



Name in English: Ping Tom
Name in Chinese: 譚繼平 [譚继平]
Name in Pinyin: Tān Jìpíng
Gender: Male
Birth Year: 1935-1995
Birth Place: Chicago, IL
Philanthropy: Yes

Business & Civic Leader that expanded Chicago's Chinatown

Profession(s): Businessman, Civic Leader

Education: BA in Economics, Northwestern University, 1956; JD, Northwestern University, 1958

Awards: 1999, Ping Tom Memorial Park in Chicago's Chinatown dedicated 2005, bust of Mr. Tom was installed in the Park to commemorate the 10th anniversary of his death; Pan Asian American Award, the highest award bestowed by the Asian American Coalition is now named in honor of Mr. Tom.

Contributions: Ping Tom was a celebrated civic leader in Chicago's Chinese American and Asian American communities. He was one of the thirteen founders of the Asian American Coalition of Chicago, an organization that brings together Asian Americans from various ethnic backgrounds, including Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Korean, Japanese, and Indonesian. Tom was greatly praised for his commitment toward inclusiveness.

His dedication to the Asian American community was deeply influenced by his father, Tom Chan, whose civic involvement began in China. It's likely that white Americans called him Tom Chan, not knowing that in Chinese custom, Tom was really his family name instead of his first name. After immigrating to Chicago and starting a family, Chan was involved in many Chicago Chinatown activities including his participation in the hosting of Madame Chiang Kai-shek's visit to the United States during World War II. He also established several successful businesses. Ping Tom's mother took over company management after his father's death and soon encountered legal feuds among family members. Motivated by these legal disputes and the potential loss of his father's companies, Tom pursued an education in law school. Upon graduation, he passed up a potentially lucrative legal practice and assisted his family with business operations.

Being a second generation native English speaker enhanced Tom's penchant for working with (non-Asian) organizations and politicians. He was an advisor to U.S. Senators Paul Simon, Carol Moseley-Braun; Illinois governors, James R. Thompson, Jim Edgar; and Chicago mayors, the late Harold Washington and Richard M. Daley. His extensive political involvement afforded him numerous business and political distinctions and appointments on government committees as well as civic organizations including the

Harold Washington Library, Adler Planetarium, Madison Bank, Mercy Hospital and Medical Center, Illinois Development Finance Authority, South Side Planning Board, Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority, and the U.S. Federal Judicial Nominations Committee. The latter appointment, adding his Chinese American voice in the nomination of federal judges, in particular showed the immense trust placed in Ping Tom by the U.S. Government.

Outside of the family businesses and his political involvement, Mr. Tom's greatest achievement was his work on Chinatown Square, a \$100 million plus residential and commercial expansion of Chicago's Chinatown on 32 acres of land purchased from the Santa Fe Railroad. As president of the Chinese American Development Corporation, founded in 1984, he unfortunately did not have the chance to see the bustling development it has become. It was his desire to expand Chinatown so there would be more room for his fellow Chinese to live and work.

Philanthropy: As an extension of his commitment to family, Tom became heavily involved in civic activities: Jane Addams' Hull House, the Asian American Institute, Chinatown Chamber of Commerce, Chinese American Civic Council, and the Chinese American Service League. Ping Tom was the primary person to push for the inclusion of a community park in Chinatown development plans, two decades after the only park had been paved over and developed. For this reason the Ping Tom Memorial Park was dedicated in his honor in 1999.

External Links:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ping_Tom

<http://pingtompark.org/Welcome%20to%20Ping%20Tom%20Park.html>

Interview with Darryl Tom, son of Ping Tom, on February 17, 2009 in Chicago.