



Name in English: Tom Young Chan
Name in Chinese: [譚贊]
Gender: Male
Birth Year: 1881-1944
Birth Place: Yakou, China
Philanthropy: Yes

Profession (s): Business Leader, Civic Leader, Philanthropist

Education: Unknown

Contribution (s): Tom Y. Chan was one of the most significant Chinese American business leaders in early 20th Century America as well as a philanthropist and civic leader. He played a significant role in supporting Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the Chinese Revolution of 1911 that Sun led, and in supporting the Republic of China after the revolution. He was also the father of [Ping Tom](#), another noted Chicago businessman and civic leader and the grandfather of actress Lauren Tom.

He was born in Yakou, Guangdong Province in China, the second of seven children. In early 1898 he immigrated to Honolulu, Hawaii to work as a typesetter for the weekly Lung Chi Pao, eventually renamed Tan Shan Hsin Pao (Hawaii- Chinese News.) This was one of a number of newspapers founded to support Dr. Sun Yat-sen's attempts to overthrow the Qing Dynasty in China with newsprint and with money. Tom's arrival in Hawaii proved to be fortuitous. Later that year the United States formally annexed the islands and created the Territory of Hawaii. In 1900, the Hawaiian Organic Act was passed stating that any person that was a citizen of the Republic of Hawaii on or before August 12, 1898 would also become a citizen of the United States. Whether by good luck, incompetent government officials, or some other means (Sun Yat-sen paid for a Hawaiian birth certificate for himself,) Tom became a United States citizen. This was despite the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 expressly forbidding the naturalization of Chinese and that law being extended to Hawaii by the territorial government. In 1907, he helped raise funds to establish the Tzu Yu Hsin Pao (Freedom News.)

In 1908, Tom moved to the mainland and learned how to make noodles in New York City before moving to Chicago. He believed that the key to financing the Chinese Revolution would be industry and commerce so he determined to become a man of business. In December 1909, he joined the Chicago branch of the Tongmenghui (同盟會), a secret revolutionary society created from the merger of several Chinese revolutionary groups in Japan during Dr. Sun's visit to Chicago. In 1911, he founded the Chinese Noodle Company, Chinese Trading Company, and the Min Sun Company. The company names were much grander than their actuality before they became successful enterprises. As his grandson, Tom Y. Chan remembered it, "The noodle company began

in a one-room shop and he delivered his noodles from street cars, while repairing his worn shoes with newspapers."

On October 10, 1911, the Wuchang Uprising occurred when revolutionaries working in cooperation with the Tongmenghui and disaffected troops of the Qing army overthrew the provincial government of Hubei and declared their independence. Many of the other provincial governments quickly followed making the position of the Qing Dynasty untenable. Dr. Sun was caught by surprise, having been in the United States raising money for the revolution. He needed to return as soon as possible to China to take control of what was later called the Xinhai Revolution before he lost control of the movement. Among the business leaders that raised the funds to get Dr. Sun back to China by December 1911 was Tom Y. Chan. On December 29th Dr. Sun Yat-sen was elected as Provisional President by the revolutionaries. On January 1, 1912 the Republic of China was officially founded.

President Sun was soon pushed out of power though by General Yuan Shikai, who became the second Provisional President and moved the national capital from Nanjing to his power base in Beijing just three months later. General Yuan had an army while the revolutionaries didn't, nevertheless President Sun continued his efforts to form a national government under his newly formed Kuomintang Party (Nationalist Party) even as the country disintegrated and fell to warlords. Tom's first wife, Mary Goo, died during or shortly after World War I (different sources variously state 1918, 1919, and 1920.) He married again in 1922 and went to Niagara Falls, New York, where his second wife, Lillian, recalled spending their honeymoon decoding messages from President Sun. The death of President Sun in 1925 didn't diminish Tom Chan's political interest. He was elected to represent San Francisco, the largest Kuomintang party branch in the United States, at the party's second National Congress in Guangzhou in 1926 where he saw his father for the first time in thirty years.

