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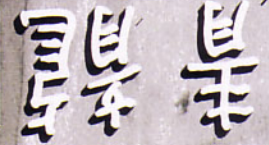
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EXIT THE GREEN DRAGONS

## EXIT THE GREEN DRAGONS

By: Soul Man Seth

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*Don Diva brings you inside a unique and mystifying underworld sub-culture that most Americans know little about outside of karate movies and takeout food. However there is a lot more than meets the eye to this culture. Chinese crime groups are gaining power in cities around the country. In New York Chinese crime groups are second only to the Mafia. They have their own internal structure that is not outwardly known to others that is filled with their own brand of tradition and beliefs. Take a walk with us in our first endeavor inside the deep rooted Asian Underworld.*

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The Green Dragons were a violent gang... The members primarily extorted protection money from Chinese-run businesses... They frequently employed violence to defend and expand their turf, assaulting, kidnapping and murdering rival gang members, potential witnesses and business men who refused to pay protection money



**U**nder questioning Sonny Wong testifying at trial said, "You gotta know [the] rules involving gangsters going up to take the stand." When the prosecutor asked what these rules were, Sonny answered, "That we were to take care of ourselves, not go to the police." Kind of ironic considering that he was sitting in the witness' box preparing to testify against his former co-horts. The onetime Green Dragon lieutenant flipped the script on his crew and gave the government the 411 on the violent enterprises of the murky Asian underworld where his predominantly 'kid' gang kidnapped rivals, committed multiple murders and extorted money from dozens of Chinese restaurants between 1986 and 1990. Investigators called the group, which based its operations in Queens, "One of the most violent in the city."

In the fall of 1990, an FBI/NYPD task-force arrested 6 of the organization's leaders, along with 10 other youths belonging to the Green Dragons. The arrests occurred near Ithaca and Whitney Avenues in Elmhurst, Queens around 3 pm in the afternoon. Federal authorities said the gang attempted to take control of organized crime activities in Queens, New York through a series of strategic murders and violent intimidation tactics. The group of youths, aged 16-23, was allegedly headed by a man in China who wielded power on New York streets through his murderous group of enforcers. The case provided a rare glimpse into the unusual world of Asian gangs.

The defendants were named in an indictment chocked full with 3 dozen criminal accounts, including participation in the racketeering enterprise known as the "Green Dragons". The Green Dragons was a violent gang that operated principally in the predominantly Chinese sections of Elmhurst and Flushing in Queens. The members primarily extorted protection money from Chinese-run businesses, but also engaged in periodic armed robberies. They frequently employed violence to defend and expand their turf, assaulting, kidnapping and murdering rival gang members, potential witnesses and business men who refused to pay protection money. The gang amassed a sizable arsenal of firearms with which to conduct its criminal activities. Although the establishments that the group generally targeted were small, family run businesses, the Green Dragons weekly intake for protection alone was \$1,500 to \$1,700 a week per establishment in late 1990.

The Green Dragons were typical of the new breed of gangs that emerged in the mid 80's as the Asian population in America grew. Unlike the older Chinese-dominated gangs of New York's Chinatown, these new progressive gangs became more ethnically diverse, in an effort to circumvent the established strengths of their predecessors/opposition they began recruiting poor, alienated immigrant teenagers from South East Asia and China as well as Hong Kong with promises of friendships, safety, fast cars and money. Gang leaders profiled prospects as young as 14 from High Schools and Junior Highs. Younger members were indoctrinated in the art of recruiting new soldiers; they were mainly for-

eign born, had trouble speaking English and were usually failing in school. They saw the easy money and exciting life of the gangs as a sharp, pleasant contrast to that of their parents'; both frequently working two or three low-paying jobs. The flashy cars, loose women and cache' gleaming guns they kept stashed in the communal apartments, in which the gangs commonly resided, were too alluring to resist. John Chu was one of those youths mesmerized by the gang lifestyle. While incarcerated in Federal Prison, Chu relayed his experiences to Don Diva Magazine.

