

*In the late 1980s and early 1990s, proposals surfaced for building Japanese "enclaves" on Australian soil. Political controversy scuttled the idea. Now it has resurfaced in the United States, this time under Chinese auspices. These two articles are reprinted with permission from the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette editions of August 4 and 8, 1994.*

# A New 'Chinatown'

By Doug Thompson

Little Rock, Arkansas, August 4, 1994

A group that wants to build a "Chinatown" near Little Rock [Arkansas] for 2,000 immigrants says it has obtained \$500 million from foreign investors for the project.

Cheung K. "Jimmy" Ng's company, Chinatown USA Inc., will disclose its backers' identities Sunday at a reception in the Little Rock Hilton Hotel, spokesman James Mitchell said. Chinese and Japanese investors are the primary backers, Mitchell said. Local investment is not being sought.

The concept is to offer a planned community to Chinese immigrants as an alternative to established — and overcrowded — Chinatowns in bigger U.S. cities, Mitchell said.

"The idea is not to isolate themselves from the surrounding community," he said, but to give them a familiar community base from which they can acclimate themselves in the United States.

Ng, president of Chinatown USA, is best known in Little Rock for setting up the Arkansas-China Trade Association. That trading company's opening celebration earlier this year was marred when guest Elena Yee presented herself as the U.S. ambassador to China and was accorded VIP treatment by Little Rock and chamber of commerce officials. Yee, however, held no position in the U.S. government.

Ng filed for personal bankruptcy in December 1990, after losses closed the Bamboo Gardens Restaurant in Little Rock. Ng was part owner of the restaurant. Ng had been in the restaurant business since moving to the United States from Sun Woi, China, in 1950.

Chinatown USA and the Arkansas-China Trade Association are two separate enterprise, Mitchell said. The association is a group of ethnic Chinese businessmen in the United States and other countries looking for trade opportunities. Chinatown USA is a development project, "something Jimmy Ng's worked toward for a long time," Mitchell said. "For the last year and a half it's been a real struggle, but it's all coming together."

Chinatown USA is still looking for about 500 acres in the Little Rock area, Mitchell said. Plans are to market homes and business sites in the area to Chinese business owners who are not fully convinced that free market capitalism will survive under Chinese Communist Party rule. Also, with Hong Kong reverting

to Chinese rule from British control in 1997, Mitchell said, many Chinese there are interested in relocating in the United States. "It's a hedge," Mitchell said.

Having a place to go and a company to work for when one gets there eases the immigration process, Mitchell said. "They're planning [for] two schools, an area for light industries, some shopping area, a large park and a community center," Mitchell said. "Much of the architectural styling, especially in the park, will be Chinese. They also plan to have one in four jobs created in the area to go to local residents, people who already live here."

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If Chinatown, Arkansas, succeeds, the project will be the first of seven such communities, Mitchell said. Others are planned in Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana, he said. A culturally diverse community "really has some-thing to offer, from food to culture to clothes," said Mayor Jim Daily of Little Rock. "So I hope (Ng) can create this. I don't know the particulars about whether it is feasible. For that, you'll have to talk to him."

Although the trade association and the Chinatown project are formally separate, the two ventures share the same president — Ng. According to company statements, Alfred K. Goh of Dallas is on the board of both organizations. Frances Ng, Jimmy Ng's wife, is secretary-treasurer of Chinatown, USA.

Also, the trade association hopes to benefit from a Chinatown, Sum To said, when the association opened in March. To, spokesman for Midland Eagle Corp. of Hong Kong, an investor in the association, said a community of Chinese-speaking and -writing citizens would be a great help in conducting business between the two countries.

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Little Rock, Arkansas, August 8, 1994

The backers of the proposed Chinatown, Arkansas, project remained a mystery Sunday.

The leaders of Chinatown, USA Inc., announced Wednesday they would reveal the names of the

proposal's financial backers along with other details at a reception Sunday, but they could not because financial arrangements are not complete, company president Jimmy Ng said.

The group wants to build a 500-acre, 2,000-resident development for Chinese immigrants to the United States.

"I can tell you that there are two groups who have formed a joint venture, one Chinese, the other Japanese," Ng said. The Chinese group contains many Hong Kong businesses that want to relocate in the United States, he said.

Ng received a letter of commitment from the joint venture dated July 24, he said. "That's all I can say until everything's in place. I have been told to keep this (their names) confidential until money is transferred to the U.S., and cannot get permission to release any more information," Ng said. "As soon as I have permission, I will call you. That's my promise to you."

Chinatown, Arkansas, is a pilot project designed to aid the emigration of businesses to the state as much as people, Ng said. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service restricts businesses that want to relocate, accepting only those above a certain size. Businesses from Hong Kong that meet the criteria would be allowed to move, NG said, along with their managers.

Once here, the businesses could offer jobs to other would-be immigrants. Having a job waiting for you is a definite aid to complying with immigration laws and getting a visa, Ng said. However, jobs created would not be reserved exclusively or even primarily for Chinese, he said.

The goal is to allow a comfortable, familiar place for Chinese who want to immigrate to the United States. The group wants to avoid any segregation of immigrants into a closed colony of its own, he said. If Chinatown, Arkansas, succeeds, Ng said, Chinatown, USA, will do the same thing in six other Southern states.

China "has produced much anger and pain, but has also produced a people who are industrious and courageous," Ng told a group of about 65 people who attended his announcement reception Sunday. All but about 10 of them were Chinese. "I feel great. I'm confident in this vision I've long held of helping the people of China and the U.S. to walk together."

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No site has been selected, Ng said, but three in the Little Rock area are being considered. Architectural drawings dated March 1994 showed the project as it

would appear if built west of Gillam Park and south of Fourche Creek, near the intersection of Interstate 30 and U.S. 65-167, but that site has not been chosen, Ng said.

The group is looking for a site of about 500 acres that would accommodate 500 homes and about 100 business sites.

This venture is separate from the Arkansas-China Trade Association but shares many of the same participants, including himself, Ng said. The trade association was set up by a Hong Kong corporation called Midland Eagle. Sum To, an associate of Ng's who works for Midland Eagle, is also helping coordinate the group of Hong Kong investors in Chinatown, USA, Ng said.

The group is not soliciting funds locally or applying for any grants, assistance or loans, Ng said.■