Three Chinese Stores in Early Honolulu

Wai-Jane Char

Early in the nineteenth century, there were three Chinese stores in Honolulu, listed in The Friend on August 11, 1844 as “Samping [Samsing] & Co., Ahung & Co. [Hungtai], and Tyhune.” The stores are long gone and forgotten, but they were significant among the commercial establishments of that time.

The first store mentioned, Samsing Co., had a modest beginning in the 1830s, next to a bakery on Fort Street, in the middle of the block near the west entrance of today’s Financial Plaza. Later Samsing Co. had a location on King Street facing south in the middle of the block between Bethel and Nuuanu Streets. Yat Loy Co. carried on a dry goods business there for most of the twentieth century.¹

The second store mentioned was Hungtai Co., begun even earlier at the northeast corner of Fort and Merchant Streets, where today stands the multi-storied Financial Plaza. In 1838, the store moved to a building called the “Pagoda” on Merchant Street, facing the harbor, between Fort Street and Bethel, then not yet opened as a street.²

The third store, Tyhune, also started before the mid-30s, was at the southwest corner of Hotel and Nuuanu Streets. It was marked merely as “Chinese store” on a map drawn by Alexander Simpson in 1843, during contentions over the land claims of Richard Charlton.³

During the period the Chinese stores were in business, Honolulu changed from a small village into a flourishing town with lumber yards, wharfs, streets, schools, and churches. The streets may have been dirt paths, but the town had an air of excitement from the burgeoning development of its commerce. Provisioning whale ships played a large part in the development of business. Whalers and other seamen spent their winter months here, and Honolulu streets often teemed with them. Some writers term the condition of Honolulu in those days as “frontier,” and frontier it certainly was in the sense that foreign residents of this early period, Westerners (except missionaries) as well as Chinese, generally did not bring their families with them.

Research on these three stores has revealed a group of adventuresome men

¹ Wai-Jane Char is a founding member of the Hawaii Chinese History Center.
who came from China to settle in a strange land. They were versatile enough
to venture into not only shopkeeping but also the manufacture of sugar. They
associated with and assisted Anglo-Americans in similar pursuits. In turn they
were given advice and assistance by their new-found business friends—
Hawaiians, English, and Americans. Their language and their dress were
uncommon, but they made a place for themselves in a fairly open community.
Human they were and certainly undeserving of the anonymity assigned them
by abbreviated names or generic appellations like “John Chinaman.” They
accommodated to the social patterns around them, marrying Hawaiian girls
and establishing well-respected families.

A chart of persons associated with the three Chinese firms is here added
for readers’ convenience in identification.

Persons Associated with the Three Chinese Stores

A. Hungtai Co.

1. Atai, d. Maui, April 27, 1841.
   a. Apung, brother (also known as John Pake, Keoni Pake, China
      John), d. Honolulu, February 24, 1842.
   b. Asing, b. China, ca. 1819.
   c. Ahlan, b. China, ca. 1814.
   d. Louisa Chu Chu Neddles Gilman, wife; d. November 30,
      1909.
   e. Hoolanie or Rebecca Hualani (Mrs. Rufus A. Lyman), daughter;
      b. February 19, 1844; d. February 1, 1906.
   f. Ahchoc or Aholoc, son.

   b. Asing, b. China, ca. 1819.  
   c. Ahlan, b. China, ca. 1814.  
   d. Louisa Chu Chu Neddles Gilman, wife; d. November 30,
      1909.
   e. Hoolanie or Rebecca Hualani (Mrs. Rufus A. Lyman), daughter;
      b. February 19, 1844; d. February 1, 1906.

3. Employees
   a. Asan
   b. Chunfaa


B. Tyhune Store

1. Tyhune (Wong Tai-hoon), d. Honolulu, May 4, 1855.
   a. Wahinekapu, wife, d. 1864.
   b. Uwini, daughter; married James Auld, March 1, 1862; d. June
      6, 1876.
   c. Akini, daughter; married Frederick Leslie Hanks, d. February 14,
      1859.

2. Achun, brother (also known as Achona, Akana, Ah Chon, Achung).
3. Others with varying interests in the store
   a. Asam (same as Sam of Sam & Mow bakery)
   b. Apana
   c. Akai

C. Samsing & Co. (originally Sam and Mow, bakers)
   1. Asam (Sam), drowned Honolulu Harbor August 4, 1847.
      a. Makahema (also spelled Kamakahema), wife, married Waimea, Hawaii 1835 or 1836.
      b. Akana, son, b. ca. 1840.
   2. Ahmow (Mow), drowned Honolulu Harbor August 4, 1847.
      a. Deborah or Kepola, wife, married January 28, 1844.
      b. Ahu, son of Kala and Ahmow, b. ca. 1838.
      c. Ahoe, son of Deborah and Ahmow, b. ca. 1842.
      d. Kialele Ponuoole, daughter of Deborah and Ahmow.
      e. Ah Sung, father of Ahmow.
      f. Ahin, brother of Ahmow.
   3. Achiu (Wong Chiu), Alum (Fung Look), and Ahee (Mock Yee).
   4. Young Sheong, Achiu, Ahpong.
   5. Ahpong, who also used the firm's name, C.P. Samsing.

HUNGTAI CO.: Ahung and Atai

Hungtai was a business name, not a man's name. It was a composite of the names of the two principal partners, Ahung and Atai. The deed to their store was addressed to Messrs Hung and Tai. Ahung's full name was Chun Hung (surname Chun) as written on his will. Ahung at times used Hungtai as his personal name. Atai's family name and other portions of his given name have not been identified as yet, although much was written about him.4

Evidence of Hungtai being a business name may be seen in a transaction assigning titles of several properties belonging to William French. French had first stopped in Hawaii in March, 1819 on his way to China on the brig Neo to sell his cargo of merchandise. He later returned from China to set up business in Hawaii and unfortunately took on an Englishman, Francis John Greenway, as partner in his own business. In 1842, without cause, Greenway declared the bankruptcy of French & Co. Assets were $180,000 and liabilities $90,000. French offered to settle any debts out of his own funds and transferred titles of his assets to Stephen Reynolds and William Ladd, two Honolulu businessmen of repute, in order to satisfy creditors' claims. Ladd and Reynolds were to hold several claims of creditors, among whom was Hungtai Co.4
In a Bureau of Conveyances record of the above transfers of title, the proprietor of Hungtai Company signed the business name in Chinese. To the benefit of researchers, he first wrote Ahung Store, then crossed out the word for Store and added Tai, making it apparent that Hungtai and Ahung Store were one and the same and that Hungtai was a business name.6

The firm of Hungtai was already in partnership in 1828 when it went into sugar production in Wailuku on the island of Maui. The Hungtai establishment rates various mentions as one of the earlier sugar mills in the Sandwich Islands,7 and Hungtai consistently advertised the sale of sugar in the Polynesian from May 29, 1841 until the end of that year:

**HUNGTAI**

Have for sale, at their plantation, at Wailuku, East side of Maui, a quantity of superior White Sugar, not inferior to the best imported Loaf Sugar. Also White Syrup, a superior article for family use.

For the information of merchants and others trading to these islands, they would state, that they are enlarging their business, having now 150 acres of Sugar Cane under cultivation, and in the course of the next season will have 250 acres. By the 1st of December next, they will have a large lot of Brown Sugar for sale, on as reasonable terms as can be offered by any other firm.

No information is now available on how much longer this joint sugar venture continued—whether there were changes of ownership or whether it quietly folded. Atai personally looms large in Hawaii’s sugar industry, with both his brother Apung and William French.

The partner Atai was apparently a close associate of both Stephen Reynolds and William French. He had a brother named Apung, whom others called John Chinaman, Keoni Pake, or China John. The two brothers were also sometimes included with others as “French’s Chinamen.” The earliest reference to the brothers occurred in Stephen Reynolds’ Journal.

Reynolds on August 17, 1826 noted that he sent “the Chinaman [or men] to restore the cellar” and on May 14, 1827 wrote that Atai was washing bottles in preparation to bottling wine. This may have been for the boarding house or hotel, Canton Hotel, which was jointly owned by Atai and William French, or for any of French’s grog shops.