"I was about 14..." Chu says, "[when] I went to a pool-hall with my god sister [and] I saw them there. It was about 7 of them. One of them liked my god sister and I got to know them. I was just hanging out with them, like going to different places. This is how I started. When I came to this country [my family] sent me to school where there was only like 5 Asian kids. I didn't speak English. I got picked on by American kids. I got in trouble [when I] stabbed one and couldn't go home. I didn't have anywhere to go so I joined the (Green Dragons) gang."

The degraded conditions of many of the Asian countries from which most of the gang members originated, combined with their naivete', continuously drew them into the often romanticized "gangster" lifestyle. Court records indicate the Green Dragons "adopted" young Asian men right out of schools and off of playgrounds in Queens. Most of the members moved out of their family's homes and into apartments or safe houses where they lived with other Green Dragon members under the supervision of more senior members. Senior members collected funds derived from the gangs activities and used the funds to pay the gangs expenses and to pay salaries to the younger members.

"I lived in Jackson Heights on 82nd Street on top of a Chinese restaurant," Chu explains. "We got involved real young. We could leave our parents' house and live in the group's apartments. Four or five dudes at one, four or five at another. One car per group. We each made between \$80 and \$250 a week after all bills were taken care of, for a 14 or 15 year old, that's a lot of money, every kid looked up to us. When you're that age and you have a car and money, you feel important. You feel you are getting a lot of respect. Plus so many girls want to get with you like you're someone big-time."

John Chu is 33 years old now, serving a 210 month sentence (17-1/2 years) in a federal penitentiary on a kidnapping charge. He's been in for

*"The gang members were recruited as young as 14 from High Schools and Junior Highs... The flashy cars, women and guns stashed in the communal apartments were very alluring."*



## EXIT THE GREEN DRAGONS

growth of the new Chinese communities in Queens meant that these areas were outside the control of the Chinatown tongs. In 1980 there were 120,000 people from China in New York City but by 1990, there were 300,000 there legally and an unknown number illegally.

The Chinese moved out along the subway lines, particularly the No.7 to Queens the train they called the Orient Express through Jackson Heights, Elmhurst and Flushing. Where the subway ends in the shadow of Shea Stadium, new high-rises and signs in Chinese marked a rapidly growing community. None of the established Chinese tongs operated there and that left a power vacuum for ambitious youth gangs to try and fill.

The New York Times reported at the time that Chinatown had burst its traditional boundaries. The new Asian community expanded North and East along East Broadway, glistening with new banks and office towers shielding Hong Kong investments to Division Street, where immigrants from Fujian Province in Southeast China were clustered to Centre Street, where the Taiwanese were to Henry Street, where the Burmese were found and along Canal, where the Vietnamese gangs dominated.

But as waves of Chinese and Southeast Asian immigrants flooded the City in search of better lives, their expanding neighborhoods were plagued by increasingly violent street gangs and new criminal enterprises fighting for control. The gangs concentrated on street crimes, engaged in erratic behavior, internecine squabbling and competitive warfare over turf, demonstrating relatively crude leadership, The New



John Chu and Mike Huang- FCI Raybrook 2003

15 years and looking back he remembers a bunch of kids playing "gangster" as though they were in the movies. "We mainly hung-out in Elmhurst, in the park where we'd go down and play ball. We hung out at the pool halls, Golden Cue on Northern Blvd and Five Star, located in Sunnyside. We drove around in cars, ate in the restaurants and went to Manhattan clubs like the Palladium and Limelight." But Chu wasn't in the movies, everything he did was in real life and would ultimately, adversely affect his real life in the worse way. The mastermind behind the Green Dragons was a 35 year old man, Kin Fei Wong better known as "Foochow Paul," who was charged with being the founder and leader of the gang. A rival gang leader allegedly tried to have Foochow Paul murdered but the job did not go as planned. Foochow Paul was shot and wounded in January 1989 as he was leaving a friend's house in Queens. After recovering, Foochow Paul fled to China, while retaining control of The Green Dragons from overseas. One of the jobs he allegedly assigned to the Green Dragons was to murder Kin Tai Chan- Chan was murdered on August 23, 1989 in Queens.

