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**Project description**

By examining the little used notes and essays of Paul Siu produced in the 1930s, we find evidence that challenges early images of unassimilable Chinese men and enslaved Chinese women. In early twentieth century Chicago, racial categories for Chinese men were rigid. However, their categorical foreignness did not prevent Chinese men from establishing or buying sexual and/or emotional relationships with white, black, and mixed-race women. The prevalence of these relationships reveals the ways in which the image of the unassimilable eternally foreign Chinese man collapses when interrogating individual intimate relationships. For Chinese women, I argue that within the popular discourse of “white slavery,” the racial category of whiteness became contingent on the conditions of their gender and allowed for Chinese women to be enfolded into whiteness. Prostitution allowed Chinese women to gain some economic freedom while they escaped the harsh conditions of servitude and was a central avenue for Chinese men to form intimate relationships with local women.

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Foreign Pleasures: sex in early twentieth-century Chinese Chicago

By  
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## Abstract

By examining the little used notes and essays of Paul Siu produced in the 1930s, we find evidence that challenges early images of unassimilable Chinese men and enslaved Chinese women. In early twentieth century Chicago, racial categories for Chinese men were rigid. However, their categorical foreignness did not prevent Chinese men from establishing or buying sexual and/or emotional relationships with white, black, and mixed-race women. The prevalence of these relationships reveals the ways in which the image of the unassimilable eternally foreign Chinese man collapses when interrogating individual intimate relationships. For Chinese women, I argue that within the popular discourse of “white slavery,” the racial category of whiteness became contingent on the conditions of their gender and allowed for Chinese women to be enfolded into whiteness. Prostitution allowed Chinese women to gain some economic freedom while they escaped the harsh conditions of servitude and was a central avenue for Chinese men to form intimate relationships with local women.

## Introduction

Some historians argue that Chicago’s Chinese population was an insular ethnic group located in Chinatown.<sup>1</sup> Contrary to popular belief, Chinese men did not simply live as lonely bachelors in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> Instead, they navigated foreign terrain to seek methods that both fulfilled patriarchal duties to their wives and children, who were legally kept out of the U.S. in most cases, and find intimacy and companionship among white, black, and Chinese prostitutes in Chicago. Intimate relationships formed between prostitutes of many races in Chicago and

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<sup>1</sup>Adam McKeown, *Chinese migrants networks and cultural change Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900-1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2001; Huping Ling, *Chinese Chicago: Race, Transnational Migration, and Community since 1870* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012) <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/11123550>

<sup>2</sup> Paul C. P. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation*, (New York: New York University, 1987).

Chinese men were integral in Chinatown's underground economy and challenge images of a monolithic Chinese population and the perpetually lonely Chinese bachelor.

By using prostitution as the lens in which we approach writing a social history, we illuminate the axis at which gender, race, intimacy, and economy intersect. Through a critical reading of Paul Siu's notes, we see that interracial relationships based in sexual exchange was exceedingly common in the early twentieth century for Chinese men and American woman of different races. Additionally, Siu's notes give insight into the lives of early Chinese prostitutes that show even under harsh conditions of violence and oppression, some women still found avenues in which they could claim their independence through selling sex. I focus on spaces of the intimate because; one, these spaces are often charged with all the inflections of political, social, cultural, and cultural understandings; and two, written documents quoted directly from prostitutes are exceedingly rare, this fact is compounded further when searching for the narratives of lower class and immigrant women. Because most early Chinese women migrants did not speak English they did not leave many material traces. Any chance to pull these women back into the historical account is an incredible privilege. It is only a small part of giving them the recognition they deserve for their roles as historical, social, economic, and human actors to attempt to record their lives now. Additionally, the rarity of sources on early Chinatown in Chicago itself designates that we look closely at the few sources that are available. By exploring the interracial intimacies recorded by Paul Siu in the 1930s, we can see the ways in which the transgression of boundaries of race and ethnicity produced an underground economy for the exchange of sex for money and introduced new norms around intimate relationships.

In turn of the twentieth century Chicago, Chinese men both benefitted from emotional and physical intimacy with black and white women who sold them sex and struggled for their

own economic upward mobility. The black, white, and mixed-race women who sold and sometimes bought sex struggled to find security in a dangerous city with no place for the new populations attempting to make a home. And lastly, Chinese women who were coerced and forced violently into sex work found themselves in situations in which they negotiated new routes of independence.

## **Historiography**

At the center of my interrogation lies the intersection of racialization and sexuality. I want to push back against frames of analysis that place priority in official avenues such as political or judicial entities. Ideologies are produced and reproduced both at the state and personal level and the intimate can reinforce, renegotiate, or combat narratives of the state.<sup>3</sup> Conceptions of a monolithic ethnic enclave were mobilized by scholars and evidence of such can be found in Paul Siu's notes. However, I argue that avenues of intimate relationships held much more fluid boundaries around race and propriety than was recently believed.

On the topic of urban sexuality, the works that were most helpful either focused on Chicago at the turn of the twentieth century or the topic of urban intimacy and racialization. In Chicago specifically, Joanne Meyerowitz's *Women Adrift* and Cynthia M. Blair's *I've Got to Make My Livin'* both establish the social conditions of turn of the twentieth century Chicago with a focus on women.<sup>4</sup> However, both works only minimally integrate or use accounts of immigrant women. Even when immigrant accounts were included, in *Women Adrift* specifically, Chinese women and men failed to be mentioned.

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*. Ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982): 143-177.

<sup>4</sup> Cynthia M. Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

The Midwest tends to be overlooked in accounts of Chinese migration. Exceptions to this rule include Adam McKeown's *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change* and Huping Ling's *Chinese Chicago*.<sup>5</sup> Both authors endeavor to write a history of Chinese migrants, McKeown within the early twentieth century and Ling from the nineteenth century to contemporary times. Analytically, I contend with McKeown's treatment of Chinatown in Chicago as an insular ethnic enclave and use Paul Siu's notes to argue against this framework. Additionally, Ling's temporally expansive history glosses over the specificities surrounding the buying and selling of sex in Chicago. The interracial nature of the exchange of sex for money both complicate the idea of an ethnic enclave and add nuance to the discussion of prostitution.

Chinatowns have long been geographic points of interest for academics, tourists, and migrants. As such, early investigations such as *Long Time Californ'* by the brothers Victor and Brett de Bary Nee, have served as a jumping off point for more contemporary Asian American studies of Chinatowns such as *Vancouver's Chinatown* and *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery*.<sup>6</sup> The earliest published book by the brothers Nee was a compilation of interviews done in San Francisco's Chinatown in the early years of the 1970s. The book features many original recorded narratives from Chinatown residents, but the authors rarely attempt to connect the themes within those narratives to a wider historical context. The latter examples both use governmental and "official" documents to construct the discourse around in the former. Anderson's and Lui's books offer new strategies in writing a history of people's by using multiple sources and show a

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<sup>5</sup> Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900-1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2001; Huping Ling, *Chinese Chicago: Race, Transnational Migration, and Community since 1870* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Victor Nee and Brett de Bary Nee, *Longtime Californ': A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986); Kay Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); Mary Ting Yi Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-century New York City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

more interdisciplinary use of primary documents in their creative uses of both images and newspapers.

### **Methodology and Sources**

My primary source base consists of Paul Siu's notes from the Ernest Burgess Collection from Special Collections and Research Division at the Regenstein Library, with supporting evidence taken from *The Chicago Daily Tribune* and *The Chicago Sun Times* from the years of 1850-1930. The main focus of this project are the aforementioned notes and documents produced by Paul Siu under the study of sociology professor Ernest Burgess at the "Chicago School of Sociology" in the early twentieth century. The particular documents I engage with are on the topics of prostitution and interracial relationships.

Paul Siu entered the sociology department of the University of Chicago in 1932.<sup>7</sup> Siu was a rare Chinese student in that he spoke the same dialect as rural lower-class immigrant Chinese laborers, namely Cantonese.<sup>8</sup> Other Chinese students, such as Ching Chao Wu, another prominent Chinese student at the University of Chicago, mostly spoke Mandarin and came from elite or educated families in urban areas.<sup>9</sup> Siu's father worked as a laundryman in St. Paul, Minnesota, and Paul joined him on a student visa at age twenty-two. After studying in Minnesota for several years, he moved to the University of Chicago to continue his education.

Siu had been a social worker for eight years when he started his fieldwork. During this period, he lived everyday among his subjects. He even worked for some time as a laundry

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<sup>7</sup> Paul C.P. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation*, (New York: New York University, 1987):1-8.

<sup>8</sup> The failure of the Boxer Rebellion forced the Chinese government to pay foreign nations an annual indemnity. The U.S. used these funds to recruit Chinese students, most of the students were attached Protestant Missions. American Protestant missions were largely in Northern, more urbanized regions of China from Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 115.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001):116.

delivery man. The intimate notes and stories recorded by Siu indicate that, instead of being an insular ethnic enclave, Chinatown served as a location where information could be exchanged and boundaries of race and ethnicity were transgressed. His professors at the University of Chicago were excited by the prospect of a true insider. However, Siu's own awareness of his precarious position as an investigator was reflected when he wrote about himself,

“He has friends and relatives among the laundrymen. He knows the cultural background well enough to comprehend the personal problem of the laundryman. This, however, may be an advantage or it may be a disadvantage. The disadvantage is bias and loss of sight of some of the significant points and interests from the cultural standpoint.”<sup>10</sup>

Siu's notes and papers are recorded in the third person to maintain distance; how effective this strategy was to establish objectivity is debatable as he attempts to parse his role in the writing of history.<sup>11</sup>

The turn of the twentieth century saw great demographic shifts in the city of Chicago with an influx of populations from the American south, Europe, and Asia.<sup>12</sup> This phenomenon fascinated sociology professors at the University of Chicago and resulted in multiple projects on urban communities of which Paul Siu took part. Parts of the experiences captured by Siu for his dissertation were published in 1988 under the title of *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study in Social Isolation*. This book focuses specifically on the experiences of Chinese launderers based on his participant observation during the 1930s.<sup>13</sup> However, the fieldnotes and unpublished papers he wrote during his time as a doctoral student at the University of Chicago touch on a

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<sup>10</sup> Paul C.P. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation*, (New York: New York University, 1987).

<sup>11</sup> Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Paul C.P. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation*, (New York: New York University, 1987): 1-8.

<sup>12</sup> Cynthia M. Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); Mary Linehan, "Vicious Circle: Prostitution, Reform, and Public Police in Chicago, 1830-1930," Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1991; Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

<sup>13</sup> Paul C.P. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation*, (New York: New York University, 1987).

wider variety of experiences within Chicago's Chinatown, including prostitution, gambling, marriage, family, occupations, and specific case studies of both individuals and families. Often, he includes direct quotes from members within the community which allows an invaluable glimpse into an understudied community. His position as a participant observer with friends and relatives within the community allows for an intimacy that is non-existent in most nineteenth and early twentieth century texts purported to accurately describe the everyday lives of Chinese people. His notes and papers are worth revisiting and contain exclusive insights into an understudied region during a time of great change.

There are only two books that have used the notes I work with. They are Siu's own book published in 1988, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study in Social Isolation* and Huping Ling's book published in 2012, *Chinese Chicago: Race, Transnational migration, and Community Since 1870*.<sup>14</sup> In Ling's work, the use of Paul Siu's notes is preliminary. They are used to give a very brief overview into the types of vice that existed in early Chicago Chinatown. Her work focuses much more on the importance of gambling and does not delve deeply into racial, social dynamics at play within prostitution. The brief engagements of Siu are also a result of the temporally expansive method in which she constructs a history. In Siu's 1988 book, *The Chinese Laundryman*, he addresses prostitution almost exclusively by examining how the women engaged Chinese laundry men. In his unpublished notes, we also find narratives recorded from more affluent men with higher clan status and restaurant owners that were not present in his study of Chicago's Chinese laundry men.