It is necessary here to digress from Hungtai Co. to include information on Atai’s activities with William French and the activities of another nineteenth century American company, Ladd & Co. In 1835, Ladd & Co., general merchandise firm in shipping as well as provisioning of whalers in Honolulu, started the first successful sugar plantation at Koloa on the island of Kauai where William Hooper, one of the partners, was first manager. He and his partners exchanged many letters on business affairs together with commentaries on the passing economic scene of the 1820s to the 1840s. Chinese were in their employ at the Honolulu store as well as at Koloa Plantation, from where Hooper wrote that “the Chinese fixed up their quarters as if they intended to stay forever.”8

The success of Koloa Plantation lay in Hooper’s ingenuity in substituting horizontal iron rollers for the vertical wood or stone rollers, then ordinarily
used with Chinese mills, and in the cultivation of cane instead of using native cane provided by the Hawaiians under share crop arrangements (as with Chinese establishments and the William French establishment at Waimea, Kauai, also started in 1835). French had a “fair-sized group” of Chinese at Waimea, but better methods at Koloa and lack of a land lease for French were factors soon to put them out of business. The mill and apparatus were brought back to Oahu in 1838.9

It is of interest how white businessmen of Honolulu and the developers of an infant sugar industry on Kauai found it expedient to use Chinese, while the Chinese found it of mutual benefit to seek advice and help from their white foreigner friends. There was much trust and mutual dependency among those in business and in agricultural ventures in these “Sandalwood Mountains.” The following letter is indicative of this. Ladd & Co. on August 30, 1833 wrote to Hooper at Koloa, Kauai about a Chinese by name Arsang (name in Chinese unknown), saying:

This will be handed to you by Arsang, a Chinaman whom you will recollect as in the employ of Rufus Perkins. He has, we learn, a family in China, and we believe it is his intention to return here with them soon. It is possible he may be making investments to considerable amt. so that it may be some object for a vessel bound here or to the Coast to take him and his freight and perhaps he with you might take up a whole vessel. At any rate you will be pleased to see him, and will be able to know from him the unpleasant circumstance under which he has been obliged to leave and possible may be of service to him. We think your attention to him will not be misplaced.

There has not yet been found any historical writing to verify this information nor to add to this account of a Chinese merchant-adventurer.

Ladd & Co. kept an eye on French and his men during their sugar venture. Reports from Honolulu and from Hooper to the parent company went back and forth, with frequent mention of the competitor’s doings. Hooper on March 29, 1835 reported that he had seen the “Chinese Sugar Works” and that “William French was elated with its success and from what I learn from Mr. Whitney [missionary on Kauai] you may expect a Host of Chinese and their apparatus per Diana.”

It is not clear what the business arrangement was, but either French, or Atai, or the two jointly imported an additional sugar mill and apparatus with “4 Chinese Manufacturers” via the Diana, which arrived on September 23, 1835, “92 days from Canton via Bonin Islands.” Invoiced to the “Chinamen in French’s employ,” the sugar mill apparatus included “400 to 600 pots for Claying* and 5 Cast Iron Boiling. They are all under the control of Atti [Atai] and hopefully may be obtained on fair terms,” according to Stephen Reynolds’ account.

According to “Hooper Journals, 1835–1848,” an entry of October 29, 1835 stated:

At 10 a.m. the British Barque Cheviot anch [anchored] at Koloa, with Kaka [Governor Kaikioewa], and four Chinamen with Sugar apparatus for Waimea, Kaka being much illeg] agric had bit illeg] conversation with him.10

* Claying, a process in sugar refining.
Two years later, in a letter of February 23, 1837, Ladd & Co. wrote to Hooper at Koloa that:

Mr. French is paying the Chinese at Waimea $10 dollars per month. This is a piece of information which may be of service to you.

By March 1837, French had given up at Waimea. It was felt that the lack of permanent tenure on the land was a major obstacle. Ladd & Co. had been able to arrange a fifty-year lease, the first major transfer of land from the hands of Hawaiians. Atai, after the Waimea failure, tried to sell the mills, sugar, and apparatus, but French said he had an interest in them and offered them to Ladd & Co. at prices which Ladd felt were double what they would pay if they were to import them themselves.

Ladd & Co. came to the astute conclusion that the Chinese would not succeed in establishing mills in these islands to any profit unless they went into larger scale ventures, as Hooper was trying to do. Unable to expand capitalization and faced with labor problems, Ladd & Co. itself declined after 1841.

Earlier, on November 16, 1838, Hooper had made this observation in a letter to the Honolulu office:

The best suggestion was to lease Koloa on terms to some good men, perhaps Chinese, for such persons could look to their own country for laborers. A colony of Chinese would probably put the plantation in order, to be perpetuated sooner and with less trouble than any other class of husbandmen.

This plan was not put into operation, but it is noteworthy that Chinese were brought in as agricultural laborers from 1852 until the Chinese Exclusion Laws of the United States became effective in Hawaii after annexation in 1898. As Kuykendall remarked:

Chinese had been familiar figures in Hawaii for many years; they were merchants, planters, mechanics, and house servants; many of them had intermarried with the Hawaiians, and the Chinese-Hawaiian children were very favorably spoken of; the general esteem in which the Chinese were held was one of the reasons that led to the importation of the first coolies.

Atai's younger brother, named Apung but usually called China John or Keoni Pākē, was employed by French in the 1820s. He was probably familiar with the sea, for Reynolds reported in his Journal that French sent him off to fetch the crew from a Japanese junk wrecked off Barber's Point of Oahu early in January, 1833, during a "Squall of Thunder, Lightning and Rain." The one Japanese who came ashore with Apung reported the others chose to remain with the wreck and would come "by and by."

In 1839, Apung ventured into sugar on Maui, as had his brother Atai. Whether he used the Hungtai sugar establishment of 1828 or whether he used the unsold Waimea, Kauai sugar works of French and Atai is not known. However, the following is a very proper share-crop agreement entered into by Apung that even allowed for the Sabbath.

SUGAR AGREEMENT

Agreement between Kalauwalo and Keoni Pake (Chinese), a native of China. This is what they said, and which was agreed upon:
1. That Kalauwalu has taken Keoni as his man to make sugar for him, in Wailuku, permission is granted to Kalauwalu to plant one hundred acres, and that Keoni can stop the planting, and that Keoni shall be the overseer over all of the sugar-cane planters in Wailuku.

2. The division of the sugar has been agreed upon,—Keoni is to have four pounds in ten, and Kalauwalu and others, and the sugar-cane planters set apart for that purpose, to have six; the division to be only in that way until all of the sugar is finished, the division of the molasses to be in like manner, four gallons in ten.

3. Here is another matter which they have agreed upon, when the sugar-cane is fully matured, no day shall be left unworked, the Sabbath day is the only day to be omitted. If one day in the week should be omitted until the setting of the sun, and the mill lies idle, Kalauwalu et. al., and those who plant the sugar-cane, shall pay to Keoni five pans of sugar, the penalty for a labor day not worked shall be paid in that manner only.

4. Here is another matter that they have agreed upon,—that Kalauwalu shall cut the trees and the boards, and that Keoni will do the building. This is what the King has to do,—build the sugar-mill, the sugar-boiling house, the house for making sugar, the house for storing sugar, the large warehouse down at Kahului.

5. It is agreed that there shall be sixteen laborers under Keoni to work in the sugar-making buildings, eight laborers for one week out of the sixteen, likewise as to the other eight, one week’s work. It is for the sugar-cane planters to bring the sugar-cane on the cart to the sugar-mill, likewise also for going after the wood, to help Keoni with two carts, and Kalauwalu three.

6. In the first year of the maturity of the sugar-cane in Wailuku, Kalauwalu shall give Keoni assistance with his vessel, and at the end of the grinding of the first matured sugar-cane, then Kalauwalu shall cease helping Keoni with his vessel.

7. Permission is granted to Keoni to withdraw within four years and five up to ten, he shall be released between those years. But, should Keoni desire to leave the work of making sugar during the second or third year, he will not be released.

8. The King will supply ten pairs of sugar-cane working oxen for the heavy work of making sugar, and for hauling of such other material to the place for making sugar. Kalauwalu agrees to a horse for Keoni, when acting as overseer in the planting of sugar-cane in Wailuku.

Honolulu, August 25, 1839.

Eyewitnesses:

J. Ii. Kamehameha III.
B. Mahune. Kekauluohi.
Kapule. Kalauwalu
Keoni Pake.

(Translated from Hawaiian by E. H. Hart, Original in FO & Ex.)

The King was to play a very substantial part in this sugar venture, for which he appears to receive no shares of the resulting sugar unless it is a portion of the 6/10 for “Kalauwalu and others.”

The signers on the agreement were significant. Kalauwalu had been chief instructor of Alexander Liholiho, King Kamehameha IV. Keoni Pākē was the name Hawaiians called Apung, and Kekauluohi was kuhina-nui “special advisor to king” and mother of King Lunalilo. Apung’s share-crop arrangements with the King and Kalauwalu seemed quite separate from his brother’s operation under Hungtai Co. His beginning
in sugar seemed auspicious under the aegis of the King, who was to put up the buildings, besides allowing the use of land. Apung, as Keoni Pākē, also applied for permission “to rent one of the King’s [Kamehameha III] fish ponds so that he might feed the men working for him.”