"He was a millionaire," Chu says. "He used all of us. He was cutthroat." Foochow Paul was born in China, lived in the United States for a time and then operated the Green Dragons from deep within China's Fujian province. The heroin trafficker used the Green Dragons as an enforcement arm to maintain his authority in the US. "They called him Dai Lo," Chu says, which means "big brother" in Chinese. "When the case came down, he jetted to China. He didn't give us anything. Not even a fucking lawyer." It was reported by FBI Director, Louis Freh, in a speech on Asian crime that Foochow Paul was arrested in the Peoples Republic of China in 1995 and that he would be prosecuted in China. No other information about Big Brother Foochow Paul was available.

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"The Green Dragons wanted to take over Queens," Chu says. "They didn't hang around Chinatown. They had beef in Chinatown with some of the Chinatown boys. If we went to Chinatown, they'd try to kill us." The



(top left) Joseph Wang, Alex Wang, Chen "Tony" Chung, Chaing "Jay" Cheng, John (kneeling front) Roger Kwok, Tungtran "big nose"

York Times reported. "Every single business in Chinatown and Chinese areas of Queens is being extorted and sometimes not just by one gang," Catherine E. Plamer, an Assistant US Attorney who specialized in Asian organized crime said. Dr. Chin, author of Chinese Subculture and Criminality phrased it better, "Queens is like the Wild West, it's the frontier. That is why it's so violent." And the Green Dragons were Queens' Billy the kid.

"Some respected the Green Dragons, some didn't" Chu says. "To me at that time, I felt like a strong and powerful kid." The other gangs the Green Dragons beefed with included the White Tigers, the Tong On, the Fu Chang and Born to Kill. "Fights were over power, respect and territory," Chu says. "The White Tigers hung out in Flushing and Elmhurst and so did the Green Dragons. They kicked the Tigers out. Most of the



Korean gangs like Korean Power and 24K used to run away from us. When any other gang came down to Elmhurst, we would beat them up. [Eventually] all of them tried to make peace with us."

With their links to the sophisticated Asian-based crime syndicates that smuggled heroin and illegal immigrants, these modern gangs were poised to move into America's mainstream. The gangs were headed by a Dai Lo (big brother) and they were paid to guard the Dai Lo's interests. The crew ate free in neighborhood restaurants, scrawling the gang's name across the check was payment enough. They extorted money from businesses in return for protection and robbed people that were unlikely to complain, like high stakes gamblers and patrons of massage parlors where Korean prostitutes worked. The language used in extorting merchants,

the police said, was often "polite" making prosecution difficult.

hu explains, "You walk into a new restaurant and tell them, 'You got nice friends but I don't know if you know the rules; for a grand opening you pay this and then this per week.' If they say no, that's no problem. We get kids to come in and harass them. Punkrock kids. They slide cockroaches into the plates of food and make a big scene. Then the restaurants pay the money. It's good for business. Then we will stage extortion and come in to protect the owner so that he doesn't feel like he's being squeezed. He's happy to see us. And eventually we'll try to open gambling tables in the back of the restaurant to generate more money."

Chu was not in the leadership stratosphere of the Green Dragons but on the street and in prison he associated with the alleged leaders of the gang. Court records indicate that Joseph Wang was responsible with Alex Wong for collecting extortion money from various restaurants and when the manager of the Tien Chiau Restaurant refused to pay; Wang along with Wong was responsible for arranging the termination. After the killing Wang moved up the ladder in the gang and he began planning crimes. Danny Ngo was responsible for operating one of the gang's apartments and controlling the activities of the seven or eight members who lived there.

Joseph Wang of Taiwanese and Chinese descent was from Flushing. Chu says, "He was a playboy. Always going around with the girls. Danny Ngo was half Vietnamese, half Chinese. He lived with his aunt and uncle but said, 'fuck it' and moved in with the gang. He cooked real good." Court records say that Alex Wong allegedly shot the manager of the Tien Chiau Restaurant and helped to organize the effort to locate the witness who had identified him in the shooting. Alex "Was a quiet dude, the tallest (6 foot 3) too," Chu says. "He lived in Jackson Heights, spoke English like an American, grew up playing football, he figured life got boring so he got in the gang when he was 15 or so."