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<sup>14</sup> Paul C.P. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation*, (New York: New York University, 1987); Huping Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

Both within his notes and book, he frames prostitution as a psychological problem stemming from Chinese migrants' inability to assimilate. Siu mistakenly analyzes prostitution as a result of "social disorganization" and believes the solution to be the transplantation of Chinese families to the U.S. or the return of Chinese migrants to China.<sup>15</sup> The collection contains interviews, family case studies, individual case studies, counts, and Siu's own observations of the people living within Chinatown. His recorded accounts extend back to when the first Chinese migrants arrived in Chicago and offers access to a collective memory that dates further back than most other sources. In my use of his notes, I include a wider range of narratives than that of the Chinese laundryman, most notably those of early Chinese prostitutes.

At times, Siu's documents can be moralistic due to his own biases around culturally based racism and prevalent discourses by the Progressive movement to end prostitution. The bulk of the documents and notes are dated from the early 1930s. The subsequent publishing of Siu's book on Chinese launderers in Chicago did not take place until 1953.<sup>16</sup> As such, Siu's notes and book fall into what Sucheng Chan would place within the second period of Asian American historiography, defined by social scientists occurring between 1920 and 1960.<sup>17</sup> The first period (1870 to 1920) was characterized by partisan writings that attempted to quell the rising tide screaming Yellow Peril invasion.<sup>18</sup> The first two periods of Asian American historiography view the establishment of Asian communities in America as a "problem". Siu's documents belong firmly into the second period of Asian American historiography which focused on categorizing and tracing the social organization of Asian communities. He uses this

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<sup>15</sup> Paul C.P. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation*, (New York: New York University, 1987): 250-271.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Sucheng Chan, "Asian American Historiography," *Pacific Historical Review*, 65, no. 3 (1996): 363-399.

<sup>18</sup> Sucheng Chan, "Asian American Historiography," *Pacific Historical Review*, 65, no. 3 (1996): 363-399.

strategy in an attempt to humanize Chinese migrants in the eyes of a suspicious American public. Siu's own complicated feelings regarding his own position vis-à-vis the University of Chicago and Chicago's Chinese community influenced his notes and papers. Through critically engaging his text, I illuminate the ways that social relationships between Chinese men and white, black, and Chinese prostitutes rejected popular notions of "the Chinese problem" to create new norms and economies in the turn of the twentieth century Chicago.

I use the term prostitution and the selling of sex interchangeably. I use the term migrants instead of immigrants because immigrant implies a legal status with political connotations. The term migrant is broader and includes those that might not intend to settle in the U.S. permanently. The racial designations assigned in this project are those taken verbatim from the source material. The exception to this is when Siu refers to an individual as a "blank race-blank race- blank race" hybrid which I refer to as someone as mixed race for readability. I start by situating Siu's notes into the particular historical moment they were written through his institutional affiliation of the Chicago School of Sociology.<sup>19</sup> Then I engage Siu's profiles of some of the Chinese prostitutes to show that while the conditions under which they lived and worked were harsh, they were able to find some semblance of freedom due to the economic mobility allowed by their profession.

### **Chicago Chinatown**

In the mid nineteenth century, the space that is now occupied by the Southside Chinatown on Cermak, Archer, and Wentworth Avenue, was occupied by a population of

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<sup>19</sup> This affiliation with the University of Chicago is in large part why his notes and documents are so well preserved and accessible as a historical document now.

German and Swedish peoples.<sup>20</sup> In the 1890s and 1900s, this population was mostly displaced by incoming Italian and Croatian populations. Later, in 1912, Chinatown moved from Clark Street (in the heart of the Levee vice district) to the Southside location at Cermak, Archer, and Wentworth Avenue.<sup>21</sup> The Levee at this time was one of America's most notorious vice districts but was more tolerant of Chinese residents when compared to the virulent racism in the western states.<sup>22</sup>

The move was the result of rising land values, racial prejudice by landlords, and conflicts between the two largest Chinese rival merchant associations.<sup>23</sup> In the nineteenth century, most Chinatown businesses subsisted by providing goods and services to Chinese launderers. During the turn of the twentieth century in Chicago, anxieties around assimilation, labor, and the role of race crystallized around the newly growing Chinese population.<sup>24</sup> The integration of these new peoples into the social political landscape required a setting of boundaries both socially and geographically by politicians, police, landlords, and newspapers. While there are many other facets involved in the racialization of a migrant group, I will be focusing on the social and intimate aspects due to the limits of my central primary source.

The first Chinese people in Chicago were a group of eight men who came without wives and established laundries in 1870; one was nicknamed "opium Dong".<sup>25</sup> Four years later in

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<sup>20</sup> Bennet Bronson, Joe Chiu and Chuimei Ho, *Chinatown in Chicago: A Visitor's Guide to its History and Architecture* (Chicago: Chinese-American Museum of Chicago, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Bennet Bronson, Joe Chiu and Chuimei Ho, *Chinatown in Chicago: A Visitor's Guide to its History and Architecture* (Chicago: Chinese-American Museum of Chicago, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Victor Nee and Brett de Bary Nee, *Longtime Californ': A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986).

<sup>23</sup> Bennet Bronson, Joe Chiu and Chuimei Ho, *Chinatown in Chicago: A Visitor's Guide to its History and Architecture* (Chicago: Chinese-American Museum of Chicago, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Bennet Bronson, Joe Chiu and Chuimei Ho, *Chinatown in Chicago: A Visitor's Guide to its History and Architecture* (Chicago: Chinese-American Museum of Chicago, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

1874, two brothers, Moy Tong-Chou and Moy Tong-Hai, bought “opium Dong’s” laundry on Madison Street by Clark Street. The store was named Hip Lum and later moved to South Clark Street and finally to Twenty -Second Street. According to one of the brothers, Mr. Moy Tong-Hai, there were no Chinese women in Chicago until six or seven years after the establishment of the “Chinatown” on South Clark Street.<sup>26</sup> There were only five or six Chinese families within the “Chinatown” in the late nineteenth century.

As in San Francisco, this early iteration of a “Chinatown” was not easily discernable from surrounding buildings.<sup>27</sup> Through popular narratives in newspapers and orientally stylized buildings, the concept of a Chinatown, a geographically distinct area with a discernable “Chineseness”, was transplanted from the sensational stories from San Francisco and New York’s Chinatowns.<sup>28</sup> The passing of various anti-Chinese laws, such as The Page Law of 1875 and Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, crystallized conceptions of the Chinese race, as dirty and dark.<sup>29</sup> Siu classifies Chicago as changing from an “industrial city to a “metropolis” from 1883-1893.<sup>30</sup> Largely focused on the figure of the Chinese laundryman, he observed them slowly being pushed out of the downtown business district into different neighborhoods during the early twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> The unofficial “Chinatown” in Chicago moved down to Twenty-Second and

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<sup>26</sup> The quotations marks around “Chinatown” were included by Siu to indicate a difference between the early formation which was different from what existed in the 1930s.

<sup>27</sup> On San Francisco’s Chinatown: Roman Mars, *99% Invisible Podcast: Pagodas and Dragon Gates*, podcast audio, December 8, 2015, <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/pagodas-dragon-gates/>.

<sup>28</sup> “The Horrors of Chinatown” *Chicago Daily Tribune*: Aug 1, 1885: “Montana: Routes Thither”, *Chicago Daily Tribune*: Feb 11, 1873: Roman Mars, *99% Invisible Podcast: Pagodas and Dragon Gates*, podcast audio, December 8, 2015, <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/pagodas-dragon-gates/>.

<sup>29</sup> Huping Ling, *Surviving the Gold Mountain: a history of Chinese American women and their lives* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 1998; Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991); Sucheng Chan, “Asian American Historiography,” *Pacific Historical Review*, 65, no. 3 (1996): 363-399; Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Paul C.P. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation*, (New York: New York University, 1987): 27.

<sup>31</sup> Paul C.P. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation*, (New York: New York University, 1987): 30-31.

Wentworth in 1912 and at this point the number of families had greatly increased. The number of Chinese in Chicago continued to grow while populations in Chinatowns in the West declined due to the relative economic success and stability found in Chicago among the Chinese population.<sup>32</sup> For various reasons, the success of the Chinese in Chicago in regards to the overall Chinese population in the United States illustrates the robustness of different facets of economy in Chinatown and the ways that racialized prejudices were not as hurtful in the Midwest as opposed to the racial projects on the West Coast. Additionally, kinship relationships and networks allowed new Chinese male migrants to find employment in laundries and restaurants with relative ease which resulted in a basic security of a regular paycheck.

At the same time, young white, black, and mixed-race women moving to Chicago found new avenues for relationships with Chinese men that offered a sense of security. Whether that security was emotional or material depended on the particular individuals. Interracial relationships illustrated the ways in which racial projects by the state and public entities to establish difference worked to some extent. But, intimate relationships for purposes of sex and sentiment were much less easily categorized and point to the messiness in projects to construct ideologies of race, gender, and sexuality. Prostitutes played a significant role in acting as companions and sometimes partners for Chinese men.

Urban migration was central to the development of Chicago's Chinatown. The Chinese population in the Midwest was concentrated within the city of Chicago while the population outside of the city accounted for less than twenty five percent of the entire population from 1870-

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<sup>32</sup> Two other factors that could have contributed to the larger Chinese population would be undercounting in the census during the earlier years leading to greater increases later on, and the migration of Chinese populations within the United States from other centers such as New York, San Francisco, Portland, etc. McKeown also argues to varying degrees of conviction of the ways that the robust gambling economy enabled Chinese workers greater stability during the U.S. Depression in the 1930s: Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrants Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900-1936*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

1940.<sup>33</sup> Chicago Chinatown also functioned as a hub in the Midwest for smaller Chinese communities in Minneapolis, Duluth, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, and St. Louis. Within the city, many Chinese residents of Chicago also lived, worked, and travelled outside of “Chinatown,” returning to visit regularly and irregularly.<sup>34</sup> Although the construction of Chinatown was an endeavor undertaken by both Chicago natives and non-natives, it was an important place used for the exchange of ideas and information between different racial and ethnic groups.

The changing urban landscape and influx of non-native populations at the turn of the twentieth century Chicago provided sociologists the perfect opportunity to test their theories of society and community. The sociology department at the University of Chicago was particularly interested in shifting the commonly-held concept of race being biologically determined to an argument that proposed cultural differences as the explanation.<sup>35</sup> Robert Ezra Park was one of the founders of the University of Chicago’s “School of Sociology,” which was most well-known for sending students to study, map, and create, in some sense, ethnic neighborhoods. Park’s experience with segregation in Alabama at the Tuskegee Institute informed his spatialized concept of race relations which was then transplanted to his work and teachings at the University of Chicago.<sup>36</sup> His mode of analysis imposed onto twentieth century urban Chicago a concept of “social distance” based in cultural heritage that contributed to the formation of an imagined Oriental figure. The Chinatowns and Japantowns of the city were imagined to be linked to some

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<sup>33</sup> Other calculations of the Chinese population propose that the national census underrepresented the population from 50 to 100 percent. Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900-1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2001; Huping Ling, *Chinese Chicago: Race, Transnational Migration, and Community since 1870* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).  
<http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/11123550>

<sup>34</sup> Paul C.P. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation*, (New York: New York University, 1987).

<sup>35</sup> Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

space of a mythical Orient and an impossibly far-from-white America.<sup>37</sup> The Chicago school of sociology taught Paul Siu that problems of race were based in cultural differences between foreigners and the “native” white American population.