Atai hanged himself on Maui on April 27, 1841, leaving a letter that he was very sick and full of pain, according to Reynolds’ Journal. He had had his share of woes. An isolated Reynolds’ entry said Atai’s child had died of leprosy on April 13, 1828, but nothing more about his family has been uncovered. Atai was “down” in spirits about financial losses over the poor trading voyage of the Clementine, a William French venture. Atai was then, according to a Ladd & Co. (April, 1838) letter to Hooper at Koloa, Kauai, in debt to the amount of $1,400 and his health very bad and “raising much blood.” Another Chinese, Tyhune, told Ladd that Atai couldn’t get his cash out of French’s venture, although he wanted to liquidate and “return to China first hand,” as did other Chinese. Whether all this was the aftermath of the French-Greenway case or just a case of continuous poor health cannot now be determined.

Atai was buried in Manoa.

His funeral was attended by all his countrymen dressed in white, preceded by a band of music. A large concourse of foreigners and natives also attended.

He left no will, but probate records of his partner Ahung showed that Atai’s share of the Canton Hotel had been left to “Apan” (an associate of Hungtai Co.) and Ahung. There was no mention of Atai’s share in Hungtai Co. As in Chinese tradition, wives had not figured in affairs of business. It may be assumed that some liquid assets went to brother Apung, as he soon after became a heavy spender.

Atai’s business connections with William French had included a partnership in the Canton Hotel, situated on the mauka side of Hotel Street where Bethel Street now intersects it. This hotel or boarding house was fitted with a billiard parlor, bowling alley, and a bar serving wines and liquors. What business arrangements were made between Ahung and Apan when they inherited the half interest in the hotel have not shown up in documents so far seen. According to a July 6, 1844 list of licenses in the Polynesian, Ahung alone held the Canton hotel license.

Less than a year later, Atai’s brother, Apung also hanged himself (on February 24, 1842), but for quite a different reason. Sir George Simpson, while in the islands, heard the story and recounted it as follows:

The unhappy youth inherited a considerable property from a brother who had died in Mowee [Maui] of the same distemper [suicide], had at once rushed into an extravagant course of life, carrying the passion of his race for gambling to a characteristic extent, and maintaining, in addition to a lawful wife, a whole nest of houris at a ruinous expense [mentioned elsewhere as five thousand dollars]. It was this last circumstance that led to his death. The police, having got evidence of his amours, threatened to bring him up before the court, and, in order to avoid the exposure, he destroyed himself. No sooner was his corpse laid out on the floor, than his bereaved favourites, howling their lamentations over him in dismal strains, endeavoured to shampoo him back into life; but he was too far gone for that, and was buried the same afternoon in the Protestant
ground, while a dense crowd followed him to the grave with a hired band of music, which had all day formed a curious accompaniment to the wailing of the women with the cheerful notes of the pipe, cornet, and drum.

This scapegrace was in partnership with Hungtai, already mentioned. . . .

After the death of Apung, other Chinese continued working the Wailuku sugar establishment, probably on prior verbal agreement with him, but the plantation was forcibly sold from under them as described in Stephen Reynolds’ entries of June 24, July 7, July 23 and July 27, 1842, and January 3 and September 2, 1843. Reynolds was very angry, feeling the Chinese should have been allowed to finish the crop and be reimbursed for their investment and to keep the establishment. He felt there was unkind interference from William Richards (missionary on Maui) and Dr. Gerrit P. Judd (adviser to the King).

Earlier, on August 29, 1838 Apung and Hungtai (Ahung or Atai) had called on William Ladd & Co. for advice about their store lease. According to a letter from Ladd to Hooper at Koloa:

When the Chinese hired the store they now occupy [at the northeast corner of Fort and Merchant Streets; see map, marked “John Cummins store”], they took it for three years & the Six months notice to quit. Yesterday French offered to Sell them the premises but before evening when the Chinese were to give him an answer; he sold the premises to Fayerweather at a reduced price & this morning notified the Chinese to quit in 2 months. Cummings is to occupy the Store. Whether Fayerweather is to be interested with Cummings in business or whether the purchase was made in his name, merely that the Chinese might not see that [illeg.] were really [sic] at the bottom of the matter, or not, we do not know.

The affair will create some talk, from the fact that F. is indebted to the Chinese. French very kindly offers them the lower floors of the Pagoda.

Ladd continued the story on September 6, 1838:

The Chinamen have bought the Pagoda building of French for Sm [Ladd & Co.'s code for $5,000] and will probably make more display in it than they have hitherto in their present store.

Ladd continued a brotherly interest in the Chinese and on October 16, 1838 reported again to Hooper, “The Pagoda now looks well. The Chinese will move into it in a few days.”

The Pagoda building was situated on Merchant Street, facing toward the harbor. It “was crowned by a cupola and flagstaff in order to provide a landmark for incoming captains and an observatory for those ashore from which to recognize approaching ships.” The Pagoda had cost $5,000 and was further described by deed:

... all that piece of ground with the house erected thereon, well known as the Pagoda, having therein a Cellar and Seven Rooms, and a Lookout House situated in the village of Honolulu.

Another document officially described it in this way:

House is built in a substantial manner, has two stories of Wood, basement of stone. There are double Verandahs in front and rear secured by excellent venetians. Each story contains 1 large room in centre 20 x 27 feet and an oblong room on each side, 10 x 27 feet.

The upper story is handsomely arranged for a suite of counting and lodging rooms, and beneath the sales room is an excellent cellar for Storage.
Who built the Pagoda and why it was so called are conjectural. Since it was purchased from William French, it was probably another of the enterprising New Englander’s efforts. In the early days of the kingdom, whole pre-fabricated houses and buildings were brought into the islands. Sometimes, lumber from the Pacific Northwest was taken to China, where carpenters prepared the pre-fabs; after arrival in Hawaii these were advertised as “China Houses.”

There is no record to show whether the Pagoda was such a “China House” sold in toto with plans and carpenters available, or a building whose materials were shipped from America and put up by Chinese labor and thus given an appropriate name. Nevertheless, this was the building of Hungtai, one of the three earliest Chinese stores in Honolulu.

Hungtai Co. evidently imported China goods. Stephen Reynolds on April 14, 1830 bought a “lot of Canton Shoes at H’s for 20/100 [20 cents] per pair. Long cloths 5.25 per pio [three-yard lengths]” and on September 27, 1834, “Received six trunks of shoes, blue cotton, white Nankeen jackets and Pantaloons from Atai.” The September 8, 1835 arrival of the brig Diana brought a “Good deal of property on board” for the Chinese, duly reported by Reynolds.

The mention of buying Canton Shoes from “H’s” raises the question of who was using Canton shoes, which may be assumed to be black cloth slippers with white platform soles. “White Nankeen jackets and Pantaloons” were made in Canton or Macao, where Chinese tailors were then already familiar with Western styles.

On September 13, 1836, Reynolds borrowed $300 from Atai to pay for an order of China goods imported as cargo and sold by the captain or supercargo at prices Reynolds felt were reasonable. Again on September 13, 1837 Reynolds “Bought six dozen nankeen jackets, furniture and Shirts of China-men at 16 dollars per dozen.”

According to an inventory of September 2, 1848 of Chun Hung’s goods and personal effects, the store sold American and China goods, some of which were silks and nankeens, crepe shawls, fine brogans, Mexican boots, China shoes, saddles, “Lot Sandelwood, about 1,000 lbs.—$400,” crackers, goat skins, molasses, “Russian [sic] Duck [cloth],” and crockery.23

Hungtai Store was a center for activities other than merchandising. On December 21, 1837 Reynolds noted an evening meeting at the Pagoda on how to adopt measures to enclose a “Burial Grounds for Foreigners.” When the Oahu Charity School, described by Kuykendall as an “English language school, intended primarily for the education of children of foreign residents who had Hawaiian wives,”24 needed space for a dancing party or a school auction, it was to the “Chinamen’s Hall” that they turned, upon which

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Hungtai Store, “The Pagoda,” on the right in this photo showing Merchant Street in the 1870s. Other buildings from right to left are 1) the Pacific Commercial Advertiser building erected in 1856, razed in 1917; 2) Honolulu Hale with its lookout, lower floor rented to H. Paty in Ahung’s time, also razed in 1917; and 3) Kamehameha V Post Office, built in 1870–71 and therefore not there in Ahung’s time; still in use in 1974. (R. J. Baker Collection, Hawaii State Archives)
Reynolds commented in his entry of September 23, 1842: “BUT, some of the nobility, Yankee women, could not think of going to the Chinamen’s Hall to dance!!! O mores—Temporum!!!”; On November 1, 1842, he noted:

Went over to Chinamen’s Hall to lot, for auction sundry articles sent from New York by Mrs. Doremus for the benefit of the Oahu Charity School. Evening they were sold. The foreign ladies attended and bought around $4,700.

