

Is the Sinister Shadow of "the Hatchet" Again Falling on New York's Chinatown?

Police on Guard, Fearing Recent Murder of Ko Low, Hip Sing President, May Be Initial Move in Chinese Tong War—Would Add New Chapter to Series of Sanguinary Conflicts in Chinatown That "Truce" Had Apparently Ended.

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ONE man standing in the deep shadows of a doorway near No. 23 Pell Street; an idler, apparently, fumbling with a handkerchief.

Another man coming from a restaurant at No. 24, just across the way—one of a party of five in which there are two young women not of the race of the quarter.

The man in the doorway straightens from his lounging, advances a step, and then, from beneath the handkerchief, come four quick stabs of flame.

Six hours later Ko Low, national President of the powerful Hip Sing Tong, who had come so carelessly from the restaurant, is dead in Beekman Street Hospital with a bullet through his body.

And now the police are wondering whether long-silent "automatics" are being taken from their oiled rags to break the ten-year peace which has existed between the Hip Sings and the Ong Leongs.

Most of the affairs going on in Chinatown were and still are as adroitly hidden from those of alien race as the guns and knives of the killers were concealed in their roomy sleeves. The first intimation that war was on often came with the clatter of pistol shots and the gattering of policemen and ambulance surgeons to hold a pow-wow over one or two dead Chinamen in the roadway and a brace of long-barrelled, blue steel .44-calibre revolvers found in the gutter.

The secret societies of Chinatown have always had great faith in the primitive method of disposing of enemies or other "undesirables" by eliminating them. The Hip Sings and the Ong Leongs might be called "The Societies for Doing Without Some People."

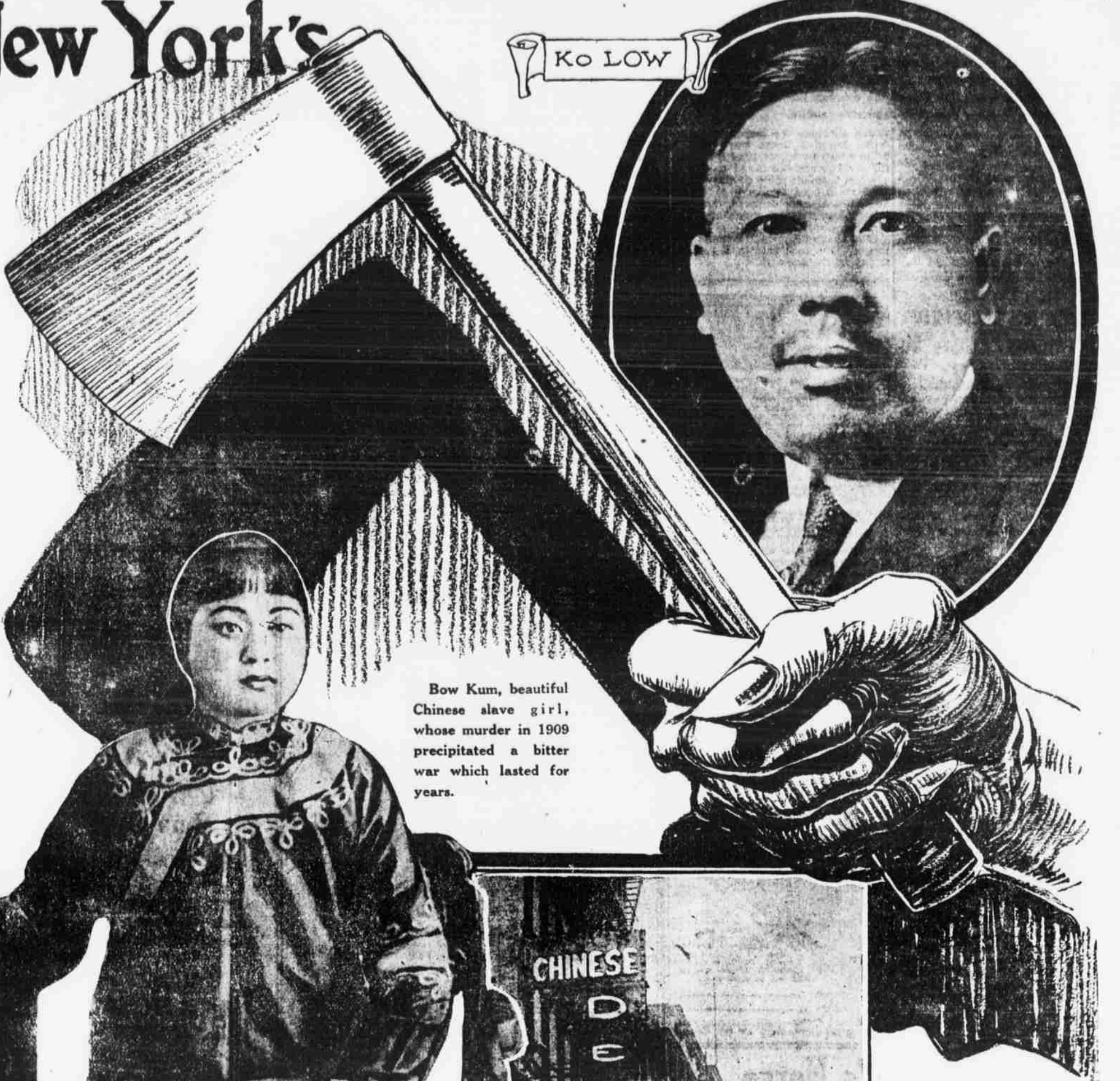
The "undesirables" were picked off in the dark of Mott or Pell or Doyers Street, and at the very first revolver reports the street of the shooting would be deserted save for the crumpled figure on the sidewalk.