This belief led Siu to classify interracial relationships and the use of prostitutes by Chinese men as the result of a “disorganized” or “demoralized” social life.<sup>38</sup> The University of Chicago school taught that racial prejudice was affixed to an imagined social difference. This construction cemented racial categories without a firm integrated analysis that accounted for systems of power. Based on their theory of “social distance,” one could not hate a racial group yet intimately desire someone from that group.<sup>39</sup> However, this type of interracial mixing was recorded in Siu’s notes and papers as occurring regularly within Chinatown and the Chinese population in Chicago. Sentiment and money crossed boundaries in intimate relationships. His lengthy documents and astute observations regarding prostitution gestures towards Siu’s sense that these relationships indicated something deeper than just an exchange for carnal pleasure. Yet, the sociological training he received and his own personal anxieties around his lack of objectivity limited his analysis of prostitution as just another cultural gap between Chinese and white Americans.

### **Prostitution in Chinatown**

Women often exchanged or sold sexual services to men as an important strategy of earning money in the early twentieth century.<sup>40</sup> Chicago was known to be a city with many

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<sup>37</sup> Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>39</sup> Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>40</sup> Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

prostitutes and popular beliefs around sexuality accepted prostitutes as needed in maintaining the social order.<sup>41</sup> In discourse, the bodies of prostitute often represented a site for the fleshing out of anxieties around race, disease, sexuality, and morality.<sup>42</sup> This compounded with particular anxieties around Yellow Peril make the intersection of sex and race particularly pertinent as a location of analysis. The Chinese population in Chicago, while small in numbers, was particularly vilified by white slave writers:

The cruelest, wisest set of heathens on earth, who feared not nor worship God, and recognize no law but their own; who will sell their life of the life of others for a white woman; who will work night and day, steal, starve, gamble and save enough money to get a white woman slave or wife.<sup>43</sup>

Chinese immigrants were associated with prostitution but in ways that focused on protecting earlier Victorian ideals of the virtuous white women. Chinese men were largely associated with an inscrutable foreignness that was poisoned by opium and darkness.<sup>44</sup> Similar to black women, Chinese women who sold sex were both victimized and vilified for practicing as prostitutes.<sup>45</sup> The critique of Chinese men mainly rested on their immorality and a fear of contaminating the white female population. Similarly, a white fear of black men led to their hypersexualization as a threat to white womanhood. After all, white women were tasked with the reproduction of the

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<sup>41</sup> Mary Linehan. "Vicious Circle: Prostitution, Reform, and Public Police in Chicago, 1830-1930." Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame. 1991.

<sup>42</sup> For more on prostitution in U.S. history at the turn of the twentieth century see: John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Joel Best, *Controlling Vice: Regulating Brothel Prostitution in St. Paul, 1865-1883* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1998); Cynthia M. Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-Vice Activism, 1887-1917* (University of Illinois Press, 2006).

<sup>43</sup> Zimmerman, *America's Black Traffic*, p. 51. Chrysler, *White Slavery*, p. 76 as quoted in Mary Linehan. "Vicious Circle: Prostitution, Reform, and Public Police in Chicago, 1830-1930." Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame. 1991.

<sup>44</sup> Sucheng Chan, "Asian American Historiography," *Pacific Historical Review*, 65, no. 3 (1996): 363-399.

<sup>45</sup> "Montana: Routes Thither—Their Undesirable Character Special Correspondence of the Chicago Tribune," *Chicago Daily Tribune (Chicago, IL)*, Feb. 11, 1873, ProQuest; "The Horrors of Chinatown", *Chicago Daily Tribune (Chicago, IL)*, Aug. 1, 1885. ProQuest.

white race and had to remain pure at all costs.<sup>46</sup> This type of alarmist rhetoric stems from fears about the unfixed place of Chinese immigrants and rural white women entering the urban sphere.<sup>47</sup>

Through a swirling discourse of white womanhood under attack, Siu saw reflected within it his own understandings of Chinese women who sold sex. Siu saw Chinese prostitutes as victims by classifying them as “white slaves” which took on the Progressive definition of some helpless, young woman coerced into sex work. He grafts this Progressive definition onto his understanding of Chinatown prostitution and characterizes the Chinese women as “unhealthy”, “maladjusted”, “demoralized”, and on a scale of complete “white slave” to “simi-white slave” due to how professional the girls had been in their sex work before coming to Chicago Chinatown specifically.<sup>48</sup>

The use of the term of white slavery while referencing Chinese women by Siu point to the prevalence of and flexibility of “White slave narratives”, stories of largely white young women kidnapped and forced into prostitution, dominated popular conceptions of urban prostitution at the turn of the twentieth century. An early example of this in 1873, a special Chicago Tribune Dispatch from Montana wrote that Chinese women are cast as slaves that “are daily bought and sold, and transferred voluntarily or involuntarily, like horses or cattle”.<sup>49</sup> Tellingly, directly above the paragraph of “barbarous” treatment being received by Chinese women, the author urges young American girls to make their way to Montana where they “stand a better chance to marry well” and “make your fortune.” This article warns Chinese women from

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<sup>46</sup> Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

<sup>47</sup> Mary Ting Yi Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and other dangerous encounters in turn-of-the-century New York City*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>48</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>49</sup> “Montana: Routes Thither”, *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Feb 11, 1873.

the dangers of sexual slavery in the West and at the same time invites white American girls to seek their fortunes. Alarmist representations by newspapers and vice commissions contributed to a further exoticized and racialized Chinatown within Chicago. Additionally, these accounts cast Chinese women exclusively as victims of their situations. But soon, fears of a disappearing white womanhood shifted stories to enfold the new rural women migrating to urban centers.<sup>50</sup> These stories began to appear in the 1880s but became especially popular after 1908.<sup>51</sup> While white slavery narratives gained popularity, so did stories of enslaved Chinese women.

In fact, Chicago authors claimed the bulk of the production of these literary exposés.<sup>52</sup> Chicago newspapers such as the Chicago Sun-Times and the Chicago Inter-Ocean also expressed fears around Chinese or Mongolian men selling women or poisoning white women with headlines such as, “GIRLS SOLD TO CHINESE -- \$125 to \$200 IS PRICE PAID.” and “FIND NEW SLAVE DEN -- Police Arrest White Woman with Mongolian in Chinatown Restaurant.”<sup>53</sup> Within a popular discourse meant to vilify and differentiate the Chinese race, Siu emphasizes Chinese women’s proximity to whiteness to highlight her helplessness in her situation. In this instance, the term “white slavery” was racially flexible enough to include traditionally excluded Chinese women. In popular discourse, Chinese women were brought under conditions of coercion by their debased countrymen to sell sex.<sup>54</sup> Foreign to the U.S., Chinese men were further cast as corrupt aliens willing to transport and force Chinese women into prostitution.

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<sup>50</sup> Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

<sup>51</sup> Mary Linehan. “Vicious Circle: Prostitution, Reform, and Public Police in Chicago, 1830-1930.” Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame. 1991.

<sup>52</sup> Mary Linehan. “Vicious Circle: Prostitution, Reform, and Public Police in Chicago, 1830-1930.” Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame. 1991.

<sup>53</sup> “Girls Sold to Chinese-- \$125 to \$200 is Price Paid,” *Chicago Inter-Ocean* (Chicago, IL), May 21, 1890: “Find New Slave Den,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), October 17, 1909.

<sup>54</sup> Benson Tong, *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-century San Francisco* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).

Aside from the racial marker of whiteness, which has always excluded Asians, “white slavery” narratives fit more succinctly in Chinese cases than in many actual cases of white slavery. While stories of wicked Chinese men were sensationalized, there were instances where men coerced Chinese women to migrate and then forced them to sell sex. In a real life “white slavery” story recorded by Siu, LL, a twenty-one-year-old Chinese prostitute was flattered and coaxed into marrying a young Chinese man. After the married couple arrived in the United States, he violently forced LL into prostitution. A dominating and violent figure who forces young girls into prostitution was a prominent fixture in white slave narratives. Newspapers also classified a wide array of other intimate practices as white slavery which indicates the flexibility of the term even within popular discourse. These articles used the term white slavery to refer to: divorce cases, an affair between a married college professor and a young woman student, a man who married a farmer’s daughter instead of his common law wife, and interracial marriages.<sup>55</sup> These examples show that the term itself was delineated by mostly violence and coercion and less so stringent categories of race or ethnicity.

The presence and relationships of Chinese prostitutes in turn of the twentieth century Chicago Chinatown complicated notions of the black and white color line. Contrary to popular beliefs, integration of these women within the sexual landscape was neither racially nor ethnically bound. Early laws like the 1875 Page Act limited female immigration from Asian countries for the purpose of prostitution. These laws effectively prevented wives from joining their husbands and branded any Asian woman immigrant as a prostitute.

Even before the 1875 Page Act, Historian Sucheng Chan traces immigration laws with distinctly gendered qualities back to California state legislation in 1866 when “An Act for the

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<sup>55</sup> Mary Linehan. “Vicious Circle: Prostitution, Reform, and Public Police in Chicago, 1830-1930.” Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame. 1991.

Suppression of Chinese Houses of Ill Fame” passes. This act along with “An Act to Prevent the Kidnapping and Importation of Mongolia, Chinese, and Japanese Female, for Criminal or Demoralizing Purposes” passed in 1870 actively marked the bodies of Chinese women as immoral prostitutes. Even before the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, concerns of Chinese women’s immorality and sexuality had effectively been legislated multiple times in the United States. Thus, the Chinese women that immigrated to the U.S. at the turn of the twentieth century encountered a population that had already constructed an image of the female Chinese prostitute.

In San Francisco, most single Chinese women labored as domestic workers or prostitutes; married Chinese women were mostly housewives and merchants’ wives.<sup>56</sup> However, in Chicago, we find instances of “free union marriages” which Siu classifies as when “a white or Chinese prostitute comes to live with an immigrant... they are temporary arrangement for living together.”<sup>57</sup> “Free union” relationship arrangements were fairly common among Chinese men in Chicago. The relationships were flexible for women who needed a steady source of housing and for lonely men who wanted companionship. This allowed the women to sell their sexual services for money while maintaining some stability in their housing arrangements.

For Siu, the seeking of prostitutes was a biological imperative for Chinese men in the absence of a “normal” family life.<sup>58</sup> Siu implicitly argues that if Chinese men remained married with their families in China, they would not patronize prostitutes. Unfortunately, he overlooks the prevalence of prostitution in China in this attempt to link maladjustment to cultural values in

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<sup>56</sup> Huping Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

<sup>57</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 7], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>58</sup> Paul C.P. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation*, (New York: New York University, 1987): 250-271.

the U.S.<sup>59</sup> In Chicago, engaging prostitutes was commonly practiced by Chinese men and constituted knowledge passed from the older to younger generation. The learned knowledge was passed through migrants who had been in Chicago longest to newcomers. In this activity, new migrants became accustomed to learned habits of exchanging money for sexual favors with a host of women. Siu classifies the “patronizing of prostitutes and keeping mistresses [as] frequently manifestations not merely of sexual isolation but also personal maladjustment.”<sup>60</sup> He attaches sex to a wider host of other vices such as: gambling, opium addiction, and betting on horses, classifying it as a social problem that, “breeds diseases of all kinds.”<sup>61</sup> Siu employs commonly used rhetoric of disease to further heighten the social stakes by moving the scale of analysis from individual to communal.<sup>62</sup> His framework implicates the actions of the individual to be of communal consequence. By Siu’s construction, individual maladjustments of Chinese men lead to the seeking of prostitutes implicates the whole Chinese population.

There were different avenues for the selling of sex. Most fell under the category of what Siu termed “simi prostitution.” The term designates a woman that practiced exchanging sex for money and are either under the patronage of a man to which they must pay a fee for the freedom to stop selling sex, or of a woman who works other jobs along with the selling of sex.<sup>63</sup> But for Chinese women, this often meant the former iteration where their profits from selling sex would go to a male patron while they kept a percentage. The economic possibilities for Chinese women

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<sup>59</sup> For more on prostitution in China see Gail Hershatter’s seminal work *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>60</sup> Paul C.P. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation*, (New York: New York University, 1987): 250-271.