The Pagoda was the site of a meeting of businessmen involved in the French-Greenway bankruptcy case. There was also the protest meeting of American businessmen on March 10, 1841. In the spring of 1841, animosities in the foreign community were such that British consul Charlton tried to horsewhip J. J. Jarves, editor of the Polynesian, for statements made in the paper. Abhorring this violence, Americans gathered at the Pagoda to discuss matters and pass resolutions of disapproval. Due to competition and such complexities as the supposed bankruptcy of a large business house with whom many had business interests, bad feelings between Americans and British ran high.25

On February 25, 1843, the British took control of the Hawaiian Islands and retained it until July 14. During this take-over, aliens in Hawaii were asked to register their property. Among these land claims were two made by Hungtai Co. They are both in British Commission Claim 78 in the Archives of Hawaii. One is for the store property on Merchant Street and the other for property in Manoa Valley, which was held under an 1841 lease. Hungtai’s interest in Manoa Valley was probably for something other than as a location for a summer residence, as had been the earlier, more popular use for the cool valley. Queen Kaahumanu, Regent, 1824–1832, had a country residence there, as did John Coffin Jones, American Consul. In 1845 a portion of the Kaahumanu Estate became the Manoa Chinese burial grounds. Others found Manoa fertile for agricultural pursuits. John Wilkinson had a sugar plantation and coffee fields there between 1825 and 1827. There was also a coffee nursery on the land of Boki, Governor of Oahu, which was later given to the Rev. Hiram Bingham for Punahou School. In 1840, the Reverend Bingham had raised sugar cane in his fields, having sugar manufactured at a Chinese mill in the back of Honolulu. Hungtai Co.’s lease of Manoa property was therefore probably for an agricultural venture.26

The lease to this property was from the Hawaiian Boaz Mahune, honor graduate of Lahianaluna Seminary and probable author of the first civil laws for Hawaii.27 The government approval of the lease agreement drawn up with Hungtai was as follows:

Boaz Mahune to Hungtai Co. Lease

March 17, 1841

I, Mataio Kekuanaoa, the Governor of Oahu, consent to the bldg. by the Chinamen, friends of Mahune, of a house mauka at Manoa, this consent to the bldg. of the house being given under Mahune, to be built on his own land, and not on any other, and at the end of the occupancy by the Chinamen, to leave everything with Mahune, and his heirs or representatives, they are to whom the land belongs. The Chinamen shall not make any undue trouble to Mahune, concerning the material with which the house was built. But all these things shall belong to Mahune.
Little is known of Ahung's early years. He was married to Louisa Chu Chu Gilman, adopted daughter of John Neddies Gilman, who generally used the name John Nedlles only. Her mother was Kamoku and her father was Nahili or Kaniliaulaninui, descendant of Kualii, a chief of Oahu. Chu Chu was an Indian name given Louisa by her adoptive father, who was part-Cherokee Indian. This is how Stephen Reynolds described his friend Ahung's wedding:

April 19, 1843—Fine morn . . . Lord George Paulet [Paulet] and French Frere called on Ahung—took a piece of cake and glass of wine and went away. . . . Evening Ahung was married to Miss Louisa Neddles by Richard Armstrong. All my Dancing Scholars. Mrs. French and Mrs. [illeg.] and many others of natives . . . French & American Consuls, E. & H. Grimes . . . and many others present. Came at ½ before 8 o'clock. Dancing at ½ past 8 til 11 . . . when everyone left apparently well pleased. . . . April 26, 1843—Went over to Hungtai’s to lunch many people in who were at the wedding.

A daughter, Hoolanie, was born on February 19, 1844 to this marriage. The family lived at the Pagoda, as did Ahung’s three cousins, Ahlan, Apio, and Asing, who also shared in profits from the store and the bowling alley at Canton Hotel.

Ahung had the use of “Old Neddies Lot” on Branch Street, now Adams Lane, east side, upon which he built a fine residence for rent to the U. S. Commissioner to the Hawaiian Islands, George Brown. The house lot extended to Cross Street, now Alakea Street. The house itself was worth $2,500, and Ahung deeded it to Hoolanie with rights of residence for Louisa until Hoolanie’s marriage, at which time the property was to go with her as her dowry. Possibly the land had been Louisa’s dowry at the time of her marriage to Ahung. Her adoptive father, John Neddles, later left her the Adams Lane land and other property at the time of his death.

Ahung lived less than two years after his marriage. His obituary appeared in the Friend, February 1, 1845:

Died—In Honolulu, January 27, A. Hung, a native of China; he was married on the Islands and has for many years been engaged in mercantile pursuits.

A will had been drawn a few days before in which Ahung mentioned himself as a native of Macao. The will was witnessed by two other Chinese merchants, Ahpong of Samsing Co. and Tyhune of Tyhune Co.

Stephen Reynolds made this comment:

12 February, 1845—went into Pelly’s. Saw Ahung’s will and a Strange will too! Gave his wife and daughter this house in Neddles’ yard—ordering everything sold—even House & Store—and after paying off all debts, expenses, etc., to send all the balance to his son in Macao—!! Not naming Atai’s share—some smuggling—I guess.
Both Atai and his brother had died as earlier related. There is nothing known of their families.

First, Ahung bequeathed to his wife Louisa and daughter Hoolanie, then about 11 months old, the dwelling house on Adams Lane, known as the “Brown” residence, as earlier described. The will of this Chinese merchant was indeed unusual in making provisions for wife and daughter, because in China inheritances followed a system of primogeniture, and widows and unmarried daughters were cared for by eldest sons. Louisa signed the final disposition of provisions of the will as Hanana, which was marked “surname” in Chinese, the Chinese not knowing that in early Hawaii, the Hawaiians did not use surnames as such.

Second, as to the lease on the Canton Hotel, which Ahung now held (Atai having died and his other legatee Apan probably having sold his share to Ahung), it was to be surrendered to William French’s receiver for $3,000 on June 1, 1845. If the receivers did not require this, the lease was to go to his three cousins, who were his copartners in business, and also resided with him. Thereupon Asing and Ahlan, holding a hotel license good until July 1, 1846, went to take charge at the Canton Hotel. However, Hungwa, a Honolulu businessman, had bought into the Hungtai interests at the death of Ahung. As a result of this, he became proprietor of the Canton Hotel and started advertising vigorously:

**CANTON HOTEL**

The undersigned having taken the premises formerly known as “Warren Hotel,” begs to assure the public that he has spared no expense in fitting up the same for the comfort and convenience of residents and visitors, and solicits a share of the public patronage.

*Billiard Room* and newly fitted *Bowling Alleys* attached to the premises.

The services of superior *Chinese Cooks* and *Waiters* have been secured.

Residents may have their meals sent to their homes, or picnic parties provided at the shortest notice.

*Bread* and *Pastry* made at the establishment, constantly on hand, and will be supplied in any required quantity.

August 24

**Hungwa.**

This advertisement ran prominently in the *Polynesian* from May 31, 1845 until November 22, 1845, when Hungwa changed to a smaller advertisement, called “Business Card,” which was still running at the end of 1847:

**CANTON HOTEL**

(formerly Warren House)

Kept by Hungwa

*Billiard Room* and *Bowling Alley* Attached.

The third provision of the will required that the store and dwelling called the Pagoda, with furniture, merchandise, and other effects be sold and proceeds sent to Ahung’s son, Ahchoc (also spelled Aholoc), who was living with his grandfather in Macao. This son was probably not Louisa’s, but may have been from an earlier Hawaiian marriage or from a Chinese wife whom Ahung had
married prior to his coming to the “Sandalwood Mountains” or during a trip home to China.

Several other Chinese then in Hawaii, including a bookkeeper named Asan, are mentioned in the probate.

By 1848, cousin Ahlan had gone to Lahaina to develop his own business, while cousin Asing was busy in the Hilo area on his sugar plantation at Makuhanaloa.30

The Pagoda had already been sold, just before Ahung’s death, to George Pelly, first agent of Hudson’s Bay Company in Hawaii, who held a mortgage deed. He paid $5,100 to purchase it from Ahung, who was already ill and whose finances were complicated by the French-Greenway case.31

After Ahung’s death and the resignation of two other executors, George Pelly became sole executor of Ahung’s will. The Hawaiian Treasury Board bought the land and buildings of the Pagoda from Pelly for the price he had paid for it. Subsequently, and after much correspondence, the buildings were sold to Starkey, Janion and Company, predecessor of today’s Theo. H. Davies and Co., but the government gave them only a fifty-year lease on the land, with no rental charge.32 The propriety of these property sales was questioned by Ahung’s widow and her second husband, A. P. Brickwood whom she had married in July 1846. The court’s reply was that the executor of the estate should be reprimanded only for “waste and tardiness.”