Tung Tran instructed other members of the Green Dragons to murder Tina Sham, who had testified against a Green Dragon member at a preliminary hearing in State Court, and Tommy Mach, who happened to be with her when the Green Dragons apprehended her, court records relate. "They called him Big Nose," Chu says. "He was a little older, came

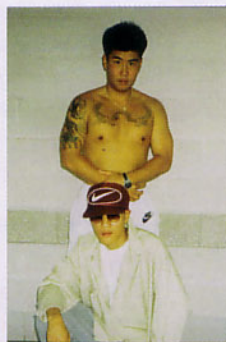
from California and started hanging with us. He was half Vietnamese and serious in demeanor."

Brian Chan drove one of the gang's cars, participated in kidnapping Tina Sham and Tommy Mach and instructed other Green Dragon members to beat up members of the White Tiger gang, court records say. "They called him pretty boy," Chu says. "He was tall too, like 6 feet. He had a crazy rep"

Chen I Chung, "Who everyone called Tony," says Chu, was the gang's alleged street leader. At his initial court appearance, the New York Times



(3 in middle from left to right) Roger Kwok, Chiang "Jay" Cheng, John Chu in USP Lompoc 1993.



(top) John Chu, Chiang "Jay" Cheng- USPAllenwood

called him a baby faced 23 year old. Foochow Paul, the Dai Lo, maintained regular telephone contact with Chen I Chung, court records say, and issued directives concerning Green Dragon policy, specific places to be extorted and amounts to demand and how to handle conflicts with rival gangs and members of the Chinese community. "He always kept it serious," Chu says of Tony. "He expresses himself with his eyes. Always thinking about how to make more money. Very smart. I called him the brainchild." Court records say he became the operational leader of the Green Dragons in November 1986 when the former street leader E.T. was killed by the Tong On, a rival Asian gang in Flushing at a restaurant," Chu remembers. "Everybody was like drunk, it was Tony's birthday party. E.T. was arguing with a Tong On guy. Guns came out and everybody started shooting. A couple of other guys got shot too."

Roger Kwok, Chiang I Cheng and Steven Ng, although lower in the gangs hierarchy, operated under the direction of their superiors over an extensive period of involvement in the affairs of the Green Dragons, court records state. Kwok was the actual shooter in the murders of Tina Sham and Tommy Mach. Cheng was involved in 3 murders in connection with the gangs activities and Ng was involved in the murders also in furtherance of the Green Dragons operations. "All these guys are basically Americanized," Chu says. "They all had their American names." Like Tony for Chen I Chung and Jay for Chiang I Cheng. "Everybody used to make fun of Jay," Chu says. "Roger is Cambodian, he came from New Jersey. He talks black and has a good gift of gab in both Chinese and English." Steven Ng, who took a bullet in the E.T. shooting, "got shot a bunch of times," Chu says, "He had a lot of scars."





apartment at 40-15 Hampton Street in Queens on a tip that the apartment was the location of an underground gambling spot. A woman who lived there was allegedly raped but no charges were forthcoming. The conspiracy to murder Carol Huang, the witness to the Tien Chiau murders. The extortion of the High Pearl Restaurant during the spring of 1989. The gun battle at 82-22 45th Ave. in Elmhurst. The extortion of Jack Tran in August 1990. The June 1990 gunfight between the Green Dragons and BTK (Born To Kill) at the Mars club in Manhattan. The February 27, 1990 murder of Jin Lee Soek, a Korean Power member and the Queens poolroom gun battle in January 1990 between the Green Dragons and White Tigers. But it was the double murder of witness Tina Sham and Tommy Mach in early 1990 that sparked the joint investigation that included full time surveillance of the gang's four safe houses in Queens.

This event led to the Feds orchestrating a supposed showdown with the White Tigers so they could get all the Green Dragons in one place. "One of the White Tigers called Tony on the phone and called them out, which was a set-up," Chu concedes. "They got Tony pissed off, he was like come out, lets have a war!"