In 1930, he became general manager of the San Min Morning Paper, the only Chinese newspaper in the Midwest, with circulation that included the American South, central Canada, and Mexico.

In 1933-1934, the Century of Progress Exposition (as the World's Fair was known that year) was held in Chicago. The official exhibition was such a financial success (being the first World's Fair to pay for itself) that it was decided that it should be opened again from May to October 1934, this time entirely financed by local businesses instead of national governments. Among the new exhibitions featured in what was called "The Streets of Shanghai" area was an operating noodle factory and an exhibit of the way bean sprouts were grown paid for and operated by Tom Chan. It was in the same year that he became involved as Vice-Chairman of the Chinese Relief Association in Chicago, one of the first organizations in the country devoted to helping raise money for China.

His efforts on behalf of China earned him an appointment in 1942 onto the People's Political Council in China's government, a position that American publications likened to that of a United States senator under the Chinese system. After returning from China after his appointment he spent the next eight months touring Canada and the United

States raising money for the war effort. In 1943, he was elected to the leadership of the All-America Chinese Congress of Resistance and Relief Organization which unified all Chinese American fundraising for the war.

Tom Y. Chan died in November 1944, just 63 years old, a death attributed to exhaustion after having raised \$4 million in war bonds for the US Government from Chinese communities across the United States. This was the equivalent of nearly \$100 million today and it was collected from Chinese Americans almost all of whom earned very modest wages because of their lack of education and opportunities from racial discrimination. He was supposed to be buried at Rosehill Cemetery where his first wife, Mary Goo, had been buried. The Chicago Tribune in 1944 covered the saga that Tom's family went through with the cemetery. First, the cemetery said only one grave had been bought and they wouldn't sell the family a plot to give enough room for a second burial. Second, they said they hadn't been given his wife's personal name and therefore couldn't find her grave. Third, they said that Chinese burials hadn't been allowed in the past twenty five years.

The cemetery superintendent said the discriminatory policy "had nothing to do with race but with practical situations." He then complained about the burial practices of some non-Christian Chinese, "They often disinterred their dead to burn the flesh from the bones over a charcoal grill; polish the bones, and pack them into tin boxes for shipment to China for final burial ... Adjoining lot owners protested the scenes and the stench." As the Chinese-American Museum of Chicago pointed out though, "Tom Chan, who had a Christian wife and is likely to have been Christian himself, should not have been excluded, and yet he was." The superintendent stood by the story though and said, ""the cemetery simply faced a practical situation that had to be changed. We are not a bit sorry about the decision and are not offering apologies for it." Tom Y. Chan was buried at Mount Auburn Cemetery in Stickney, just outside of Chicago.

Philanthropy: Tom Chan was very active in leading and fundraising for Chinese American community organizations, the Kuomintang Party, and the United States and Chinese war efforts. In 1941, Tom became involved in fundraising for Soong Mei-ling (Madame Chiang Kai-shek) to create orphanages for the children of Kuomintang soldiers that had died in the fighting. He raised the extraordinary amount of \$1 million, a huge sum at the time.

External Links:

<http://bbs.chineseofchicago.com/showtopic-4721.aspx>

<http://www.ccamuseum.org/index.php/zh/research/people/84-sun-yat-sen-sun-zhongshan>

<http://www.ccamuseum.org/index.php/zh/research/century-of-progress-exhibition/167-the-streets-of-shanghai-1934>

<http://www.ccamuseum.org/index.php/zh/research/research-before-1900/135-1892-a-vanishing-cemetery>

<http://www.ccamuseum.org/index.php/zh/research/research-1900-1949/126-1944-racism-at-rosehill-the-cemetery-refuses-to-bury-tom-chan>



Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan) with Chinese-American leaders in Chicago 1909

Tom Y. Chan is identified as the man 3rd from the left in the 2nd row from the Chinese caption but other sources have identified him as the 4th man from left in the 2nd row.
Courtesy of The Chinese-American Museum of Chicago and the Moy Family Association, Chicago