Proceeds from the estate, as shown from the final settlement on September 14, 1848, were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gross cash</td>
<td>$16,336.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various expenses</td>
<td>2,613.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net cash presumably sent to Ahchoc in Macao</td>
<td>4,086.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among various expenses incurred was one of $383.75 on March 9, 1845 to build a vault over Ahung’s grave at Palama. A Chinese grave of a man of considerable property and esteem would have had, in addition to a vault, an omega-shaped or chair-shaped memorial structure before it. A search at the cemetery on School and Houghtailing Streets did not reveal a vault. Perhaps Palama Cemetery was at another location. Or, more probably, the disinterred remains were later shipped to China for reburial in Ahung’s native village, as was the custom of Overseas Chinese.

Another small item in the probate bespoke the nature of the times of Ahung when seamen roamed the streets and frequented grogshops along Fid Street, now Nuuanu Avenue. The list of expenses included cash paid for soldiery in charge of premises and property on occasions in April and September 1845. There was also mention of many uncollectible debts owed to Hungtai Co.

A. P. Brickwood, Louisa’s second husband, became Postmaster General of Honolulu in 1869. Brickwood had also commanded the Ningpo, a Chinese junk which had sailed from China, and was used for shipping between the islands. It was lost in 1853.33 Louisa died November 30, 1909.
Hoolanie (b. February 19, 1844 and d. February 1, 1906), the daughter of Louisa and Ahung, was adopted by her stepfather Brickwood. Her name was listed as Rebecca Hualani Brickwood in the genealogy book of her husband's family. Hualani was a Hawaiian name, and Hoolanie was perhaps an earlier Anglicized spelling of it. On January 8, 1866, she married Rufus Anderson Lyman, fifth son of the Reverend and Mrs. David Belden Lyman, missionaries who came to Hawaii in 1832 and in 1836 established the Hilo Boarding School. Hualani and Rufus had fifteen children and there are many descendants. Among the better known of Hualani's sons were three West Point graduates: Cavalry Officer Lt. Clarence Kumukoa Lyman, General Charles Reed Bishop Lyman, and General Albert Kualii Brickwood Lyman. Senator Richard Kailihiwa Lyman, currently a trustee of Bishop Estate, is the oldest grandson of Hualani.  

TYHUNE

The second Chinese store of Honolulu of the forties was that of Tyhune, whose given name, Tai-hoon, had many spellings: Tyhune, Tyhoon, Tihune, Tyhoun, or Tihoon. In the 1843 registration of land claims made to the British Commissioners of the Sandwich Islands, Tyhune signed his Chinese name in legible calligraphy as Wong Tai-hoon:

Tyhune Store occupied the southwest or Ewa-makai corner of Nuuanu and Hotel Streets in downtown Honolulu. Unlike the Hungtai Store, which dealt in dry goods, tea, sugar, and such, the Tyhune store dealt in “Wines and Spirits,” as well as dry goods and groceries. The principal partner of the firm was Wong Tai-hoon; others who held some minor interest in it for short periods were Apana and Ahsam. Asam was a partner in the Sam and Mow Bakery, which will be discussed in the Samsing Co. section.

It has not been determined when Tyhune opened for business, but a Ladd & Co. letter of September 23, 1835 reported that they had bought a parcel of blue cotton from Tyhune. Tyhune was at one time in the employ of Ladd & Co., which sent him to Kauai on May 7, 1838. Upon his return to Honolulu in June, the company letter back to Hooper on Kauai reported that:

Tyhune was in a terrible rage in giving an account of his passage. He says the Cap. one great fool, that he [Tyhune] had nothing to do but watch all night and all day. The fact is simply he had a long time for it, 12 days and not being used to Kanaka-Captains, thought of course that everything went wrong.
In describing his visit he is all poetry. Mr. Hooper one good master, Sam are big liar, Koloa very long, make more money. Plenty to eat, anything very nice by by. He appears to have enjoyed himself and to have large shots of the Plantation. He says how he walks two day all time he not go round Mr. Hooper land, so large.

Perhaps there should be some commiseration for Tyhune’s fears caused by the inattentive captain. Daws spoke of “wild miscalculations and bizarre mishaps” when “Polynesian self-confidence about navigation persisted long after ancient voyagers’ skills and intuitions were gone.”

Ladd & Co. found it expedient to use Tyhune, perhaps to learn the Chinese methods of producing sugar (upon which they could improve), and as liaison between the Chinese workers and the company. Another company, Randall and Young, just starting out in the business, wrote to Hooper at Koloa that they needed Chinese for their crop and “please to rite for one.” Hooper obliged by taking his Chinese sugar manufacturer over to them at Waioli at Hanalei, Kauai, on January 18, 1839. This caused some misunderstanding among other Chinese in Honolulu, who accused Hooper’s man of revealing trade secrets. This Chinese boilerman went down to Honolulu to clear matters but was badly frightened by the Chinese there, who told him he had to pay $500 for his misdeed or else they would ship him back to China in irons. Although not entirely clear, it seemed that workmen were recruited by, or came under the auspices of, certain Chinese already established in Honolulu, viz., Atai for French’s Chinese or Tyhune for the Chinese workers at Ladd & Co.’s Koloa Plantation. The Chinese at Koloa asked that Tyhune be sent to visit them, probably in an advisory capacity.

Chinese labor was much in demand, for Governor Kekuanaoa of Oahu was “rebuilding the houses and shed for the Chinese to make sugar, just back of the village [Honolulu],” and Chinese at Wailuku, Maui continued at their works, according to the Hooper letters. However, on February 22, 1839 William Ladd reported that “Today we gave Tyhune notice that we should discharge him tomorrow night. We have had him long enough. And have a better person to take his place.”

Stephen Reynolds also became disenchanted by Tyhune; he wrote on August 30, 1844 in his journal: “Old Tyhune sold his sugar, which I had bought of him, to C. Brewer & Co. Said I did not tell him not to sell it.”

In common with other businessmen of those early days of the Hawaiian Kingdom, the Chinese had interests in more than one venture; Tyhune was in sugar, shipping, merchandise, and liquor. His signature was frequently seen on business documents. There was much interlinking of businesses among the Chinese, due largely to the need to pool resources. There were no banks to support their enterprises. Besides mortgaging real property or chattel goods to

The granddaughters of Wong Tai-hoon or Tyhune and Wahinekapu:

Left: Charlotte K. Hanks, daughter of Akini and F. L. Hanks; married Curtis P. Iaukea.

Right: Maud Akini Auld, daughter of Uwini and James Auld; married Henry C. Pfluger.

(Photos courtesy of Hawaii State Archives and Bernice P. Bishop Museum)
gain the use of larger sums of money, the Chinese formed *huis*, or money pools, which took the place of banking. This use of the *hui* to pool resources was a practice in China before these earliest Chinese merchant-adventurers and sugar masters found their way to Hawaii.  

By the time Tyhune signed his claim to the property on which his store stood in 1843, he was already well established, selling liquor besides other goods. The 1840s have been described as "spirited" times, and Nuuanu Street was then called Fid Street. "Fid" was sailor talk for a "drink" and was in common usage by the many whalers, seamen, and traders who thronged the streets. It actually meant the bar or pin that supported something. Grog shops in 1842 were not licensed as such but some retail sellers of goods sold liquor as well. The short-lived British government of 1843 decreed that grog shops be licensed and limited to nine at Honolulu and two at Lahaina, each to pay $150 per annum for the license. Thus restricted in number, some of the worst shops were closed. Together with Asam, Tyhune also held a license for wholesaling liquor at Lahaina in 1842, and this license cost $500 when the British were operating the government of the Sandwich Islands.

In 1844, the Hawaiian Kingdom further limited the number of grog shops to six for Honolulu and one for Lahaina. Licenses were sold at public auction, and the six in Honolulu sold at $1,074 each plus the $150 for the license. The single license at Lahaina went for $1,460 total. Those years were the peak ones for the whaling industry. There were times when as many as a hundred whaling ships were anchored in Lahaina Roads. At times, there were so many sails in Honolulu harbor that seamen could make their way across the harbor on the decks of the brigs, schooners, and whalers without coming ashore. And in *The Friend*, "A semi-monthly journal devoted to temperance, seamen, marine and general intelligence," there were many articles urging temperance because of rowdy activities.

Gorham D. Gilman writing in 1904 described Tyhune's Honolulu store as also having "rooms for his countrymen addicted to the use of opium." Gilman said that few natives or foreigners used the drug at that time, but "occasionally some gentlemen from Bohemia 'hit the pipe' in the bunks of the Chinamen."