But again, as in the shooting-up of the Chinese Theatre in Doyers Street on Aug. 6, 1905, murder was carried on with more drama than the theatre itself could provide. This was one of the best examples of Tong warfare. The police said at the time that the Hip Sings started the row, and Mock

Duck was arrested for it. At any rate, there were several hundred Chinamen in the theatre attending a "social concert," when some one in the back of the house set off bunches of firecrackers. It was looked upon as enthusiasm over the concert. But when the auditorium was filled with smoke four Chinamen arose as if by prearranged signal. One was at the rear of the house, another at the stage end of the centre aisle, the third was to the right midway down the side and the fourth in a corresponding place on the left. These four arose and fired simultaneously, apparently without taking aim, and no one fell.

Instantly there was a rush for escape on the part of the audience and the piece was in an uproar. The Chinaman at the back of the house met the rush with drawn revolver and a burst of bullets. The crowd charged for the stage and the Chinaman there greeted them as the first had done. Rushes to right or left were checked by the other two gunmen. Finding themselves thus cut off, men in the milling crowd, Ong Leongs, so it was said, drew their long-barrelled revolvers now and let fly.

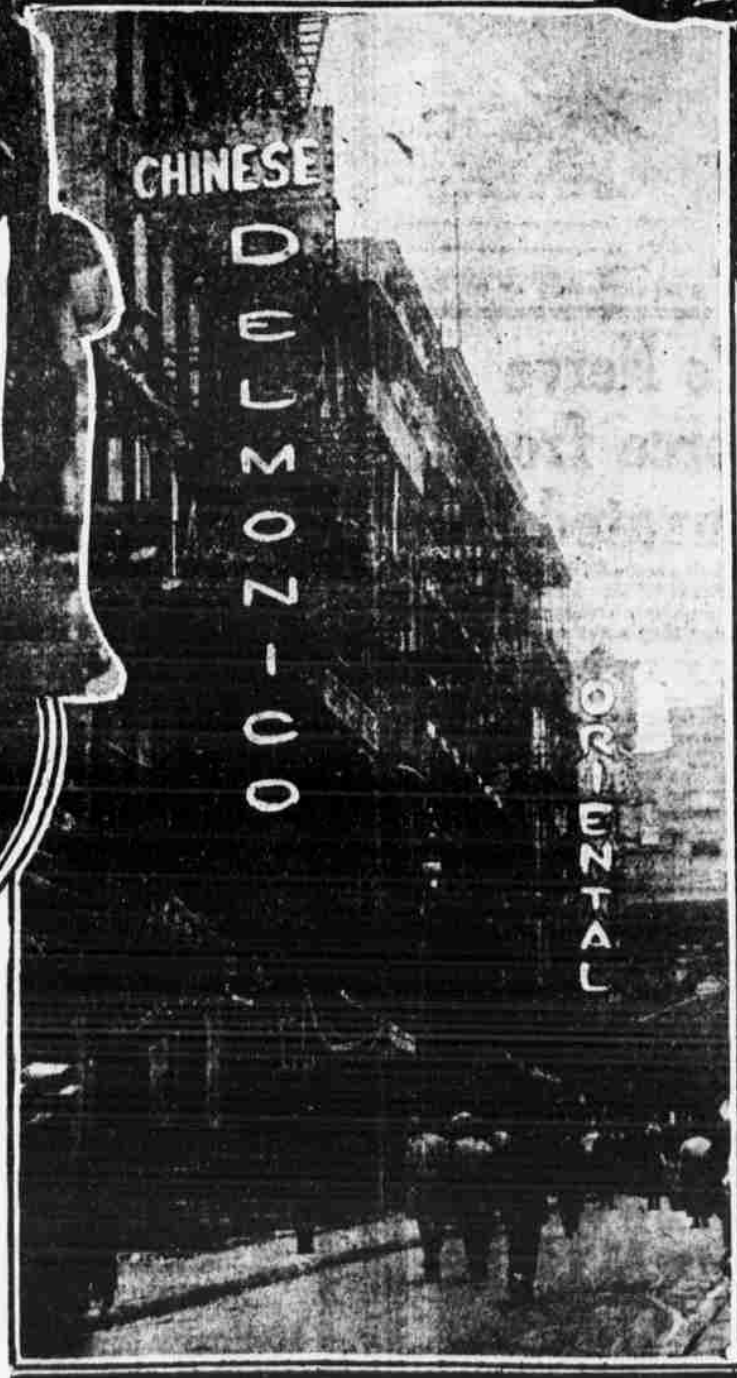
The result of the battle was five mortally wounded Chinamen. The police said that the Hip Sings were



Bow Kum, beautiful Chinese slave girl, whose murder in 1909 precipitated a bitter war which lasted for years.



The "Bloody Angle," where Doyers Street enters Pell, and the scene of many Tong killings.



Chinese Delmonico Restaurant at No. 24 Pell Street, where Ko Low was shot in what may prove the beginning of a new Tong war.