<sup>61</sup> Paul C.P. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation*, (New York: New York University, 1987): 250-271.

<sup>62</sup> For more on how the discourses and practices of public health policy racialized Chinese as a contagion see Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>63</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

were often bound by the conditions in which they immigrated to the U.S.; Chinese woman were often brought to the U.S. as the wives of merchants or workers. When migrating to the U.S. under conditions that involved coercion, the women would arrive believing that they would get the chance to attend university or a better life but instead would be forced to sell sex for profit.<sup>64</sup>

An example of such a case is of YY, a twenty-five-year old Chinese woman who sometimes sold sex. As a young girl studying in Canton, she was persuaded by her lover to run away. They migrated to America but he later died of a heart attack. A friend of her lover then took YY as a mistress and after living together for one or two years, they ran out of money and he forced her into prostitution. Opportunities for YY after the death of her lover would have been very limited, especially in a foreign land. Her entrance into the U.S. would have most likely involved extensive questioning. Perhaps she received some familial help from an affluent Christian Chinese family, and/or her status as a student in Canton could have allowed her to migrate successfully.<sup>65</sup>

As a single Chinese woman in the early twentieth century, her choices of employment would have been limited to finding work in a factory or in domestic service.<sup>66</sup> What we do know from the source is that after finding companionship with what must have been a familiar man to her, being her lover's friend, he took her to New York and "arranged various of situation where was forcibly for her to have sexual relation with other man."<sup>67</sup> The brutality of her situation is

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<sup>64</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 2], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library: Lucie Cheng Hirata, "Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 5 no. 1 (1979): 3-29; Benson Tong, *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-century San Francisco* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).

<sup>65</sup> Huping Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

<sup>66</sup> Huping Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

<sup>67</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

undeniable, yet when she arrived in Chicago, she was able to exhibit some agency in setting her own schedule and choice of relationship. We must reckon with both truths and see agency when there was evidence of such and see pain when there were the conditions for such an abuse of power.

Evidence of her agency was exhibited by her ability to be selective in her choice of clients. When YY arrived in Chicago in the 1930s, she lived on the North side and was known to be picky about the men that she saw,

L Taam, one of YY's best patron told me the other day that H.Sun, a wealthy Chinese in New York and now in Chicago, offered her fifty dollars for her to stay over night with him. She accepted it for the first night. But for the second time H Sun offered her the same price and she refused. She said he was too fat and too awkward.<sup>68</sup>

YY is known to only see men that she likes, which meant she was known to turn down offers. She previously held a job at a soda shop that she subsequently quit due to lack of business. Her ability to turn down offers and quit jobs point to a sense of economic freedom. She is able to choose due to the stability in knowing that she could make money by selling sex due to the high demand. YY also plays ma-jong quite often in the gambling houses and is able to pay her debts and rent independently. The later accounts fail to mention her patron or a male partner completely. At one point, YY lost some ninety dollars in a game of ma-jong in Chinatown and her opponent expected her to be unable to pay this large debt. But, she returned an hour later and paid him back in full.<sup>69</sup> She pays her own way and makes her own way directly in contradiction of popular conceptions of enslaved Chinese women. The lack of mentioning and naming of her male patron later during her life in Chicago indicates that perhaps YY was able to pay off her

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<sup>68</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>69</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

patron for her freedom. She had previously lived and worked in New York City prior to moving to Chicago. New York City's Chinatown was more established and more populated than Chicago's. And through her work in New York, perhaps YY was able to dictate the terms under which she spent her money and with who she spent her time later on in Chicago. However, due to the lack of direct engagement between her and Siu, we will never know if selling sex was something she felt constrained or empowered or somewhere in between about. We can imagine that while YY was able to find economic independence through her selling of sex, the economic and social system itself did not allow for the freedom of Chinese women easily. Her service sector job in the soda shop eventually ended due to lack of customers in the shop. Although YY was able to sell sex freely, there were not many other avenues of employment for her in early twentieth century Chicago.

The following two examples also illustrate that the boundaries of intimate relationships within prostitution, marriage, and violence were porous and negotiable for Chinese women. While both women are confined by language barriers and violent patrons, some are able to buy their freedom and dictate the terms of their independence through the selling of sex. LL's story is one full of drama and intrigue: at eighteen she was married off to a man named WK with promises of attending school in America. Her new husband had paid the parents the requisite ceremony money which in this case cost one thousand and two hundred dollars. Siu then speculates that travel costs for the couple probably cost WK another one or two thousand yuan rather than dollars.<sup>70</sup> However, when LL arrived in San Francisco, WK "turned an iron hand on her, made her to be a prostitute." Her "husband" profited off this young Chinese girl's body by

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<sup>70</sup> It is also possible that the early number 1,200 dollars is also actually Chinese currency since Siu does not say specifically Chinese *yuan* in the second case. Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

violently coercing LL to sell sex to make money. However, WK is not the first to have this idea and it was established enough by other men to have been confirmed to be a successful way of making profit. After staying in the West Coast for a year, Siu records:

In October 18, 1930, he took her to Chicago, lived in a little apartment in Chinatown. Soon after that, I began to hear a gossip about her: "Hehe, new 'commodity' just arrived from China. You better go to see her earlier," one said.

"Gee, I heard she served over thirty men Sunday night, -- wonder how could that be," the other responded.

About five or six months after the gossip state above, until she became a regular customer of K restaurant."

LL became integrated and known in the Chicago Chinatown community after five or six months. However, in an example of ethnic conflict, WK is murdered by an Italian gang in Chinatown in front of an Italian restaurant. It was understood that the case had no connection with any affair of LL's but was a personal conflict between the gang and WK. As large swaths of African Americans migrated northward and immigrants flooded urban centers in the turn of the twentieth century, Chinatown was pushed out of its original location and forced into the impoverished South side of the city. The space was to be shared between the Chinese, Italians, Irish, African Americans, and other ethnic minorities. The murder of LL's patron by the Italians showed that instances of ethnic violence and interactions between Italians and the Chinese did take place.

After the death of her husband, LL's patronage transferred to YTW, a Chinese medical man and cousin of WK. The amount she had to pay for freedom, or her "body count" was five thousand dollars. Even after working since she was fifteen or sixteen years old, she still owed more than three thousand before she could be free. This early stage might refer to her time as a prostitute in China as well as the US. She had most likely been in the US for about two years which meant that she was able to pay off \$1000 worth of her debt in those two years. Contrasted with Mrs. A, an older Chinese prostitute who had been practicing for around twenty years and had moved to Chicago after working in New York City, LL was not able to pay off her debt as

quickly. I come to this conclusion because at the rate that LL is able to pay off her debt, it would have taken her ten more years of prostitution, while Mrs. A was able to pay off her debt and save “gradually a few thousand dollars” within eleven years. There is no mention of either woman being a great beauty nor having incredible circumstances, so I come to the conclusion that New York was more profitable for Chinese prostitutes. If not, then in twenty years, the amount paid for prostitution shifted, or there were circumstances that Siu did not record. Additionally, New York City had more people than Chicago, a population disparity which was also reflected in the Chinatowns. Additionally, YY, the Chinese woman who was able to sell sex on a selective basis, also worked in New York before arriving in Chicago. This fact coupled with the lack of reference to her patron indicates that selling sex in New York was lucrative enough for both women to buy their freedoms. Both Mrs. A and YY escaped bondage in some sense and were able to more readily define their new conditions.

LL had been paying her debt in small increments, but at the time of WK’s death, more than three thousand was still left to be paid before she could be free. Siu does not specify the conditions under her patronage but it can be speculated that conditions were similar for those women who had to pay a specific percentage of their earnings for a pimp-like figure. LL is spoken of as an anomaly in 1932 in Chicago Chinatown during a conversation between two men:

Q: That’s all right, but there are some people that think she is a queen in this Chinatown.

A: Yes, but you ought to know that there are not many Chinese prostitutes here, and all the others are too old. She is the queen only in comparison with the old ones. That doesn’t mean any thing. A few more years later, you want to see her, -- she’ll look like an old woman.- that she is a young Chinese woman who is selling sex.

This conversation shows within the population of prostitutes in Chicago, there was a shortage of young Chinese women compared to prostitutes of other races or mixed-race Chinese women.

Later on, a conflict arose due to LL becoming closer to one man specifically, CC. Siu observes

that “They go like as if in love” regarding CC and LL. However, LL brings one of her “big fish” (who spends at least fifteen dollars with her) to K’s restaurant and CC becomes angry. A waiter warns her,

“Yes, if you want to make a living in this neighborhood, you better not go with only one fellow. Some people are gossiping about you two. They said you go with CC too often. I hope you shall take my advice.”<sup>71</sup>

LL’s personal relationships become a matter of public business due to the insular nature of the prostitute-patron circle. At one point, LL expresses frustration around the anger that CC felt when she brought her client into the restaurant that they frequented. Unlike white or black women who sold sex, Chinese prostitutes’ lives and livelihoods were experienced within a constricted realm of the Chinese men that they were able to communicate with. The language barrier kept Chinese women within Chinese communities while Chinese men had greater mobility to move around the city.

One frequent customer of prostitutes, L. F. Yang, age 38, says the following when asked when he first started to see prostitutes and how his habit came about:

Well, at the first two or three years I didn’t dare to go yet. I was once I saw a leg show downtown. Then my sexual impulses were overwhelmingly excited. I then went to see a Chinese prostitute in the old Chinatown, Clark and Van Buren Streets. That was the first time. Then I went back to see the same girl for several times. Then people took me to see white girls. You know, some of those hotel in the loop. Then when I had money I went to places alone. And then later went to dancing halls and night clubs. I became an old hand.<sup>72</sup>

L. F. Yang was a wealthy Chinese man with property in Canton. His money allowed him to travel throughout the city without much concern. He speaks of attending dancehalls every weekend and specifically mentions two located in the Black Belt at Fifty-Fifth Street and State

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<sup>71</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 2], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>72</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 6], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Street. When he is unable to find a woman at the dancehall, he picks up the black street walkers that frequent the roadsides. L.F. Yang's mobility throughout the city and relationships with many different women shows that the role that Chinese men played in the wider sexual economy in Chicago was one built on interracial relationships.

More so than instances of ethnic conflict, as in the case of WK's murder, relationships and friendships were also struck between the Chinese population and the Italian population. A mixed-race girl of seventeen or eighteen named Helen Sing is recorded as being a "maladjusted youth" by Siu because of her friendship with Italian youth and her orphan status. Helen's mother was described as being a "White-Indian-Chinese hybrid" and her father as being an "American-Chinese" which indicates that interracial relationships had a long history in Chicago. This could be due to the fact that Illinois only briefly prohibited interracial marriage from 1829 to 1874. Comparatively, interracial relationships did not pique as much interest as in other states.<sup>73</sup> Helen's mother had died when she was seven or eight and her father worked as a newspaper editor in Portland, Oregon. She was left under the care of local hotel owners, Mr. and Mrs. L.L. as an adopted daughter. However, after some time, Mrs. L.L. was sent to an insane asylum, Mr. L.L. died, and Helen was left alone again. Siu records of her life,

Four years ago, I saw Helen quite often on the street in Chinatown. She has been around an apartment house where there live all men. She did not make association with any Chinese children as I ever seem. But she has some Italian children as her chums.

Last year, I saw her play tennis in H. Square with an Italian girl. At 10 or 11 o'clock at night one day, I saw Helen went with a White boy, probably Italian, walking down in Archer Avenue. Looked very intimate to each other.