In 1846, Tyhune urgently needed $16,060, a large sum of money for those days. He borrowed this from Theodore Shillaber, a merchant who owned the "Eating House" opposite Tyhune's. Shillaber was an enterprising man who later, at the news of the gold rush in California, purchased up a cargo of goods in Honolulu and sailed for San Francisco. For use of this money, Tyhune gave a chattel mortgage on the store property. Why was the money needed? Since the chattel mortgage was recorded in the Hawaii Bureau of Conveyances in the book on vessels it may well have been that Tyhune had purchased a vessel.

*Left:* Louisa Chu Chu Gilman (Mrs. Chung Hung or Ahung, later Mrs. Arthur Peter Brickwood), with her daughter Eva Brickwood. (Bernice P. Bishop Museum Photo)

*Right:* Hoolanie Ahung, daughter of Louisa and Chun Hung; married Rufus A. Lyman. (Lyman House Memorial Museum Photo)
In 1848, there was a record of Tyhune owning a retail store at Koloa, Kauai when his manager there was fined $200 for doing business without a license. And in 1852, Tyhune applied for a retail store license for Lahaina, where his brother Achun (also known as Ah Chon, Akana, Achung) had been in business as early as 1833.

At about the same time increasing demand for land tenure led to the Great Mahele, the dividing of the lands of Hawaii. Thereafter came the awarding of land titles and royal patents through the Board of Commissioners to Quiet Land Titles in the Hawaiian Kingdom, which held hearings for a number of years.

Tyhune obtained title to his land at Hotel and Nuuanu Streets, but by a very round-about method.

Apparently he did not own the land and buildings in 1843, in spite of his claim. However, he had paid for it as indicated by testimony later filed with the Board of Commissioners to Quiet Land Title. His father-in-law, Kahanumaikai, claimed it based on the following document:

Know all people by this instrument that I, William Wallace, colored man, do bargain, grant, sell and by these presents have bargained, granted and sold to the Native called Kahanumaikai and in consideration of $30 to me in hand paid by Chinaman called Tyhung [Tyhune]—receipt whereof I do hereby acknowledge—all my rights, title, interest in the yards, dwellings and premises occupied by me and lately by William Johnson Parker, dec’d. . . . twelfth day of July, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-eight.

In February 1850 Kahanumaikai sold it to Apana, who in turn on August 17, 1850 sold “one half the premises and all the tenements thereon” to Akai and Ayoung for $2,000. Ayoung then deeded his interest in the land and premises to Tyhune. The deed elaborated that Tyhune had become personally responsible for a “large amount of money,” and Ayoung wished to release any title he had to goods then in charge of the Marshall of the Superior Court.

The maneuvers apparently were an attempt to save Tyhune from some serious financial embarrassment. In the end it must have worked out, for Tyhune did not lose his store.

In October 1852 Kahanumaikai was granted Land Commission Award 48, giving him a fee simple title to the land (with an adobe building on it) at Nuuanu and Hotel Streets, based on the purchased from Wallace. No mention was made of the 1850 transaction. Nor was any mention made of the fact that on September 14, 1852, Apana and Akai for “$1” had turned their deed over to Tyhune. By 1852, Tyhune finally had the full title to the land he had paid for years before.

When Tyhune became ill in 1853, he called brother Achun to come from Lahaina, Maui and expressed the wish to entrust his business interests to him, in the following manner:

Tract of land on Hotel and Nuuanu Streets as per deed. Apan to Tyhune and presently with mortgage to Yeng Coon [unknown] for $6,393.62,

Rights and interest in real, personal, miscell. estate goods, merchandise; horses and cattle; vessels, boats property and effects of all kinds and description, afloat or elsewhere, all to Achun,
In consideration of $1.00 and covenants and obligations set over to Achun—to pay debt to Yeng Coon and all other debts and liabilities of Tyhune and,
Covenant to keep Tyhune and maintain him during his natural life in a good and comfortable [style] and as he has been accustomed.47

Achun’s name later appeared in several transactions, both of his own and for the Tyhune Store, as recorded in various documents at the Hawaii Bureau of Conveyances. Among them was a lease of the store to other Chinese who had purchased its goods on April 24, 1855.

When Tyhune died on May 4, 1855, The Friend ran this item:
Died: An old Chinese resident at the island more than 20 years. His funeral was attended on Friday with much display, accompanied by a band of music and a large concourse of his countrymen.

His daughters, Akini and Uwini, and his widow, Wahinekapu, sold to Achun property on the mauka side of King Street, between Maunakea Street and what was to become Smith Street, property which they had inherited from Kahanaumaikai, father of Wahinekapu. This is about where the modern Lum Yip-Kee building stands today. Achun had a general merchandise store selling American dry goods, hardware, and some China goods such as camphorwood trunks, tea, and teapots. There were alpaca coats; silk, calico, bandana handkerchiefs; red or black gloves; felt, straw or beaver hats. Achun declared voluntary bankruptcy on April 12, 1860, at which time his goods were seized by court order and an inventory made.48

As for the Tyhune Store itself, the widow and children renewed the lease to other Chinese, Akai and Achim. On December 5, 1858 Tyhune’s heir Aking (spelling variation for Akini) and others sold a portion of the land on Nuuanu Street side to William L. Green for a ten-foot right of way.49

A hundred years later, the remaining property on Nuuanu and Hotel Streets, Ewa-makai corner, was still in the hands of Tyhune’s heirs.50

Uwini, daughter of Tyhune and Wahinekapu, married James Auld, printer. The marriage, performed by the Reverend S. C. Damon of the Bethel Union Church, was listed in his records (Vol. 1): “1862—Mar 1—Andrew [James] Auld to Uwini Tyhoun.” From this marriage came a son, Henry William, and two daughters, Maud Akini and Edith Wahinekapu. James and Uwini had considerable property, including the Tyhune store corner. Uwini died June 6, 1876, aged 34 years. The last surviving life beneficiary under a deed of trust of Auld properties, which included the Tyhune store location, was Maud Akini (Mrs. Henry C.) Pfluger who died February 27, 1950 in California.51 Mrs. Pfluger had a son, Henry Carl, Jr., and three daughters, who now reside on the mainland United States.

Tyhune’s daughter Akini married Frederick Leslie Hanks. According to the First Circuit Court Probate 61, Akini was a widow when she died on February 14, 1859 at age 16. Their only child was Charlotte Kahaloipua Hanks, who later married Colonel Curtis Piehu Iaukea. She played a prominent part in the court of King Kalakaua and Queen Kapiolani, and was also closely associated with Queen Lilioukalani.52

29
Like the other two Chinese stores, Samsing & Co. was involved in many kinds of island-wide activities—several stores, inter-island shipping vessels, sugar planting and manufacture, importation of American and China goods, and a Honolulu bakery. Because of these manifold activities, manpower was required; it was drawn from Chinese already in the islands or from those encouraged to come over from the home country. This explains the many names of partners at different stages. As Samsing & Co. developed, each succeeding leader became known as Mr. Samsing for easy identification in the business community. The name “Samsing” means “three partners for prosperity.” It is not clear who the three original partners were and when the firm first started in business.

By the 1840s, Samsing Company, whose “store looked like a retired post office . . . from some flourishing village in the United States, was active in retail trade as well as operating the Sam & Mow Bakery on Fort Street.”

A bakery had been established in Honolulu in 1829, where, according to Levi Chamberlain, a “small loaf of bread could be purchased for 12½ cents.” It is not known if this was the Sam & Mow Bakery, but in 1831, Ahmow (same as Mow) together with Chee In (also spelled Aiain, Chin, Aiana, Aiena) owned property off Hotel Street; “a lot of ground was obtained . . . nearly twelve years ago,” according to his Claim 5 to the British Commission of 1843. “Ahenow’s [sic] bake house-lot” was situated between Alakea and Richards Street where there is now a public parking building.

On June 6, 1840, a charming advertisement first appeared in the Polynesian and was carried for several months thereafter:

Sam & Mow  
Bakers from Canton  
Good People all—walk in and buy,  
Of Sam & Mow, good cake and pie;  
Bread hard or soft, for land or sea,  
‘Celestial made’; come buy of we.

Olmsted, who visited Honolulu on a whaler in 1841, described the shop:

A Bakery has been established here by ‘Sam and Mow’, bakers from Canton, where bread, cake, and pies are manufactured in every variety and of excellent quality. Their advertisement contains a classical allusion in the last line, which will not be readily perceived, except by those who are aware of the arrogance of the Celestial Empire.