under orders to "get" five Ong Leongs. And five were "got."

Tong wars in the past have been due, in most cases, to contest over the graft from pie gow and fantan houses and such resorts, or over the fickle white women who cast their lives with the Chinamen of the quarter. But there was one war, waged for years, which followed the murder of a Chinese slave girl in a dingy Mott Street tenement.

The killing of this girl was an atrocity, even for Chinatown. She was Bow Kum and she was twenty-one years old when she died. She had been a slave girl since a child. In 1907 she arrived in San Francisco, coming from Canton to become, ostensibly, a maidservant. What she became was the property of a rich Chinaman who, as she was pretty, paid a handsome sum for her.

Her master died and she became a coquette in San Francisco's Chinatown, distinguished among other things for the number of pistol battles fought over her. A mission worker induced her to give up her mode of life and while being "converted" she met one Chin Len, an Ong Leong man. He got her away from the mission house on pretext of marrying her, but he put her in a dive in Oakland. There she met Low Dong, a former sweetheart, a Four Brothers man, who tried to get her to go away with him. She had been learned of this and spirited her to New York in February, 1909, making a home for her in the tenement at No. 17 Mott Street. Early in the morning of Aug. 15 of that year Chin Len ran from her room saying she had been murdered. She had been stabbed to death with unbelievable ferocity.

Within a short time the war started. Hip Sings, Ong Leongs and Four Brothers swearing vengeance on one another, each charging one of the others with the killing. It may be said that the blood that flowed from Bow Kum's wounds did not dry for a year in the streets of Chinatown. Not less than four murders are said to have been done in reprisal.

