



Legacy Business Registry Staff Report

Hearing Date: March 13, 2023

DRAGON SEED BRIDAL & PHOTOGRAPHY

Application No.: LBR-2022-23-022
Business Name: Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography
Business Address: 735 Clay St.
District: District 3
Applicant: Henrietta Tam, Owner
Nomination Date: November 1, 2022
Nominated By: Supervisor Aaron Peskin
Staff Contact: Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography, founded by Thomas and Henrietta Tam in 1978, is a special event and custom dress shop that specializes in making custom traditional Chinese qipao, which is also known as the cheongsam. Being the national dress of China, the qipao is a long, figure-fitting, one-piece garment with a standing collar that was developed in the 1920s and evolved in shapes and design over the years. In addition to these traditional dresses, Dragon Seed is a "one-stop shop" for weddings, ceremonies, and beauty pageants which includes services for photography, decorations, and emcee services.

When Mr. and Mrs. Tam immigrated to the United States from Hong Kong in the late 1970s, they decided to open a traditional Chinese bridal store because it was their line of business before moving to San Francisco. Upon their arrival, they had noticed that the Chinese community of San Francisco needed a traditional bridal store for wedding ceremonies. This is why they chose to locate their store in the heart of Chinatown, so they could provide the most benefit and have the most influence on their native Chinese culture. Their first store was located on 753 Clay Street and went by the name New Style Tailoring Company.

In 1982, Mr. and Mrs. Tam decided to move their business to 735 Clay Street to a larger location to expand their business and provide a better shopping experience for their customers. In 1996, they decided to change the name of their business to Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography.

Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography is committed to helping preserve and promote traditional Chinese marriage customs. Through their clothing designs and techniques, Dragon Seed shares the ideals of marriage and love to the younger generations, the Chinese community, and beyond.

CRITERION 1

Has the applicant operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?

Yes, Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years:

753 Clay St. from 1978 to 1982 (4 years)
735 Clay St. from 1982 to Present (41 years)

Legacy Business Program

Office of Small Business
City Hall Room 140
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102
(415) 554-6680
legacybusiness@sfgov.org
www.legacybusiness.org





CRITERION 2

Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?

Yes, Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography has contributed to the history and identity of the Chinatown neighborhood and San Francisco.

The Historic Preservation Commission recommended the applicant as qualifying, noting the following ways the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community:

- Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography is a special event and custom dress shop which specializes in making custom traditional Chinese qipao, which is also known as the cheongsam. Being the national dress of China, the qipao is a long, figure-fitting, one-piece garment with a standing collar that was developed in the 1920s.
- Some of San Francisco's most prominent leaders have worn Dragon Seed's designs. The late Mayor Ed Lee and his wife Anita, San Francisco Symphony's Board of Governors Vice President Goretti Lo Lui, and Mayor London Breed have all ordered custom outfits from the Tams. The shop also creates the winning gown for the Miss Chinatown U.S.A. Pageant and has for more than three decades. In addition to the Miss Chinatown pageant, the business has participated in other large events in the neighborhood and the city, including Qipao Culture Month featuring the Queen of Classical Qipao of San Francisco.
- On July 10, 2022, Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography received a commendation from California State Treasurer Fiona Ma in recognition of the store's dedication to preserving Chinese history and culture and promoting diversity within California.
- The subject property was surveyed several times and was determined to be eligible for the National Register or California Register within the Eligible Chinatown Historic District.
- Over the years, Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography has been referenced in the media, including the San Francisco Chronicle, 48 Hills, and Sing Tao Daily. On February 11, 2022, Carolyn Fong wrote an article for the San Francisco Chronicle entitled "Inside a Traditional Dress Shop in SF Chinatown," in which they displayed images within the business and of the fashion while telling the business's story. On July 6th, 2020, Emily Wilson wrote an article in 48 Hills entitled "A Display of Belonging and Hope in Chinatown (and on Instagram)" which speaks about the temporary public artwork they have on display on the front of the business created by Wong Yip entitled "Hopes for Chinatown." Dragon Seed was also featured in Sing Tao Daily on June 26 and July 11 of 2022.

CRITERION 3

Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?

Yes, Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) and recommends safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions.

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Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Clothing store featuring custom special occasion attire.
- Traditional decorations and designs displayed within the business.
- Commitment to traditional Chinese design attire.

CORE PHYSICAL FEATURE OR TRADITION THAT DEFINES THE BUSINESS

Following is the core physical feature or tradition that defines the business that would be required for maintenance of the business on the Legacy Business Registry.