The Sam & Mow bakery was also called the Ah Sung Co. bakery, on the 1843 map drawn by Alexander Simpson for Richard Charlton during his contentions over land boundaries. Ah Sung was the father of Ah Mow. In 1847, Ah Sung was in China near Macao taking care of his grandson, named Ahu, who had been born in Hawaii about 1838 to Ahmow and Kala. Nothing more is known of Ah Sung. Ahu had been sent to China to be educated; he eventually returned to Hawaii, and his uncle Ahin was assigned to be his guardian.
On December 28, 1844, Ahmow was married to Deborah or Kepola by the Rev. Lowell Smith. A son, named Ahoe, had been born to them in 1842. He was also assigned to Uncle Ahin after Ahmow's death.56

By 1845, Samsing & Co. was well established as one of the three stores kept by Chinese in Honolulu.57 The company advertised for several months in the Polynesian, starting May 29, 1847, as follows:

Samsing & Co.
Importers & Dealers
in China Goods
Honolulu, Oahu, H.I.
On Hand and For Sale
Sugar, Molasses, Tea & Coffee
Families and Ships Supplied with Bread, etc.

The importation of China goods played a large part in the business of Honolulu, and Chinese merchandise was as desirable as American goods to Honoluluans. Some of the silks were used with good taste, as in the lovely holoku, 'long formal gowns' and court costumes, often devised with missionary help. A K’o-ssu tapestry, a Chinese tapestry of fine silk, gold and silver threads, was used as royal door curtains, and Chinese furniture and porcelains were also appreciated.58 Missionary and merchant families of the white population took to China goods, as did the New Englanders at home in America.

In addition to the store and bakery, inventories filed with their probates indicate that Ahmow and Ahsam were involved in sugar activities on the island of Hawaii.

The original partners of Samsing enterprises met an unfortunate death on August 4, 1847. The event was described in the September 11, 1847 issue of the Polynesian:

Drowned—On Saturday night 4th instant. Ahmow and Asam. 2 Chinamen, sugar planters and shopkeepers, much respected for their honesty and enterprise, were drowned in the surf in attempting to come ashore from the schooner Hope just arrived from Hilo. It was dark, the 2 Chinamen, unable to swim were lost; the native crew swam ashore. The bodies were not recovered, though a portion of their clothes were found. It is a common but dangerous practice for boats to attempt to enter our harbor after dark. Several lives have been lost by the impatience of parties to get ashore, and it is hoped that this last fatal example may operate as a warning to deter others than natives from an enterprise which is always attended with some risk.

According to probate records, their property was distributed as follows: The sugar establishments of Asam and Ahmow were sold to Asing, who left the Canton Hotel to go to Hilo for the sugar business. Ahmow's property on Hotel Street (Ahmow having bought Aihn's share on September 1, 1846) was granted by the Board of Commissioners to Quiet Land Titles to Deborah and her two children, son Ahoe (also spelled Ahoy) and daughter Kaielele Ponuoole, because "claimant [Ahmow] had been a worthy and exemplary citizen." The claim had been filed before Ahmow's death.59

Asam was married to Makahema in 1835 or 1836 at Waimea, island of Hawaii, by Governor Kuakini. They had five children; the only one surviving his father was Akana, born about 1840.
As to the partnership of Samsing & Co., it had changed in 1849 to include Wong Chiu, variously written Ahchow, Achiu, Achi, etc., who also used the signature "alias Sam Sing," in a document dated August 9, 1849 in which he was assigned as guardian to Akana, son of Asam and his wife Makahema. The Chinese of this group were especially solicitous in caring for their Hawaiian families, as well as their China families, if any.60

By 1851, Ahpong and Yung Sheong (same as Young Sheong) were assuming the leadership, as seen in the July 21, 1851 store lease made to "Samsing & Co., consisting of Ahpong and A Cheong [mis-spelling of A Sheong for Young Sheong]." The lease, for fifteen years, was for the premises formerly known as the White Swan Public House and on the mauka side of King Street between Nuuanu and Bethel Streets.61 Samsing & Co. consistently appeared on retail store license lists published in the Polynesian in the 1840s and also in various other documents.

Samsing Co. in 1853 appeared as C. P. Samsing & Co., as in the following dunning letter written with great discretion:

To His Majesty
Kamehameha III
Love to you.

We are in great need now because there not being any money, therefore, will you please pay your debt to us, $73.25.
We are sending you the bill of your indebtedness with this letter, so that you may know the amount of your debt, and balance of money that has already been paid and the balance of $73.25.

Peace be with the King,
With thanks,
C. P. Samsing & Co.62

Honolulu, Oahu
5 October 1853
(Translated by E. H. Hart.)

Ahpong’s Chinese signature appeared as the single character “Pong,” meaning flourishing or luxuriant, on many documents. In English he signed

 данные

Ahpong, only his given name with no surname. His signature appeared on many documents for his own as well as others' business matters. Soon he was signing as C. P. Samsing and was the leading figure for the company. Whether C. P. stood for corporate president or for Ahpong’s initials has not been verified.

There now began to appear documents showing the departure of some of the partners to other businesses. On February 5, 1855, Achiu himself bought a store site on King and Nuuanu Streets (just Ewa of the present American Security Bank at that corner). The transfer was from Asa G. with Sarah A.
Thurston and C. C. with Harriet M. Harris for $3,125 for the NW half of Royal Patent 298. This raises the probability that Achiu left Samsing & Co. to be on his own.  

On March 1, 1855 Samsing & Co. assigned its lease to two of the partners in the firm: Alum (actual name was Fung Look) and Alee (or Allee or Ahee, who was Mock Lee or Yee, both names for the same Mr. Mock). Alee moved on in partnership with Utai (Goo Phoong-wah), and together they purchased property with 23¼-foot footage from George Wilkinson, Jr., on Nuuanu Street adjoining Tyhune's store. They also had a store in Lahaina, Maui in the 1850s.

Samsing & Co. remained the largest Chinese firm in Hawaii, and had “amassed a fortune of $50,000,” according to the August, 1855 edition of the Oriental, a newspaper in English and Chinese, edited and published in San Francisco by the Rev. William Speer, who had visited the islands. The account reported that:

the Chinese stores sold goods imported from China but the largest quantity is obtained from California. They consist chiefly of articles suitable for the use of the seamen of the whaling fleets and clothing for the natives. The Chinese merchants in San Francisco send over in the fall considerable lots for the former. A friend of ours took over last year $5,000 worth.

Several Chinese have commenced plantations for the cultivation of sugar; a portion of whom have given up the business. Two are yet in operation, those of Samsing and Sam Cho, both on Maui. These employ Chinese overseers and operators who boil the sugar and perform the more difficult parts of the labor. . . . American planters are making the experiment of employing Chinese laborers.

On January 21, 1856 the partners were identified as Young Sheong (surname Young), Achiu (surname Wong), and Ahpong (no surname given). At this time, they sold the King Street store lease to Joseph Watt, Caucasian. It was not revealed whether the store relocated or continued at the same location under lease or rent.

Ahpong continued as C. P. Samsing & Co. despite frequent absences, for which he carefully signed powers of attorney to various business friends, one of whom was Chung-Hoon (Cheung Hoon), ascendant of the well-respected Chung-Hoon family.

The Samsing Co. men were becoming busy in the social life of the fifties in Honolulu. They were participants, for example, in a social event long talked about:

**THE CHINESE BALL**

13 November 1856. The Chinese merchants of Honolulu and Lahaina combined, gave a grand ball to their Majesties the King and Queen (Kamehameha IV and Emma) in honor of their recent marriage. It took place in the court house, and was pronounced the most splendid affair of the kind ever seen in Honolulu. It cost the Chinese the sum of $3,700. The names of the committee of arrangements were: Asing, Yung Sheong, C. P. Samsing, Utai and Ahee, Achiu and Afong [Chun Afong]. The opening quadrille was thus made up: Her Majesty the Queen and Mr. Yung Sheong; the King and Mrs. Gregg; Princess Kaahumanu and Mons. Perin; Prince Kamehameha and Mrs. C. R. Bishop; Mr. Wyllie and Miss Hamilin; Captain Harvey, R. N. and Mrs. Anthon; Captain Gisolme, French Navy, and Mrs. Henry Rhodes; Mr. Afong and Mrs. W. C. Parke; Mr. Ahee and Mrs. Cody; Mr. Gee Woo and Mrs. Aldrich.
Whenever the Chinese undertake anything of this sort there is nothing mean or stinted in the way of expenditure, and this first and best Chinese ball was gotten up in lavish style. The pastry and sweetmeats provided were something wonderful in variety and quantity. Two of the items for supper were six whole sheep roasted, and 150 chickens. The affair was the talk of the town for months later.