She is portrayed by Siu as a poor girl who has lost her way by fraternizing with Italian "bums" and is excluded by the Chinese girls and boys her age. In this instance, the particular boy that

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<sup>73</sup> Municipal\_Reference\_Guy, "Who Can I Marry? A Chicago History," *Chicago Public Library Blogs* (blog), February 20, 2015, [www.chipublib.org/blogs/post/who-can-i-marry-a-chicago-history-2/](http://www.chipublib.org/blogs/post/who-can-i-marry-a-chicago-history-2/).

Helen was interacting with was both white and Italian which illuminates the ways in which an ethnic community in Chicago could also be racialized as white. After the death of her adoptive father, Helen is left without a home and Siu notes that he sees her less frequently. It is unclear how she is making a living but this conversation indicates that she has previously exchanged sexual favors for money,

Not now, I am not crazy about anyone. No sire not me now. I know that all men want and I know how to take advantage with them now. One man took me to White City once and after that he asked me to go to his place. I said I knew him not very long and I was afraid. But oh, he got me finally.----- He gave me two dollars. He said if I liked I could come again. No. I can tell you no more of these. Forget all about it. I want to e a good girl now. I wish you can help me, will you?  
(to Miss Wong)

The informal way in which Helen agrees to sex work indicates her flexibility of income and in selling her companionship as a last resort. Additionally, Helen tells this story to Mrs. Wong, an older woman who owns her own shop, when Helen asks her for employment. Another factor that contributed to Helen's relative freedom to move through the city was her racially ambiguous appearance. She herself says, "Someone says I look like an Indian girl instead of like a Chinese. Well, I think I do not look like neither one of that. I look like something else." Siu replies, "You look like a White girl Helen."<sup>74</sup> This conversation happens within the context of Siu complimenting her healthier appearance and her more expensive dress. In Helen's case, her whiteness was indicative of her economic situation. Additionally, her mixed-race status did not impinge on her claims on whiteness in the eyes of Siu.

Chinese women were largely cast as victims both by popular discourse and by Siu, but some, such as Mrs. A, no longer a prostitute in her older age and YY, did manage to buy their own freedom. It begs the question, what are the boundaries between enslavement and forced

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<sup>74</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 2], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

labor?<sup>75</sup> Even those who were not “free,” like LL, were able to exercise some control over their clientele and livelihood. Since there was a relatively small population of young Chinese women, those who were present benefitted from this demographic scarcity, which allowed them more freedom in choosing clients and pay scale. However, Chinese women who sold sex were often abused and forced to sell sex giving their patrons parts of their earnings. While women such as LL and Helen illustrated their savvy in navigating and negotiating complex relationships with men to ensure the best conditions for themselves, they were often still bound by the conditions attached to their gender and forced to act against their will.

### Interracial Sex

Although many Chinese residents lived throughout Chicago, the geographic area popularly known as Chinatown was a central location for the encounter between a woman selling sex and a man buying sex. The following table was constructed from Paul Siu’s notes.

	Name	Age	Race and Ethnicity	Status
1	LL	21	"Chinese"	"white slave"
2	SS	~30	"Chinese"	"imported as a white slave from New York"
3	YY	~25	"Chinese"	"simi-white slave" only a prostitute because of her situation
4	E. Thomson	22	"white-negro hybrid"	N/A
5	Helen	23	"white-Indian hybrid"	N/A
6	Ketty	21	"a beautiful blonde"	N/A
7	Edith	~20	"a blonde Polish girl"	N/A
8	Mary	23	"an Italian-German hybrid"	"she was kept by a negree [negress] in Thirty-nine Street and Elis Avenue".
9	Rose Marie	~25	German	"She comes to Chinatown to sell her artificial flowers. She is not good looking and her cloths are dirty and old."
10	Mrs.A --	~40	Chinese	former "white slave"

<sup>75</sup> This question of coerced labor and its relation to slavery is beyond the scope of my interrogation. However, it is worth further investigation especially due to the gendered nature of prostitution and the possibilities of teasing out an intersectional history.

11	Mrs. Yen-Kwo	~60	Chinese	"half open door" prostitute - she married her keeper
12	Mrs. M--	~35	Chinese	married but sleeps with other men
13	Annt Jean Cha	~55	Chinese	"she was one of those "half open door" prostitutes in the early history of Chinatown

*Table 1: Information taken from Paul Siu's unpublished paper "Prostitution in Chinatown"*<sup>76</sup>

Based on the table, the majority of the prostitutes that regularly solicited and came to Chinatown were below the age of twenty-five. In addition to the thirteen women listed here, Siu records that countless other women who sold sex moved in and out of Chinatown and Chicago regularly.<sup>77</sup>

For some women, Chicago's Chinatown became a regular source of work for an extended period of time. For others, it was a brief stopover that sometimes only lasted days, weeks, or months.

For American women migrating into the cities, the selling of sex was a way to subsidize their income.<sup>78</sup> The large numbers of "women adrift" moving into the city, along with the large influx of migrants both from the American South and Europe, was reflected in an abundance of labor and a shortage of formal jobs.<sup>79</sup> Women would exchange sexual "favors" for limited economic support. Those that practiced prostitution also held other jobs such as store keepers or secretaries.<sup>80</sup>

The presence of white prostitutes could be found by the late 1890s in Chinese restaurants or chop suey shops.<sup>81</sup> Industrialization flooded the city with immigrants looking for a better

<sup>76</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>77</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

<sup>78</sup> Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>79</sup> Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Cynthia M. Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2010.

<sup>80</sup> Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>81</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

socioeconomic situation. Immigrants into the city were largely male, and Chinese males greatly exceeded the number of female Chinese migrants.<sup>82</sup> This discrepancy in demographics, popular beliefs around insatiable male sexualities, and the fact that migrants often could not afford to marry all made prostitution an undeniable fact of turn of the twentieth century social order.<sup>83</sup> This was further exacerbated by racialized beliefs that foreign men would run wild and attack white women unless their sexual needs were satiated.<sup>84</sup> Medical professionals in the late nineteenth century believed that husbands often had ten times the sexual needs of their wives and that female coldness was a virtue.<sup>85</sup> These misconceptions provided fertile ground for the crossing of racialized boundaries of propriety. During this time of mass demographic change, intimate relationships between Chinese men and women of other races and ethnicities blurred boundaries within the realms of the economic and social order.

For instance, Siu provides a detailed account from a friend, H Lee, of one American mixed-race prostitute, E. Thomson and how she became introduced to the men in Chinatown.<sup>86</sup> This example sheds light on the particularities around how American prostitutes interacted with the Chinese men of Chinatown and is useful in showing that racial designations of white and/or black did not play a role in limiting interactions between them and the Chinese population.

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<sup>82</sup> U.S. Census Figures as cited in Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrants Networks and Cultural Change Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900-1936*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001: 45-53

<sup>83</sup> John D' Emilio & Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

<sup>84</sup> Benjamin Hatch, *The Constitution of Man* (New York: n.p., 1866), Shumsky, "Tacit Acceptance," p. 674 As cited in Mary Linehan. "Vicious Circle: Prostitution, Reform, and Public Police in Chicago, 1830-1930." Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame. 1991.

<sup>85</sup> George Henry Napheys, *The Transmission of Life* (Philadelphia; n.p., 1871), p. n.p. As cited in Mary Linehan. "Vicious Circle: Prostitution, Reform, and Public Police in Chicago, 1830-1930." Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame. 1991.

<sup>86</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 2], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

At eighteen, E Thomson married a white man, six years her senior. After four years of marriage, her husband disappeared and then her two-year-old child died. She is described by Siu as, “age 22, dark complexion, dark hair, looks like a white-negro hybrid”.<sup>87</sup> This is the only instance where E. Thomson’s appearance, skin complexion, or race is mentioned. In today’s terms, E. Thomson would be racialized as a black woman. However, Siu and the men of Chinatown mostly ignored her perceived race and focused on her lower prices in exchange for sexual services as compared to other women. After E. Thomson’s unsuccessful union, she was penniless and moved back home to live with her mother and sister at twenty-two. She attempted to find a job in the Loop, Chicago’s downtown business district, for about two weeks but was unsuccessful until a chance encounter with H. Lee, a Chinese man about thirty-five years old, introduced her to a new contact within Chinatown. They happened to meet at the elevated station at Twenty-Second Street. Siu records, “H. Lee tells the story as follows:

“I went up there. She sat on the bank in the station. She looked at me and I thought: ‘May be she is street-walker. I am going to find out!’ So I sat down at the other end of the bank and turned my face on her. She smiled and said: ‘What do you want?’ ‘Nothing,’ I replied, but I knew that she was that sort of woman immediately by the way she talked.”<sup>88</sup>

The encounter and subsequent public intimacy on the train between a Chinese man and a mixed race black woman was able to occur without interference or shock during the 1930s in Chicago. Additionally, this story implies that E. Thomson smiling and talking to H. Lee was enough indication for H. Lee to understand that she was willing to exchange sex for money. The avenues of encounter for Chinese men and women of other races were limited in some ways. Norms

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<sup>87</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 2], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>88</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 2], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

dictated that women did not talk to strange men without an agenda.<sup>89</sup> H. Lee's immediate recognition of E. Thomson as a prostitute was indicated by her behavior in the public train station. A woman who hangs around in public talking to men who were strangers was clearly designated as someone open to selling sex. From a few brief exchanges, the establishment of E. Thomson is completed as a woman willing to exchange sex for money in H. Lee's mind. The immediate recognition by Lee, "I knew that she was that sort of woman immediately by the way she talked" indicates that prostitution was a widespread and familiar phenomenon to Chinese men.

So I moved myself closer, and said: 'Where are you going, sister?' "No where, Why?" she responded ' I just go Downtown and look for a job.' she continued. 'What kind of job you want, sister? Easy one and hard on?' 'What do you think?' she said, 'any kind of job, I don't care.' 'You want to make easy money?' I asked. 'Do you like me?' she asked in a low voice. 'And how, I like you, sure you are wonderful, I think, I shall introduce you to some of my friends.'<sup>90</sup>

Conversation around jobs and labor opens the door for the possibility of gaining insight into each other's intentions. As more and more women entered the workforce, new norms became established around public behavior. Thomson's willingness to do "any kind of job," insinuates that sex for money is not out of the question. At this point, the general public was not threatened by a relationship between a Chinese man and a mixed race black woman due to both these populations existing in the popular racial imagination as marginalized.

How do you like that?" I said. "All right, some other days-- I can't go with you now.' she responded. "Where can I see you again?" I asked. 'You just let me know you name and address and I will go to look for you' she suggested.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Paul Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation* (New York: New York University Press, 1987): 250-271.

<sup>90</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 2], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>91</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 2], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

E. Thomson's mobility and flexibility are exhibited in her ability to "go look for [H. Lee]." She is able to postpone the appointment to a later date for her convenience and then enter Chinatown to meet Lee for the implied sex for money exchange. In this exchange, E. Thomson is able to dictate when and how she decides to enter into the situation. The precarity of the situation illuminates the possible danger for women soliciting strangers. While the selling of sex allowed for freedom in an economic sense, women were still placed in high risk situations where they could be easily hurt. Her agency is limited in that she must be flexible in not knowing much about the stranger she just encountered. But her language is direct and shows authority in saying, "I can't go with you now" and "I will go look for you" at some later time. Later on H. Lee's recollects,

I told her to come over here (K Restaurant, Chinatown). The car came; she and I went in the same car and sat together on the same chair. We kept silent while the car was running. She got off at Addams Street Station."<sup>92</sup>

The public nature of the forced intimacy between Thompson and Lee and the nonchalant manner in which this information was told to Siu indicate a level of comfortability with a public display of affection between a Chinese man and a mixed race black woman. Mary Lui recounts in her book *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery* that interracial relationships in New York between Chinese men and white women were often the target for covert or overt reports to police alleging disorderly conduct, or, more often, prostitution.<sup>93</sup> However, in Chicago's Chinatown, boundaries around race and white elite propriety were transgressed in intimate relationships that benefitted both parties to various degrees.