There are so many "underground" channels in Chinatown that a man marked for death often gets wind of it and manages to flee the city—only to be picked off in some other community, for the arm of Chinese vengeance is symbolized in the length of a mandarin's fingers.

But not all Chinamen were to be frightened away. One who long refused to be terrified, though he knew himself to be marked for knife or revolver, was old Tom Lee, once head of the Ong Leongs and

called "Mayor of Chinatown." He is dead now.

He lived on the top floor of No. 14 Mott Street and early one morning a bullet whizzed past his pillow and drilled an alarm clock beside his bed. On another day a heavy flagpole, adroitly sawed, fell almost on him as he walked in the street. Neither of these experiences drove him from the quarter. Eventually the Hip Sings exploded a bomb in his home and he retired in haste to the Bronx. Eventually he came back and again became head of his Tong, dying naturally and being buried in great pomp.

There was one resident of the quarter who thought he had obtained protection against any enemy. He was proprietor of the Chinese Theatre. He knew that he was always in danger of a sly bullet, so he had a secret staircase built from the theatre in

Doyers Street to his living quarters in adjacent Chatham Square. At the foot of the stairway was an iron door and a guard. At the top was another iron door and another guard. But a Chinese murderer got past all these and killed the theatre man in his own living room.

A famous Tong killing occurred twelve years ago when three Ong Leongs went to Hip Sing's headquarters at No. 12 Bowers and squatting in the street, shot down several of that society's officers as they came out of a night meeting. One of the dying bullets went into a saloon where a longshoreman was taking his first drink in weeks and with the first money he had earned after a

long period of idleness. The bullet shattered the glass in his hand and entered his forehead, killing him instantly. In the fusillade a small boy was also shot.

Two of the Chinamen captured after this shooting were found wearing armor. One had on a mailed shirt and another a waistcoat of bullet-proof cloth.

A few days later the Hip Sings went into Pell Street and at "The Bloody Angle"—where Pell and Doyers meet—took ample revenge, killing two Ong Leongs.

It may be said that the Tong wars started about twenty years ago by the arrival in this city of an astute Chinaman of the name of Mock Duck. He

is still alive, conducting what he declares to be a profitable importing business in Brooklyn. The Internal Revenue people have been at him once or twice, but not to his discomfort, where he had been of importance in Chinese affairs, and was held to be a man of power and resource. As soon as he arrived here he went to Tom Lee and explained that he might be found to be "useful" to the Ong Leongs in the matter of the maintenance of gambling prerogatives in the district over which Tom Lee held power. It should be understood here that the two chief causes of all Tong wars have been disagreements among gamblers and disagreements over the women, Occidental mainly, who cast their lives with Chinamen.

But Tom Lee saw no reason why Mock Duck should be employed by him or his Tong, and said so. Mock Duck went away, and a little while thereafter the police, supplied with accurate information, raided all the pie gow and fan tan games being conducted by the Ong Leongs.

This was too much to be borne, and two days later Mock Duck was discovered on a cold sidewalk in Chinatown with a bullet through his abdomen. He never had to ask who shot him. He was taken to a hospital and there slowly recovered. The bullet seemed to let in a great light, because Mock Duck immediately became a reformer and, some said, an informer. He allied himself with Frank Moss, one of the leaders of the Society for the Suppression of Crime, and a clean-up of Chinatown was soon under way. By this time Mock Duck was head man of the Hip Sings and powerful beyond words, since he had "the people from uptown" with him.

During the short time Mock Duck was at the head of the Hip Sings and in the leadership which followed his, the Tong wars went on with few armistices. Men were marked for death because they had done something or failed to do it, and the gunmen were sent out after them.

The killings in Chinatown, which totalled about sixty, became such an offense that steps were taken to end them. The powerful Chinese Merchants' Association bailed itself with the task and aided by the Chinese Consul General of New York and Judge Warren W. Foster of General Sessions, an agreement between the Tong was arranged and a truce was called. The important document was signed ten years ago in Judge Foster's chambers. Now the police wonder whether the peace of ten years is to be broken by a new Tong war over Ko Low.