

# ASIAN GANGS

The first group of Asians to enter the United States in large numbers were the Chinese. They were used mainly as laborers in the California gold rush and the trans-continental railroads during the mid-19th century. Some of them were undoubtedly members of the established Triad societies in China and in Hong Kong. In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act which in effect prevented more Chinese from coming into the United States. Japanese workers gradually replaced Chinese as laborers, and in the 1900 census Japanese and Chinese are the only Asian groups noted. These strict quotas were not repealed until 1965; that repeal resulted in a flood of Asian immigrants into the United States from various parts of the world.

Chinese street gangs can be traced back to immigration during the second half of the 19th century. Because of language problems and cultural differences with the resident Caucasian community, the Chinese tended to live together in particular areas or population centers. As these Chinatowns grew, so did the concept and organization of the Tong associations.

Tongs were formed by groups of businessmen offering financial support and assistance to Chinese families and eventually grew into a powerful political and business groups. Each organization had membership requirements such as common surname, common occupation or common roots from the same region of China. One of the first-known Tongs was the Chee



*Members of an Asian gang enjoying a smoke together in the backyard.*

Kung Tong, active in San Francisco from 1860.

Chinese-organized crime, whose members were often connected to established Triads, used the leaders of some Tongs to further their illegal objectives. These criminal influences guided the Tongs into loan extortion. In 1894, public feuds broke out among various Tongs over gambling houses, ownership of brothels, prostitution and opium dens. In one example of this protracted gang feuding, the Hip Sing Tong engaged in open warfare with the On Leong Tong for more than 19 years, and the rivalry continues today. Tong members, in an attempt to intimidate families who borrowed money as well as to protect their growing criminal activities, began recruiting "look see" boys from within the Chinese community. These lookouts or "Wah Ching" became the eyes and ears of the Tongs, feeding information to their leaders regarding police crackdowns and activities of rival Tongs.

Hundreds of Chinese were killed in the Tong Wars that followed. Ruthless tactics were used by the Tongs, which included putting bounties on entire families. Outside pressure from merchants helped form the Chinese Peace Society in 1913, and after the warring

parties signed a truce, much of the violence dwindled. During the 1920s and the 1930s, tourism replaced vice as the main activity in most Chinatowns. As tourism increasingly relied upon safe streets and clean restaurants, Tong enforcers helped suppress street crime and assisted in keeping problems from spreading outside the Chinese community. Tong leaders maintained their political and economic influence until the early 1960s.

One of the earliest Chinese



*An Asian gang member squatting down displaying a gun in a posed photo meant to impress his friends.*



**A posed photograph of an Asian gang member demonstrating his prowess with a shoulder-mounted rocket launcher.**

youth gangs appeared in San Francisco in the 1960s. Known as the Wah Chings, most gang members were born in Hong Kong and soon became renowned for their acts of violence: murder, torture, and extortion. They became feared throughout the Chinese community within a few short years.

In 1970, a former Wah Ching named Joe Fong organized a rival group called the Cheung Ching Yee or Joe Fong Gang, sometimes known as the Joe Boys. They were in direct competition with the Wah

Chings for the lucrative profits from illegal gambling operations, extortion of local businessmen and other flourishing criminal activities within the Chinese community.

These two gangs became bitter rivals. The violence escalated with continual conflict for territory and influence. The situation boiled over 1977. In the Golden Dragon Restaurant in San Francisco's Chinatown, the Cheung Ching Yee members, armed with automatic weapons and shotguns, attempted to kill several Wah Ching members who were eating there. The Wah Ching, warned of the imminent danger, escaped from the restaurant unharmed. But five innocent patrons were killed and 11 more wounded in the shooting spree. The Cheung Ching Yee received prison sentences for the attempted assassination, and the Wah Ching went underground to avoid further law-enforcement scrutiny. Since then, the Wah Ching has evolved from a mainly youth-oriented gang to a more organized adult crime group which has expanded throughout California, the United States and the world. Heavily involved in gam-



**A .357 Magnum loaded and ready just in case Mom needs to shoot while she's changing the baby.**

bling, prostitution, drug trafficking and racketeering, they maintain legal businesses such as medical services, jewelry stores, segments of the entertainment business and travel agencies.

Today the Wah Ching is an organized criminal group with 600-700 members that has nationwide factions and close ties to several Hong Kong Triads. Due to personality conflicts among the group's members, they have split into four main factions. Seeking to form powerful alliances with other foreign-based Chinese criminal groups, they continue to broaden their criminal activities on all fronts, both internationally and here in the United States.