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<sup>92</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 2], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>93</sup> Mary Ting Yi Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-century New York City* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

E. Thomson then makes contact with H. Lee after a couple of days and subsequently returns to Chinatown for four days after charging the men four dollars a night. In a conversation with those some of those men afterwards, they nickname her, ““The Dollar Store,” That means low price and good service.” After going consecutively to Chinatown for four days, E. Thomson abruptly leaves for a job opportunity in New Orleans, where her father is. In the letter that follows the boundaries between work and sentiment are unclear. She sends a letter to C. Lee that follows:

Dear C---:

I am now writing to you and tell you where I am. Well, here I am in New Orlean. I got a job here but all I earn is only two dollars a week and the work is very hard. Oh, honey, I wish I am in Chicago and be with you all the times. I don't like here at the present, but I hope I'll like it better later. But anyhow Chicago is better. Seems I am a strange over in the South.

My father , as I told you before, is also in this city. He works hard and the wages is also low.

I don't know when I am going back to Chicago but anyhow, I hope I can go back soon. Oh, just one year, may be months or only a few weeks. All depend upon whether I can make a living here. If I go back to Chicago, I got to have my car fare.

Read this letter yourself. Don't let the whole Chinatown know about it. Remember me to H Lee and Hoi. I wish you all the luck and success. Write to me, will you please?

Love from,

E.---- Thomson <sup>94</sup>

Even charging the comparatively low rates that she does in Chicago, E. Thomson is able to make much more money much more quickly than her job in New Orleans.<sup>95</sup> There are accounts of white and Chinese prostitutes charging their “big fish” up to fifteen or even fifty dollars a night.<sup>96</sup> The work available to young women at the time was very limited, and with many more

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<sup>94</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 2], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>95</sup> The first night E. Thomson service five men, at \$4 per man she would have made \$20. The second night she serviced four men; the third night, one man for \$4; the fourth night one man for \$4 again. Through her short stay in Chinatown she was able to make at least forty-four dollars which is much more than her two dollars a week in New Orleans. Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 2], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>96</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 2], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

entering the workforce, they would sometimes end up doing hard labor.<sup>97</sup> When Siu asks Lee about E. Thomson's mother he replies,

“I didn't ask her about that. -- who cares what is her old mother doing. I really knew not enough English to speak to her. I just embraced her and honey, honey over again and again that's all. If I know little more English, may be I can do a better job; at least I can understand her a little bit more.”

This moment also serves to show that language barriers between Chinese men and American prostitutes did not erect an insurmountable hurdle for the selling of sex in Chicago's Chinatown.<sup>98</sup> Even though, Siu must translate this letter to the receiver which indicates that within his notes, Siu has been conversing with the men in Chinese while translating all of the conversations into English to be recorded. The necessity of these interracial relationships did not depend on both parties being fluent in communication. Rather, the value of the relationships lay in the sharing of emotional and/or physical intimacy for money. There is also an element of sentiment in the letter which points to the blurred boundaries between exchanging sex for money and/or for pleasure. The overlap of these two realms maps onto the shifting ideas of sexuality as posited by D'Emilio and Freedman. Their work on a new “sexual society” expanded notions of sex for purely reproductive reasons, into a more individualized realm of pleasure and happiness which at times can be inextricable from the economic.<sup>99</sup> E. Thomson was one of the “women adrift” who defined new norms around propriety and happiness for the modern woman in the

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<sup>97</sup> Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>98</sup> This sentence by Lee illuminates two “acts of creation” that can result in intentional or unintentional silences as crystallized by Michel Trouillot in *Silencing the Past*, on the creation of history both official and otherwise. The levels of censorship of which this silencing is occurring is during Siu's translation of Lee and his conversation; and subsequently in choosing what parts of his conversation is recorded in his notes and essays for preservation in the archive. This moment particularly marks the precarity in which we attempt to excavate early Chinese Americans from the archive.

<sup>99</sup> John D' Emilio & Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

early twentieth century.<sup>100</sup> To Siu, she signaled a new racial and social order being established around the bounds of sexuality.

This system of gaining access to prostitutes through word of mouth was enabled by the types of kinship networks formed by Chinese bachelors. Siu reports that the most common way that new Chinese immigrants first form contact with women are through “street walkers.” After this initial contact, going to see a prostitute can be a social activity born out of necessity and partially out of fear. Chinese men did not travel to brothels alone and would rarely venture into unfamiliar territory alone. However, mentions of the “Near North Side, the Near West Side, and the Black Belt” indicate that locations for sex were dispersed and well-known enough for those men that had become familiar with Chicago.

Compared to LL, a twenty-two-year-old Chinese prostitute, Thomson’s rates are much lower. In a question asked by Siu to one of the men who slept with E. Thomson,

Why she charges only four dollars for one night, you offer that much to her or she asks only that much?

Hoi responds, “She asked only that much. She looks as if a very nice, honest kid, and she can tell you everything if you ask her. She told me that she had a sister. I teased her if she could introduce her sister to me.

She said: “No, I am afraid you’ll like me no more if I introduce my sister to you.”

E. Thomson and her sister both attempt with varying success to find jobs in Chicago and make money by exchanging sexual favors to subsidize their income. Her low prices for sexual service is perhaps a reflection of her unfamiliarity with other prostitutes’ prices or she could be selling sex cheaply to make money quickly. Siu records Hoi talking about E. Thomson’s sister,

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<sup>100</sup> Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

Oh no, she works in a candy store in the Loop but wages is only one dollar a day. Maybe be she is a simi-prostitute. One dollar a day sometime is not enough to buy a pair of stocking, and if I am a girl in this modern age, I don't think I can overcome such a kind of temptation.<sup>101</sup>

The issue of inadequate wages, as Meyerowitz finds in *Women Adrift*, was compounded by the irregular and seasonal nature of work available to women in early twentieth century Chicago.

This meant that some women, most likely more than are recorded, turned toward sex service work. The “sexual service sector” was essential in defining the female labor market.<sup>102</sup> E.

Thomson's story fits into the trend of women turning toward sexual service work after being left by her husband with no money and no family unit. Ideas of race and foreignness influenced the mobility of different women, while E. Thomson's ambiguous racial status allowed her more ability to travel through the city. While seeing a white woman with a Chinese man would arouse suspicions, E. Thomson's relationships with them did not fit easily fit into fears about the pollution of white women and thus were allowed freedom through marginality.

However, the new freedoms that E. Thomson exerted still had economic limits in a racialized and segregated Chicago. Her low rates for service fits into the broader pattern of black women earning less than white women, and in this case also less than Chinese prostitutes. However, like the bold actions of other black prostitutes as indicated by Cynthia Blair in *I've Got to Make My Livin'*, the story of E. Thomson also illustrates the ways that pushing racially accepted norms and boundaries resulted in an economic advantage, indicated by her being able to have a wider client base than LL, a young Chinese prostitute under the patronage of a man.

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<sup>101</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 2], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>102</sup> Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

Popular knowledge of the Chinese bachelor community with money to spend attracted prostitutes to restaurants, stores, and residences.<sup>103</sup> Some men were unmarried and some chose to ignore their duties and forego sending remissions to their family in China. Their incomes went entirely to food, gambling, and women.<sup>104</sup> In many instances, restaurants in Chinatown acted as rendezvous points for prostitutes and their clients; women would leave their information with chop suey house waiters for transmission and use.<sup>105</sup> The non-Chinese prostitutes listed in Table 1. are those that come to Chinatown regularly while there were many more that moved through the neighborhood for a few days to a few weeks at a time.<sup>106</sup> Siu writes,

“In fact, Chinatown may be consider as bright light district for the white girls. They can go down there and make some easy money and none of the member of their primary group will know about.”

Here, Siu insinuates that there would be some social ramifications for white women who interacted with Chinese men sexually or romantically. At the same time, we see Siu’s own culturally based assertions based on race by his reference to white women’s “primary groups” with no ethnic or national qualifier, as if all white women belonged to a singular primary group when the flexibility around the term “white slavery” complicates that understanding.<sup>107</sup> Freedom of movement was accessible for a rotating cast of white prostitutes to enter and leave Chinatown as they wished. Some women would stay just for a couple of days before moving onto a different city or town. However, there are instances of regular well-known women that the of whom the

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<sup>103</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>104</sup> Paul Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation* (New York: New York University Press, 1987).

<sup>105</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 2], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library; Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

<sup>106</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>107</sup> Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

men of Chinatown spoke casually.<sup>108</sup> This casual mention of women is illustrative of the mobility experienced by white women as they moved in and out of the area deemed “Chinatown.” Clear boundaries were noted by male Chinese patrons who understood “going to the south side” as heading to the South Side of Chicago for prostitutes.

In one very distinct instance of a white women seeking a Chinese man, Siu documents a white woman who is married but has extramarital affairs regularly. T.M., a forty-year-old Chinese man, relays the story,

There was a Filipino fellow who used to meet a white girl in our place. Standing outside our counter, they talked sometimes very long, and sometimes just a few minutes, and they then usually went out together. They had been doing so for several months. It might be that the Filipino fellow got tired of her. Finally he brought her into our place and let her get acquainted with us. We talked about prostitutes, about sexual intercourse, and about marriage. Then she began to approach me. I could hardly refuse. And so I took her out to a show.

After the show, she bought a set of cards and went back to my place again with me. My partner understood. He walked out and went to a show himself. Then the girl and I sat down and played cards. As soon as she and I were alone, I became sentimental. I couldn't control myself. She gave me the same reaction. When I put my hand on her breast, she asked me to kiss her. “You darling, come and kiss you baby!” she said. I kissed her. Then I had her on the bed with me.

I asked if she was married. She told me she was single. I believed her because she had been around with the Filipino. She said she liked me better than the Filipino. From then on, whenever she came she brought something to eat- fruit, candy, cake, and cookies. She ate it with us and talked for hours.

She was fat, with two breasts. She said she was nineteen. When I had intercourse with her, she was very active. **After it, I offered her some money, but she refused to take it, saying that she was working and had enough to support herself.**

She was one of our customers. Sometimes she brought a bundle of soiled clothes with a man's belongings in it. I asked to whom the man's clothes belonged. She told me that it belonged to an old man in the apartment. Once she told me that the clothes belonged to her brother.

One day she came in and talked to us as usual. Leaving for home, she said she would call again tomorrow with some ginger ale. The same night the Filipino came in. He knew I was pretty good to the girl. He advised me that I better quite her, saying the girl was a married woman. In spite of her married life, she went out with different men and made them a lot of trouble. The Filipino said that he was one of her last victims. He warned me that I should get rid of her. I was much upset that night, but I began to realize I must not let her fool me any more.

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<sup>108</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 4], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library; Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 2], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library; Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

The next day, as I knew the girl was coming, I went out to a show alone, and left a message with my partner that in case she came, he should tell her my uncle was dying in the hospital and the hospital and the hospital phoned for me. She said the same thing to me; she didn't believe me.

From that time on, I decided not to talk to her, "Why, don't you love your baby any more?"... Oh, I understand..." But I did not care for whatever she said. Maybe she realized that. Then she did not come so often. She didn't bring anything to eat anymore. After several weeks I did not see her at all.

I was last Friday, at about ten o'clock at night, when we were still workings, she came in unexpectedly. She talked to us as usual. Finally she told us that she had been to a doctor's office. She had to spend at least twenty-five dollars. My partner asked her what was the matter. "I don't know," she said, "but anyway something is wrong with me."

**"That I know," I interrupted, "you must have a baby." She just stared at me with a silly look. Upon leaving she walked near me and whispered, "If I have a baby, you are the one who has got to take care of it."**

I was so upset after she left. I wondered if she could make any trouble. Can my name be spoiled? What I want now is not whether she can sue me, I want to get it over with so that nobody knows anything about it. She can't put the thing on me! She had been the mistress of the Filipino. What is more, she is a married woman. Now if she has a baby, how can she blame me?