The police claimed that the White Tiger/Green Dragon rivalry had already led to a half-dozen killing and feared more deaths so they arrested Chen I Chung, Tung Tran, Brian Chan, Joseph Wang, Roger Kwok, Danny Ngo and other members of the Green Dragons on November 19, 1990 as the gang members massed in preparation for a showdown with the White Tigers to settle a turf dispute, court records indicate. But looking back Chu says, "It was all a ruse. A scam. A set-up to get everyone in one place."

The arrests and indictments in the case resulted from a nine month investigation conducted between March and November 1990 by the FBI, NYPD and Nassau County Police Department. As part of their investigation, the FBI and NYPD conducted court authorized electronic surveillance monitoring several telephones used by the Green Dragons. Among the 29 guns seized were two Uzi submachine guns and a Mac-10 machine pistol. "They arrested them time after time," Chu says. "Like 15 boom. Then 30, four different groups of Green Dragons until they were all locked up. Some of them were so young, they went to State."

The Feds trumpeted their feat. "This indictment, for all intents and purposes, destroys the Green Dragons and their leadership," said Andrew J. Maloney, the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York. "They put a lot of weight on terror but now they're through." The government moved for the empanelling of an anonymous jury. They contended that the Green Dragons were a violent gang with an extensive history of interfering with the judicial process and sought to silence potential witnesses against them. The Tina Sham and Tien Chiau restaurant murders were cited as evidence for the contention. The gangs demonstrated willingness to obstruct justice warranted the use of an anonymous jury, the court found, especially in view of evidence that Kin Fei Wong, the Dai Lo and other members of the Green Dragons

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remained at large with the means to harm jurors.

After a 10 week jury trial, each of the defendants was convicted of a substantive violation of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) provisions to the criminal code. At the heart of the prosecutors case was two weeks of testimony by street Lieutenant, Sonny Wong, who pled guilty to lesser charges in exchange for his cooperation. "Sonny is our Sammy the Bull," said one police investigator. Sonny testified how he joined the gang as a 16 year old student at Newtown High School in Elmhurst. As a \$40 a week soldier, his first assignment was to kill the leader of the Tong Ons. He and three others fired on a Jackson Heights restaurant and wounded five people but missed the Tung On leader. "I. Chung told me not to worry about it, that at least now they knew we won't just back off," Sonny testified.

Another former gang member, Aleck Yim testified that he and fellow members forced Tina Sham and Tommy Mach into a car, drove them to a secluded area of Sands Point, L.I. and tied their hands behind their backs. "Let the new kid do it," Aleck recalled saying to the youngest defendant, 18 year old Roger Kwok. "If you look at the transcript, most of the murders they got convicted of were ones that Sonny and Aleck ordered," Chu says. "Aleck the punk was weak. He had no business hanging with us. Sonny Wong was Tony's right hand man. He always wanted to prove himself. He always made trouble with other groups. They both are weak shits. If they didn't rat, everybody wouldn't have gotten life and might have beaten the trial."

The trial had its dramatic moments. On one occasion, three prosecution witnesses refused to testify because they were reportedly threatened on their way to the courthouse. On another day, a defendant rose from his seat and said, "Watch yourself" in Chinese to a witness. And the aforementioned rat, Aleck Yim, graphically described the Tina Sham execution while her relatives sat weeping in the courtroom's front row. The jury returned its verdict on the sixth day of deliberations following the trial. But as Chu says, there never had to be a trial.

"They were offering 20 to 25 years to plea." He says "They were offering me and some other guys 5 to 7 years to plea. Instead of pleading, we all went to trial!" Judge Reena Raggi, in Federal District Court in Brooklyn, sentenced seven Green Dragons to life terms for "truly dis-

*"...during trial, witnesses refused to testify because they were reportedly threatened on their way to the courtroom."*

turbing crimes" and noted that during the trial, the defendants had threatened witnesses and laughed at the victim's families. She added, "They were actually enjoying listening to accounts of their escapades."

Reflecting, Chu says, "I look back, it's not worth it and I believe the other guys think that way too. Tony, Alex, Roger, Joe, Brian, Danny, Big Nose, Jay and Steve, I know them all and I was cool with them all. We were smart guys who just got caught up at a young age. We could have done something with our lives, instead of wasting them. Instead of being in jail for half our lives." Or in some cases, for the remainder of their lives.