Was Young Sheong chosen to dance with the Queen because of his handsome features and his ability to speak excellent English and Hawaiian? Ahee and Achu had been partners in Samsing & Co., and Asing once owned all of Kahana Valley. Asing, cousin of Ahung, had worked at Hungtai, later went over to the Canton Hotel as holder of a retail “spirits” license, and then bought the Asam and Ahmow sugar establishment on the island of Hawaii. The Chinese men had ample opportunity to learn dancing, for Stephen Reynolds often taught his dancing classes for the Oahu Charity School at the “Chinamen’s Hall.” Certainly they were not above being pressed into service as dancing partners to Reynolds’ students.

How differently these merchants fitted into the Hawaiian scene, compared to the agricultural laborers who were recruited in 1852 to add their muscles to the development of sugar and rice plantations! Although some of the merchants had started in sugar, they were sugar manufacturers, “sugar masters” in Chinese, or manager-owners of plantations, not plantation laborers. For instance, Ah pong in his land claim to the British Commission in 1843 included twenty-five acres at Waimea, Hawaii with sugar cane already planted, sugar mill, sugar houses; a sugar mill at Lahaina, Maui; and fifty acres at Kohala, Hawaii.

The Chinese merchant-adventurers were community-minded. On May 12, 1859 a subscription list to the Honolulu Hospital included, among several Chinese donors, C. P. Samsing & Co., listed for $100. The Oahu Charity School was “supported in a great measure by voluntary contributions of the foreign residents, Hungtai, the leading Chinaman, being its main pillar,” wrote Sir George Simpson in describing Hawaii during his visit to the Pacific in 1841–1842.

Various Chinese, especially the Samsing men, had an early start in inter-island shipping, for the Hawaii Bureau of Conveyances’ earliest entries included records of sales and purchases of vessels by Chinese.

C. K. Ai (1865–1961) in his autobiography wrote:

I learned of the presence in these islands of a Chinese transportation company called the Sam Sing Company that operated a fleet of junk between the Islands. That was about 1820 [?] long before I came to Hawaii. Mr. [James] Dowsett confirmed Uncle Chang’s story. Mr. Dowsett also mentioned that young men like J. [sic] A. Cartwright, Jr. and Bruce Cartwright, two sons of J. A. Cartwright, Sr., one of the early settlers here, were full of the old Nick and loved to sail on those junks. Uncle Chang said that the King once visited the fleet of junks and even offered to build them a wharf. The Sam Sing Company very graciously declined his offer, for it would have meant the paying of wharfage fees.

Mr. Ai may have meant schooners and not Chinese junks, although one Chinese junk called the Ningpo plied island waters under the captaincy of A. P. Brickwood; who owned it is not known.
Among the various schooners owned by Chinese were the Chilean, a 34-ton vessel owned by Asing; the Hope; the Odd Fellow; and the Liholiho, a crack Hilo packet touching regularly at Lahaina. Aiung had a schooner that made the Maui-Oahu run according to entries in the Stephen Reynolds’ Journal. The Hope had once been captained by Ahmow.71

Of the three Chinese stores, Samsing was the only one to carry its activities into the 1850s. At one time or another, the following persons were identified with the firm: Ahmow, Asam, Achiu, Ahpong, Alee, Alum, and Young Sheong. Of these only Achiu (Wong Chiu), Alee (Mock Yee), Alum (Fung Look), and Young (Yung) Sheong could be identified with their surnames.

The only present-day evidence of these early Chinese merchants are the descendants, many of whom are prominent citizens of the State, and the white granite blocks which pave the sidewalk near the site of Tyhune’s store. However, the tradition of the Chinese merchant as an important part of Hawaii’s business community continues.

GLOSSARY

Achiu, Achi, Ahchow  Womg, Chiu  黃 朝
Achu, Achew Achee  Hee, Chu  許 昭
Achun, Achon, Akana  Wong, Chun  黃 進
Ah Chon, Achung  Chun, Afong  陳 芳
Afong  Mock, Yee or Lee  莫 義（莫利）
Ahee or Alee, Allee, Alii  Ahmow, Mow, Amow  阿 闊
Ahlan, Alana, Alan  阿 茂
Ahpong (identity not clear)  阿 平
Ahmow, Mow, Amow  蓬
C. P. Samsing  Ahung, Hungtai  陳 恒
Ain, Aiina, Aaiana  Chee, In  徐 燕
Aiung, Ayung  牛 容
Aiyin, Aiiing  阿 應
Akai  阿 佳
Akina, Ahsin  Tang (Dang or Dung), Hung-sin  鄧行善
Alum  Fung (Pung or Hong), Look  馮 藤
Apana o Kina, Apan  阿 炳（阿平）
NOTES

1 P, Oct. 17, 1840; HBC, 4:375.
3 HBC, 5:331, 333; Map of Honolulu, 1843. (Photostat, AH).
4 HBC, 1:64, September 3, 1838; First Circuit Court Probate 3. (AH).
6 HBC, 2:203.
9 Jackson, “Koloa Plantation,” p. 29 and 17.
10 Wilcox Papers, originals in possession of Mabel Wilcox, Kauai.
11 Ralph Kuykendall, Hawaiian Kingdom, 1854-1874 (Honolulu, 1953), p. 76.
Margaret Greer Martin, ed., *Sarah Joiner Lyman of Hawaii—Her Own Story: 1832–1885* (Hilo, Hawaii, 1970) gives another account of this shipwreck:

March 14, 1833—rec’d letter from Mrs. Emerson (residing Western shore of Oahu) not long since. Strange vessel anchored in Dec. Four men on board, three sick (four died before). Two Chinamen of Honolulu sent for. Found them to be Japanese blown off course when out on a fishing excursion. "Is not this the way in which all of these islands were peopled? Men were sent from Honolulu to take the vessel there, but they had been out of the harbor but a short time before a storm of wind arose and the vessel was wrecked." Men escaped with little baggage. Whale men fell in with Japanese "junks" frequently. They had been blown out to sea and unable to find way back.


13

March 31, 1840, IDM.


16 P, May 29, 1852.


18 Spelling, capitalization, and punctuation conform to original in this quotation as well as other quotations in this paper. For an explanation of Fayerweather’s relationships with the Chinese at Waimea, Hawaii, see the following article.


20 HBC, 1:64.


23 First Circuit Court Probate 3. (AH)


25 Ibid., p. 208n., 209.


28 HBC, I (Misc.): 31.

29 First Circuit Court Probate 3. (AH)

30 DPI Misc., Island of Maui, July 4, 1849; P, June 3, 1848, p. 11; Ahmow and Asam sugar plantation in Hilo was sold to Asing, 1847, First Circuit Court, Probate 4. (AH)


32 IDLB, I, pp. 156, 161.

33 "Honolulu in 1853," *HAA*, 1899, p. 95.


35 HBC, 5:331, 333.

39 F, April 4, 1844, p. 40.
40 Kuykendall, Hawaiian Kingdom, 1778-1854, p. 306-312.
43 IDM, July 14, 1852 and July 16, 1833 (Ah Chon agreement with King to furnish “House for Master and Officers of Whale Ships.”)
45 HBC, I (Warranty Deeds):91; HBC, 5:331-332.
46 HBC, 5:121.
47 HBC, 5:494.
48 “Inventory of Goods of Achun” (M-241, B.F. Bolles Collection, AH).
49 HBC, 9:497.
50 HBC, 2435:241.
51 HA, March 1, 1950.
54 Levi Chamberlain Journal, Sept. 2, 1829. (HMCS); Land Commission Awards, I:508-509. (AH)
55 Olmsted, Narrative, p. 213.
56 Map of Honolulu City, 1843. (Photostat, AH); First Circuit Court, Probate 33. (AH); First Circuit Court, Probate 12. (AH); Marriage Record Book, Lowell Smith. Vital Statistics 0-27. (AH)
57 F, May 4, 1845.
58 Exhibits, Lyman House Memorial Museum, Hilo, Hawaii; “Honolulu in 1853,” HAA, 1899, p. 101. Captain John Dominis used Chinese materials in building Washington Place and was on his way to China to obtain furnishings when he was lost at sea in 1847.
59 First Circuit Court Probate 4. (AH); LCA 570, Awards, I:331-332; Royal Patent 17, May 1, 1847. (AH)
60 First Circuit Court Probate 10. (AH)
61 HBC, 4:375.
62 C.P. Samsing & Co. to Kamehameha III, Oct. 5, 1853, IDM.
63 HBC, 6:489.
64 HBC, 7:84; PCA March 3, 1859, p. 1, c. 2.
65 HBC, 8:14.
66 HAA, 1931, pp. 36-37.
69 Chung Kun-ai, My Seventy-Nine Years in Hawaii (Hong Kong, 1960), p. 139.
70 HAA, 1914, p. 95.
71 “Hawaiian Maritime History,” HAA, 1890, p. 78; B. Pitman to Minister of the Interior, April 5, 1847. IDM.