The Filipino has moved away and she moved away, too. I don't know where she lives now. She lived only three blocks away from our place last time. I had never seen her with any other man except that Filipino.

**The trouble was that she didn't take my money after I had relations with her. If she had taken my money, why, then she was just a regular prostitute...** I hope she will not come back again. Oh, yes, I told her I could not do anything more with her because my wife didn't like it. She said, I might have a wife in China, but not here. You see, she seems to know something about our Chinese people here... Doing something like this with that girl is too troublesome.<sup>109</sup>

Siu believes this story to prove the fatality in Chinese men's desires for sex and romance: "ever longing for a sweetheart, is only too glad to have any personal contact with the fair sex."<sup>110</sup>

However, I propose an alternate reading where prostitution was an acceptable avenue of interracial contact especially due to Chicago and Illinois' lack of anti-miscegenation laws.<sup>111</sup>

Clear delineations are being made between a romantic relationship and one of economy as represented in T.M.'s frustration in having his money rejected by the woman in the story. T.M.

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<sup>109</sup> Emphasis added, Paul Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation* (New York: New York University Press, 1987): 260-261.

<sup>110</sup> Paul Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation* (New York: New York University Press, 1987): 260-261.

<sup>111</sup> Illinois., *The Revised Laws of Illinois*.

indicates that the relationship between him and the woman would have held clearer boundaries had there been an exchange of money. In this way, T.M. is unconsciously ascribing a certain role for himself in the story as the Chinese man who exchanges money for sex. The woman's strange and concerned reaction to her possibility of being pregnant indicates that there were also limits to how acceptable interracial relationships were socially. The first consequence of her extramarital affairs comes at the risk of an interracial child being born. Whether the child was Filipino-white or Chinese-white will remain a mystery but her reaction indicates alarm on both counts. While white women could entertain and even sleep with Chinese and Filipino men, having a child was a completely different type of relationship that was still socially prejudiced against.<sup>112</sup>

The spatial designation of Chinatown was partially delineated through social relationships with prostitutes. The work of prostitutes to engage clients was done in a public space. Women would pretend to sell certain goods, talk to waiters and leave their information, on the street, or in gambling houses.<sup>113</sup> A woman of "suspicious character" was easily discernable to the casual observer.<sup>114</sup> Some specific recorded incidences were of women entering into Chinese stores and pretending to sell goods as a strategy of encounter or of women leaving their information at restaurants with waiters who act as a go between for buyers and sellers of sex.<sup>115</sup> This classification of a woman spending too much space in public was informed by anxieties commonly held by a white middle class, of women entering the city with no place to go.<sup>116</sup> The

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<sup>112</sup> Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

<sup>113</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>114</sup> Cynthia M. Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

<sup>115</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>116</sup> Mary Linehan, "Vicious Circle: Prostitution, Reform, and Public Police in Chicago, 1830-1930," Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1991.

policing of women in public spaces contributed to the shifting space of entertainment from the private into the public.<sup>117</sup> A shift from holding parties in private parlors to public dancehalls was informed by women selling sex and raised concerns of racial mixing and impropriety.<sup>118</sup>

While there was no stigma attached to Chinese men dating or sleeping with white women, marriage was a different case. Marriage was rarer but still occurred in at least twenty-seven instances.<sup>119</sup> In instances of marriage, Siu situates interracial marriages firmly within a framework of “cultural conflict”.<sup>120</sup> He writes,

“In study of such a question, the Chinese and White cases are best illustrated, because there are so much different in their habits and sentiments, mores and folkways, technique and culture.”<sup>121</sup>

There are two important frames of analysis that can be extrapolated from this document. One, the content informs us of the particularities of the relationship between two individuals that represent beliefs widely held by their communities. And two, the use of this relationship as the exemplary case for “cultural conflict and a marriage problem,” when the relationship is ultimately unsuccessful and does not result in marriage, is telling. By Siu’s count, there are twenty-seven cases of interracial marriages.<sup>122</sup> Of these, twenty-six out of the twenty-seven are cases of Chinese men that are married to white women. The main case study that Siu engages of a “cultural conflict” takes the form of an interracial relationship which implicitly focuses on the

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<sup>117</sup> John D’ Emilio & Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

<sup>118</sup> Cynthia M. Blair, *I’ve Got to Make My Livin’: Black Women’s Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2010; Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

<sup>119</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 7], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>120</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>121</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>122</sup> Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 7], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

failures of interracial relationships. Here is a moment where Siu's own biases around interracial relationships are particularly present. At the same time, the recorded correspondences and thoughts recorded by Siu illuminate some of the paths of encounter where white women actively sought out Chinese men for romantic or sexual reasons.

In this document we are introduced to Mr. K.C., a manager of a restaurant in Chinatown and Mrs. M.R. a twenty-three-year-old widow that strikes up a relationship with him after calling the restaurant one day. M.R. had previously dined in K.C.'s restaurant and indicated to him that she was interested in him romantically and wanted to meet after she returned to the city in a couple months. K.C. told Siu that he was excited about this prospect and received the letter from her the next month,

March 24, 1932  
P.III.

Dear Mr. C:

I promised I would write, so I am keeping my promise. I shall try to tell you something about myself, then perhaps we will not feel so much like strangers if we meet. First, a description: blonde, brown eyes, five feet three inches tall and about one hundred and twenty five pounds. I would send you a picture, but I don't like any that I have. Perhaps I shall find one I like later. But if you have a picture of yourself, won't you send it to me? Please.

You did seem please when I told you I was a widow. I was married only a year, and about six months of that time, my husband was in the hospital. He died when I was only twenty. I would rather not talk about it. You understand?

My life, more of less has been a dull, lonely one. I want to find romance and happiness, and I believe I can find them both with you. You fascinated me. **You know I thought the Chinese race interesting.** Read one of Louise Jordan Miln's books and you will understand what I mean. I would suggest "By the Soochow Water". I am sure you will like it.

I have decided to stay here with my brother until the first of June. Then I shall go back to Chicago and rent an apartment with my niece (her husband just died the 17th). There is only three years different in our ages and have been more like sister to each other. So she and I are live together now.

I really don't know of anything to write. I can tell you so much more than I can write, when I see you.

Please write, as it will make me very happy to hear from you. And send you letters c/o J.D., as **I do not want my brother or his wife to know anything about us. You understand?** I know. Bye.

Yours,

Mrs. M.R.  
c/o J.D., P. III. <sup>123</sup>

The novel that M.R. mentions in her letter, *By the Soochow Water*, was written by theater actress turned novelist Louise Jordan Miln and published in 1929.<sup>124</sup> Miln was fascinated by China and India and her novels frequently contained interracial relationships and marriages. The book that M.R. mentions in particular involved an English girl falling in love with and marrying a Chinese man.<sup>125</sup> In Miln's novels, sexuality and attraction was defined along terms of racialization. The books contain drama filled romances while still considering interracial children to be a problem. The popularity of sensational novels of white women falling in love with Chinese men point to the ways that racial markers for Chinese men were more rigid than those for Chinese women. In the letter, M.R.'s interest in K.C. is distinctly raced as she pursues him romantically. Later on, M.R. indicates to K.C. that her former husband was a soldier and is employed at a governmental position as an auditor which only hires soldier's widows and pays very well. K.C. indicates to Siu that he is interested in both her and her money but does not like the fact that she is a widow.

After dating for some months, K.C. and M.R. break it off because K.C. has another girlfriend and does not love her. When questioned by Siu about the break up, K.C. says, "What can I do other wise? She is too serious. I don't want her to feel so bad, --- that's all. And I am glad that she's gone. You see, I can't marry her. No use to fool around with her anymore."<sup>126</sup> When pushed by Siu asking why he could not marry M.R. he responds,

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<sup>123</sup> Emphasis Added. Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>124</sup> AbeBooks.co.uk. "BY SOOCHOW WATERS." abebooks.co.uk. <https://www.abebooks.co.uk/first-edition/SOOCHOW-WATERS-Miln-Louise-Jordan-London/967576853/bd> (accessed March 27, 2018).

<sup>125</sup>Ebay, "1929 LOUISE JORDAN MILN- BY SOOCHOW WATERS – FIRST EDITION." Ebay.com. [http://vi.vipr.ebaydesc.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?ViewItemDescV4&item=112793791583&t=1307989329000&tid=10&category=29223&seller=bibliomonster&excSoj=1&excTrk=1&lsite=0&ittenable=false&domain=ebay.com&desc\\_gauge=1&cspheader=1&oneClk=1&secureDesc=0](http://vi.vipr.ebaydesc.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?ViewItemDescV4&item=112793791583&t=1307989329000&tid=10&category=29223&seller=bibliomonster&excSoj=1&excTrk=1&lsite=0&ittenable=false&domain=ebay.com&desc_gauge=1&cspheader=1&oneClk=1&secureDesc=0) (accessed March 27, 2018).

<sup>126</sup>Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

“Oh well, for amny reasons: first, she is a white girl. Fool around, have some good times, all right. She probably doesn’t want to go back to China with me, and, one my part, I can’t stay in this country all my life. I have no future if I stay here--- not chop suey forever. **I much go back to China some day and pick up my better vocation**; second, the customs and the languages are differnet. I shall never a woman who shall be socially isolated from my relatives, -- especially my mother. I am her only son. If I married to an American girl, she will be very unhappy. Third, I don’t like to marry a widow. I don’t really love her. You can’t marry a woman whom you are not really love can you?... She desired good times. She came to me. Why shouldn’t I? ---- it is human nature.”<sup>127</sup>

This case study perfectly exemplifies the type of cultural affixation to difference and subsequently racial difference that Siu learned from the Chicago School of Sociology. Instead of interrogating the conditions under which cultural affixations of conflict were formed, Siu positions the reader in a place where we are confronted with an ahistorical account of an un-traversable terrain of constructed cultural and racial difference. By this, I mean that Siu locates the racial difference and indeed the difference that cannot be corrected for as not race located in the physical body, but as a racial difference located in the Chinese migrant’s inability to remove themselves from their physical space of origin.<sup>128</sup> K.C. clearly states one reason for wanting to return to China is the lack of possibility for upward mobility in the U.S. This very clear economic benefit for returning to China is glossed over by Siu as he bases his understandings of race and psychology on cultural origin. The “sojourner” characterization by Siu was based in the characterization of race being based in the image of a migrant inseparable from some distant homeland.<sup>129</sup> Siu writes, “In the foregoing document we can see many points that indicate the romance has failed at last is not because of personal conflict but rather a cultural one.” Siu’s own inability to see past cultural constructions of difference prevents him from forming an analysis that fully integrates the importance and significance of interracial relationships into his understanding. By his own count,

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<sup>127</sup> Emphasis added. Paul Siu, “Cultural Conflict and a Marriage Problem: A Case Study,” Box 137 folder 8 pg. 12-13

<sup>128</sup> Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001: 46-50.

<sup>129</sup> Paul C. P. Siu, “The Sojourner”, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 58 (1952), pg. 34-44.

there are twenty-six other marriages between white women and Chinese men that disprove such an understanding of culture being an impossible hurdle within instances of marriage.

The boundaries around what was and was not acceptable behavior for white women and Chinese men were different. While there was no stigma attached to Chinese men who slept with white women, instances of marriage brought up some concerns within the Chinese community due to perceptions of differences based in culture. For white women, both sleeping with Chinese men and marrying Chinese men held varying consequences based on class and background. Siu documents that the three categories of white women who married Chinese men as: Polish dishwashers, veteran prostitutes, and chop suey house takers or hostesses.<sup>130</sup> For white prostitutes who sold sex, they faced some social consequences- namely “some difficulty to marry white men after number of years as prostitutes.”<sup>131</sup> It is unclear if the social stigma was based in the knowledge of the women being prostitutes or specifically selling sex to Chinese men. The proliferation of Chinese men and the belief that they were “big fish” or big spenders attracted women willing to overlook issues of social stigmatization of race.<sup>132</sup> The boundaries of race within intimate relationships was flexible in many cases and the large number of unemployed women led to instances of interracial encounters that established new norms around racialized relationships.

