a salary of about \$50 a month in Chinese currency. All workers were required to return to China within 30 days after the close of the fair. Ah King also negotiated a financial agreement with exposition officials to pay a flat rate of \$3,000 plus 25 percent of the Chinese Village gate receipts. The admission fee to enter the village is unknown, but visitors were charged 10 cents to enter the Chinese temple and theatre.

The Chinese Village was situated in the Pay Streak between the Ferris wheel to the north and the Arena to the south. Its three buildings contained a bazaar, a Chinese temple, Ah King's restaurant, and a tearoom. The exhibits and curios were set up on the village grounds behind the main building. It cost about \$15,000 to construct the buildings. The cost to bring the theatrical troupe and approximately 20 workers to the exposition, return them to China, and pay them totaled some \$5,000. Other costs pushed the total cost of building and operating the village past \$25,000. Every piece of furniture, every drapery and curtain was imported from China.

The Temple of Confucius brought from China by Ah King was insured with a \$10,000 bond and had to be returned after the fair. A separate building housed displays of Chinese carvings, rich draperies, laces, and silks. One piece of silk was embroidered by schoolchildren under the age of 12 with the portraits of President Taft and Vice President Sherman. The piece was given to Taft during his visit to the AYPE in October.

Ah King's restaurant in the Chinese Village was a popular attraction. Tourists were encouraged to order Chinese dishes and use chopsticks in true Oriental fashion.

The Chinese Theatre, a favorite attraction at the Chinese Village, featured the Tin Yung Qui Troupe in performances that changed daily. These jugglers, magicians, and acrobats wowed the crowds. One of the magicians was a woman- not particularly unusual for a Chinese performance in 1909, but most unusual for an American performance. When the acrobats arrived in Canada in early June, several of them had trouble getting across the border. Chee Yu San was held over in Vancouver because he had trachoma, a bacterial infection of the eye. J. E. Chilberg, president of the AYPE, wired authorities in Washington, D.C., and negotiated his release, the terms of which required the exposition official to obtain affidavits from physicians in Vancouver, B.C., stating that there was nothing physically or mentally wrong with Chee Yu San. Chilberg suggested that Chee was the victim of overzealous border guards. The Seattle Times reported that Chin How, local manager of the Chinese Village, was "tearing his hair out and using his most expressive English in telling what he thinks of the United States immigration officials." After 10 long days of conciliation, Chee Yu San and his wife finally arrived at the fairground on June 20.

In July, at Ah King's invitation, the Tin Yung Qui Troupe of imperial Chinese performers entertained 26 representatives of local newspapers and their guests. According to the Seattle

Times, "the performers tossed monster blocks of stone about and toyed with 150-pound spears as if they were feathers. Spinning diminutive plates on the ends of two bamboo canes, a performer at the same time went through an amazing series of contortions." The highlight of the evening was furnished by two magicians whose act started with several huge bowls of water containing goldfish and ended with one bowl filled to the brim with water and all of the fish. "The performance was followed by a dinner served by winsome little Chinese maidens clad in silken garments at the Chinese Village." The evening ended with a ride on the Ferris wheel.

Chinese AYPE organizer Goon Dip was one of the wealthiest members of Portland's Chinese colony. He immigrated to Portland at the age of 14 and worked there and in Tacoma before going back to China to marry. When he returned with his bride to the Northwest, the McBride family employed him as a houseboy, taught him English, and introduced him to American culture. Goon Dip eventually found work with Moy Bok-Hin, a Chinese labor contractor, and they became partners. Dip initiated a program to retrain disabled Chinese workers as hem-stitchers and helped establish the garment industry in Portland. He expanded his activities to include supplying laborers for Alaska canning operations. Goon Dip raised money for the exposition on his own initiative and obtained many of the fair's exhibits from his Chinese contacts living in Seattle, Portland, and San Francisco.

September 13, 1909, was declared China Day at the exposition. Lew Kay, son of a pioneer Chinese merchant in Seattle, was program chair for the event. Goon Dip was parade chair. The celebration began with a procession through the streets of downtown Seattle. To the delight of the huge crowd, an enormous dragon puppet led the way. The 150-foot-long dragon sat on the shoulders of 50 men, their legs resembled those of a centipede. Footmen kept the dragon's "spirit subdued by threatening it with war clubs and spears."

With J. E. Chilberg, Goon Dip-dressed in flowing silken robes-followed the dragon. Then came the AYPE marching band, followed by four Chinese bands playing Chinese music while riding on floats decorated with Chinese and American colors. The parade wound its way from Quong Tuck's teahouse to Washington Street. A Seattle Times article on the parade included the following details:

Chinese horsemen in full military regalia with their armored suits and helmets, led detachments of footmen representing the Imperial Infantry, whose silken uniforms were a riot of color.

Interspersed in the line were squads of small boys and girls bearing banners and emblems. Alongside the young group, adult Chinese carried huge, heavy banners with Chinese inscribed on them.

Fifty children from the Seattle Chinese Imperial School dressed in Chinese attire were in another float. White women held up their children to see them to the delight of all.

In front of grave mandarins marched small boys, swinging incense lamps.

Following the dragon were 30 automobiles bearing local Chinese merchants and their visiting brethren from Vancouver, Victoria, Tacoma, Portland, Everett, Bellingham, and other cities.

At the head of the motorcade rode Goon Dip and his assistant Ah Keay, Rev. Fong Chack, Judge Thomas Burke, Consul Moy Pack-Hin, of Portland, and other dignitaries. In one automobile a Chinese quartet from Portland sang popular American airs.

The fair ended on October 16, 1909. When the figures were tallied, the receipts for 3,740,551 admissions totaled \$1,096,475. The AYPE finished with a surplus of \$62,676. Ah King said shortly

before the exposition began that he did not expect to make a profit from the Chinese Village and in fact anticipated a loss. He was right: The village brought in total revenues of \$21,451, and that was before the AYPE got its cut (\$4,863). Ah King remained in Seattle all his life. Goon Dip resided in Portland while operating several businesses in Seattle. Both men continued to advance the interest of trade between the Pacific Northwest and Asia.

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