### **Vietnamese-Chinese Street Gangs**

After the fall of Saigon to the Communists in 1975, large numbers of minority groups left Vietnam. In the early 1980s some of these refugees began making their way to the United States. One of these ethnic groups, the Chinese Vietnamese from the northern section of Vietnam, were assimilated into the already established Chinese communities, especially in California.

Not long after their arrival here, the Wah Ching and another Chinese gang, known as the Flying Dragons, permitted some of the Vietnamese refugees into their gangs. They became known as the Viet Ching and soon earned a reputation for being difficult to control. The Chinese gangs discovered that some of these Viet Ching robbed other gang members and were involved in illegal activities outside of the gang operations. They also found that at times the Viet Ching openly opposed them, forming their own loosely organized gangs.

Some Viet Ching gangs are still associated with Chinese gangs but are engaged mainly in residential robberies and burglaries. Several Chinese gangs still employ Viet Ching as hit men, enforcers and debt collectors. Highly mobile gangs, the Viet Ching have a continuously changing membership

but seldom have specific names. The Viet Ching are easily confused with ethnic Vietnamese gangs because of similarity of language and appearance, and because they are involved in criminal activities similar to those of ethnic Vietnamese gangs.

### **Vietnamese Gangs**

Vietnamese gangs also originated in the corrupt society of the Republic of Vietnam before its fall to the Communists. The large numbers of refugees who came into the United States included former military officers and influential criminal elements. After arriving in this country, they began establishing themselves in growing Vietnamese communities throughout the United States, but especially in California. In the same manner as Chinese gangs, they organized extortion rings that preyed on their own people. As the Vietnamese gangs became more accustomed to the American judicial system, they expanded their criminal activities into auto theft and welfare fraud.

The Vietnamese gangs are relatively new to law enforcement and information about them is being constantly collected and developed. In the last year, discovery of rival

female gangs in the Southern California area indicates they are just as violent and well-armed as their male counterparts. The information gathered suggests that all these gangs are comprised mainly of ex-Vietnamese military personnel, and when confronted quickly resort to deadly force. Many of the gang members can be recognized by the numerous scars that cover their bodies. In an attempt to appear more intimidating, younger gang members will claim identity with these groups. These gangs are particularly feared in Vietnamese communities and some of the members have been protected by the United States government.

### **Japanese Gangs**

Japanese communities here are stable and well respected, and they have not generally been plagued by street gang activity. However, one main gang, the Yakuza or Japanese Syndicate, does exist, and it is the equivalent of our Mafia. This highly organized group, particularly entrenched in California and Hawaii, can trace its roots many years back in Japanese culture and often wields great influence and power. Yakuza members can be identified by specific tattoos and by the absence of the left little finger.

Authorities are currently attempting to destroy the influence of the Yakuza. They may be one of the richest syndicates in the world, second only to the Mafia. They have been heavily involved in drug trafficking, weapons sales and gang murders. There also has been evidence developed indicating the Yakuza own large percentages — perhaps all — of some Las Vegas casinos. The possibilities of



**An Asian gang member burns himself with a cigarette to symbolize his ability to courageously commit crimes and endure pain.**

their attempts to organize forces with the Mafia have been reported by law enforcement organizations here in the United States.

### **Samoa Gangs**

As the immigration of Samoans into the United States increased, they too began congregating in areas with people of their own culture. They already had established clans led by elders of the families. As the Samoan communities grew, many found themselves in close proximity to Black neighborhoods. Some of the youth soon began gradual assimilation into the Black street gangs, and the family clans eventually began to function very much like the local Black gangs. Many Samoan families are closely associated by blood to the old clans and therefore protect other Samoans like brothers.

Many of the Black gangs that are close to the Samoan communities are Crips. Most of the Samoan gangs affiliate with the Crips or will support their selves. However, older leaders in the upper levels of the clans are always Samoan. Some of the more recently formed gangs count Hispanics among their members, as well as Blacks. Just as with other street gangs, the Samoans are becoming more prone to violence and arming themselves with automatic weapons and other firearms. ★



**These youth are members of the 916 Laotian Crips gang from the northern portion of Sacramento. The ages of these four range from 12 to 14 years. They have already perfected the technique of flashing the appropriate hand signs.**