The precarious nature of this large population of women entering the workforce meant that work would be found wherever the situation arose. For Chicago’s Chinese male population, this meant establishing relationships outside the boundaries of race and ethnicity. Intimate relationships with American women, both white and black, often blurred the lines between the

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<sup>130</sup>Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 7], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>131</sup>Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>132</sup>Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 137, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

exchange of sex for money and sentiment. Popular discourses represented an anxiety around the relationships between white American women and Chinese men while the relationships between black women and Chinese men did not elicit the same public anxieties.

In one instance, a Chinese laundry owner, Charles, was forced to fire a white woman who had been hired. Siu records,

I used to own a laundry house at 62<sup>nd</sup> street see. I hired a white woman to help me. Then the neighbor tried to interfer. One came in and told me right in my face, "Charles, you must dismiss the white girl. We don't like it." Race prejudise, see. Well, I was forced to send the girl away."<sup>133</sup>

It is unclear whether the neighbors were white or Chinese or which neighborhood this event occurred in. The implications of white neighbors forcing a Chinese laundryman to fire a white woman would indicate anxieties around interracial mixing with particular concern centering around white womanhood. If the neighbors had been Chinese, it would also represent anxieties around interracial mixing although perhaps in either keeping an insular community or avoiding trouble from white men or women who would cause trouble for Charles. In either case, this experience led to the subsequent rejection of another white woman who had just moved from Cleveland and was looking for a job after working for a Chinese launderer in Ohio and reinforced racially distinct categories between Chinese men and white women. During this latter incident, she cried and begged for money for food and offered to exchange sexual services for money. Charles relays to Siu that this second woman was only twenty-one years old and that she had moved to Chicago to seek employment. However, she had already searched for a job for three weeks and nothing had happened for her. Her circumstances moving from a smaller city to Chicago to seek work where there was none for her left her in a desperate situation.

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<sup>133</sup>Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 7], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Long-term informal relationships between Chinese men and white women were common among the younger to middle aged men interviewed by Siu. These relationships were beneficial to Chinese men because they offered emotional support and physical intimacy in the place of their families who oftentimes remained in China.<sup>134</sup> For white women, these relationships offered some economic stability and in certain cases emotional support.<sup>135</sup> However, along with the dangers of being a woman selling sex, relationships with Chinese men also came attached with racialized stigma. L.F. Yang, a thirty-eight-year-old Chinese man who speaks a little English says, “I wish I can have a Chinese girl... You can go anywhere with her without feeling strange and people won’t look at you.”<sup>136</sup> L.F. Yang frequently exchanges money for sex without regard for race. Like most Chinese men, he has a family in China that he recently started sending remissions to. L.F. Yang frequently goes out with a half Chinese and half black woman whose name is omitted as D—. With her, he recalls people looking at them funny. Yang says, “The White men get jealousy, you see.”<sup>137</sup> Although relationships between Chinese men and women of other races did occur, they were still stigmatized in public spaces and disapproved of by white men generally. Interracial relationships between Chinese men and women of other races were more nuanced than simply white women taking advantage of foreign men or vice versa.<sup>138</sup> Relationships were instead read through various layers of race, gender, and

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<sup>134</sup>Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900-1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); Huping Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

<sup>135</sup>Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 7], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library; Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 2], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>136</sup>Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

<sup>137</sup>Ernest W. Burgess Papers, [Box 138, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

<sup>138</sup> Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

acceptability as they were negotiated within intimate relationships that embodied all the intricacies of power.

## **Conclusion**

Contemporary conceptions of Chinatown as being isolated and home to an ethnic “chineseness” have been historically formed through anxieties of interracial mixing. The image of the “sojourner” is the most famous of Siu’s writings. It is present both in his article “The Sojourner” and in his book *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation*. This archetype is characterized by how “he clings to the culture of his own ethnic group” as opposed to assimilating into American culture.<sup>139</sup> Siu characterizes this embodiment psychologically as someone who culturally aligns with that of his homeland. His article was written at a time where great debate was occurring over the assimilability of new immigrants and migrants in the U.S.<sup>140</sup> However, intimate relationships crossing the boundaries of race and ethnicity have always existed and only becomes a center of concern when boundaries cannot be clearly defined to the benefit of an American white Victorian mentality of ethnic purity. Siu’s own notes and observations contained overwhelming evidence of these complex relationships that test the boundaries of racialization.

Paul Siu’s notes and papers contain much more information that I did not have the chance to delve into here- namely the employment of black women in Chinese laundries, the economy for medicines dedicated to enhancing male sexual performance, records of letters sent by and to Chinese laundry men, and documents recording the ways that early Chinese men joked. His contributions to histories of Chinese Americans, Chinese American Women’s history, urban

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<sup>139</sup> Paul C. P. Siu, “The Sojourner”, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 58 (1952), pg. 34-44.

<sup>140</sup> Sucheng Chan, “Asian American Historiography,” *Pacific Historical Review*, 65, no. 3 (1996): 363-399.

history, and a history of gender, and sexuality are immense. Through the close reading of his notes and paper, I have attempted to recreate the social conditions that Chinese men and women encountered in the newly forming “metropolis” of twentieth century Chicago.

Interracial relationships and more specifically, the offspring of interracial relationships have oftentimes been located at the nexus at which state anxieties about race, citizenship, gender, and nation have been laser focused. In my focus on intimate relationships of sex, sentiment, and power, I argue that racial categories were formed alongside gendered notions which manifest in interracial relationships. For Chinese women, the intersection they occupied as women who were commonly thought to be slaves allowed them to be folded into whiteness under the narrative of “white slavery”. The flexibility around this categorization contests the salience of Siu’s own claims on a culturally produced discourse of race in centering the axis at which gender, race, and sexuality all foment the idea of whiteness.

The nature of Siu’s notes often limits the direct voices of Chinese women just through omission. However, the rarity of sources on early Chicago Chinatown necessitate that we look closely at and revisit this rich source. The implications of the intimate relationships present in this source base necessitates the reformation of myths around the images of the lonely Chinese “sojourner” and enslaved Chinese prostitute. As such, this reformation asks us to wrestle deeply with untold stories that do not fit neatly into accepted ideas around race and ethnicity. The intimate relationships present in the early twentieth century show that urban Chicago was where ideologies of race, sexuality, and gender were being formed and challenged. While state legislations would have us accept the image of the debased alien, intimate relationships show the nuance with which this narrative was understood and operationalized by white, black, Chinese women and Chinese men through sex and prostitution.

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## EDUCATION

### UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

*Bachelor of Arts in History & Ethnic Studies*, Expected Graduation: June 2018

Major GPA: 3.8

Honors Included: Dean's List (2015-2017)

Recipient of: Odyssey Scholarship, George Sutherland Scholarship, University of Chicago Grant, 2017 Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture Summer Research Grant, Collegiate Affairs Committee 2017 Montag Fellowship Award,

Previous Awards: Inventeams Lemelson-MIT Grant, Winner of 2013 Michigan State University Young Playwright's Festival

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

### SOUTHSIDE WEEKLY, Chicago IL

*Illustrator*

June 2014 – Present

- Complete independent illustration projects for online and print community newspaper
- Communicate with editor weekly for production satisfaction and timeline
- Produce accompanying media works for written journalistic pieces

### SOUTHSIDE WEEKLY, Chicago IL

*Writer and audio producer*

May 2017 – Present

- Conduct interviews and research for published news stories
- Record, edit, and mix audio for radio interview stories
- Collaboratively edit accompanying news articles for publication

### CITY BUREAU, Chicago IL

*Documenter*

May 2017 – Present

- Trained in documenting Chicago's public meetings and civic events
- Use data, official reports, and community dialogue to provide context to important issues
- Took notes on public meetings and civic events to be used in reporting

### MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY CHINESE SCHOOL, East Lansing, MI

*Art Teacher*  
2013

September 2013 – December

- Created a twelve-week Art History curriculum for students
- Successfully led ten 6-8 years old students in weekly hour-long classes to complete art projects
- Researched and taught popular art movements at a level appropriate for 6-8 years students

### EX LIBRIS CAFE, Chicago, IL

*Inventory Manager*

June 2017 – Present

- Responsible for communicating with vendors weekly
- Oversee a staff of 45 peers and run espresso and stocking training quarterly
- Organize and track stock of materials of shop
- Increased profits by 30% by eliminating extra stock
- Servsafe trained and City of Chicago certified as a Servsafe Manager

### EX LIBRIS CAFE, Chicago, IL

*Barista*  
2017

September 2015 – June

- Able to multi-task efficiently
- Communication and Customer Service Skills
- Able to organize tasks and delegate to co-workers
- Capable of handling financial transactions

### URBAN INNOVATIONS EXCHANGE, Chicago, IL

*Sociological Research Assistant*  
2016

May 2016 – September

- Conducted independent sociological research using Professor Terry Clark's concept of Scenescapes in China
- Communicated and worked with a team of four to translate Chinese documents to English
- Held weekly meetings to update and connect with team on our own independent work

**LA SIRENA CLANDESTINA**, Chicago, IL

May 2016 – September 2016

*Hostess*

- Maintained professional and sharp appearance at all times
- Scheduled daily reservations and planned seating arrangements for lunch and dinner service
- Generated rapport with clients and generated repeat clients through friendly service
- Inspected and maintained dining room service stations for neatness and cleanliness

**UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES DIVISION**, Chicago, IL

September 2014 – June 2015

*Lab Technician*

- Set up materials for each lab station lab independently
- Made up chemical solutions through knowledge of chemical properties of elements
- Analyzed, examined, and interpreted written directions, prepared materials for incoming classrooms
- Successfully fed and cultured flies (100,000) every other weekday for 3 months

**MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY LIAO RESEARCH GROUP**, East Lansing, MI

September 2011 – June 2013

*Lab Technician*

- Ran anaerobic digesters independently daily
- Used lab microscope and magnification equipment independently
- Read papers on anaerobic digestion and adjusted experiment variables to maximize gas production
- Worked with two graduate students to schedule experiments and design new experiments

**LEMELSON-MIT INVENTEAM**, Williamston, MI

June 2011– September 2013

*Public Relations Representative*

- Generated publicity for team via traditional media including newspaper and magazines
- Presented work at White House Science Fair to President Barack Obama and at MIT inventions conference
- Worked in a team environment to refine and publicize information about riptides

**ACTIVITIES**

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**AFRICAN CIVILIZATIONS COURSE STUDY ABROAD**, Paris, Senegal

September 2016 – January

*Student at University of Chicago*

2017

- Conducted research at Musée du Quai Branly
- Researched and designed an exhibit called “L’art Populaire: Contemporary Art in the Congo”.
- Organized a brochure for exhibit “L’art Populaire: Contemporary Art in the Congo”.

**PHOENIX SURVIVORS ALLIANCE**, Chicago, IL

September 2015 – December

*Organizer*

2017

- Started and organized an education program at local high school (on going)
- Research and assembled with a Resource Guide for Survivors of Sexual Assault with a team of four
- Organize rallies and teach-ins with a regular team of ten
- Communicate effectively to mobilize 50 students

**CHICAGO STUDENT NETWORK**, Chicago, IL

September 2013 – September

*Organizer*

2015

- Designed and illustrated flyers for teach-ins
- Communicated and coordinated between speakers for events
- Drafted press releases and communicated with press

**SKILLS**

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**Skills** Proficient in Mandarin, Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel and Adobe Photoshop