- Clothing store featuring special occasion attire.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Small Business Commission include Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography currently located at 735 Clay St. in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
Legacy Business Program

Legacy Business Program

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Small Business Commission

Resolution No. _____

March 13, 2023

DRAGON SEED BRIDAL & PHOTOGRAPHY

Application No.: LBR-2022-23-022
Business Name: Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography
Business Address: 735 Clay St.
District: District 3
Applicant: Henrietta Tam, Owner
Nomination Date: November 1, 2022
Nominated By: Supervisor Aaron Peskin
Staff Contact: Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

Adopting findings approving the Legacy Business Registry application for Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography, currently located at 735 Clay St.

WHEREAS, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; or

WHEREAS, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for more than 20 years but less than 30 years, has had no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years, has significantly contributed to the history or identity of a particular neighborhood or community and, if not included on the Registry, faces a significant risk of displacement; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has contributed to the neighborhood's history and identity; and

WHEREAS, the subject business is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business; and

WHEREAS, at a duly noticed public hearing held on March 13, 2023, the San Francisco Small Business Commission reviewed documents and correspondence, and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry application; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Small Business Commission hereby includes Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Small Business Commission recommends safeguarding the below listed physical features and traditions at Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Clothing store featuring custom special occasion attire.
- Traditional decorations and designs displayed within the business.
- Commitment to traditional Chinese design attire.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Small Business Commission requires maintenance of the below listed core physical feature or tradition to maintain Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography on the Legacy Business Registry:

- Clothing store featuring special occasion attire.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the Small Business Commission on March 13, 2023.

Katy Tang
Director

RESOLUTION NO. _____

Ayes –
Nays –
Abstained –
Absent –

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Legacy Business Registry

Application Review Sheet

Application No.: LBR-2022-23-022
Business Name: Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography
Business Address: 735 Clay St.
District: District 3
Applicant: Henrietta Tam, Owner
Nomination Date: November 1, 2022
Nominated By: Supervisor Aaron Peskin

CRITERION 1: Has the applicant has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?
 X Yes No

735 Clay St. from 1978 to 1982 (4 years)
735 Clay St. from 1982 to Present (41 years)

CRITERION 2: Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?
 X Yes No

CRITERION 3: Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?
 X Yes No

NOTES: NA

DELIVERY DATE TO HPC: January 18, 2023

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
Legacy Business Program

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Member, Board of Supervisors
District 3



City and County of San Francisco

AARON PESKIN

November 1, 2022

Director Katy Tang, *Via email* <Katy.Tang@sfgov.org>
San Francisco Office of Small Business
City Hall, Room 110
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

Director Tang:

I am writing to nominate Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography for inclusion on the Legacy Business Registry.

Located at 735 Clay Street in the heart of Chinatown, Dragon Seed Bridal and Photography is one of the few specialty tailor shops still designing and handcrafting traditional Chinese Qipao and Cheongsam attire in San Francisco. Co-owners Henrietta and Thomas Tam immigrated to the United States in the late 1970's from Hong Kong, and opened their first shop in 1978, later moving Dragon Seed to its current Clay Street location in 1982 near Portsmouth Square. Henrietta and Thomas's creations have been featured at Saks Fifth Avenue in San Francisco's Union Square and are worn by winners and contestants of the Annual Miss Chinatown USA pageant.

Despite the difficulties of navigating a small business during the pandemic shutdown, (especially given their focus on special occasion attire usually worn during large gatherings), Henrietta and Thomas Tam have remained deeply committed to their craft, along with their master tailor, Andy Wong. Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography is not only providing an essential service to the Chinese community in San Francisco, but preserving cultural traditions and artisan handywork that would otherwise go by the wayside.

Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography would benefit from being added to the Legacy Business Registry, and it is my honor to nominate this local treasure for inclusion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aaron Peskin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Aaron" being more prominent than the last name "Peskin".

Aaron Peskin



Legacy Business Registry Application



Business Information

Business name: Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography

Business owner name(s): Henrietta Tam

Identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business

Current business address: 735 Clay St., San Francisco, CA 94108

Telephone: (415) 421 – 8882

Email:

Mailing address (if different than above):

Website:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/dragonseedbridal

Twitter:

7-digit San Francisco Business Account Number (BAN): 0 9 4 9 0 9 8

Do any of these describe your business? (select all that apply)

Requires at least 51% of the business be owned, operated, and controlled by the business designation below.

☒ Immigrant-Owned Business

☐ Owned by Person with a Disability

☐ LGBTQ+-Owned Business

☐ Veteran-Owned Business

☒ Minority-Owned Business*

☒ Woman-Owned Business

**Minority is defined as on or more of the following racial or ethnic groups: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Hispanic or Latino; Middle Eastern or North African; Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander*

Contact Person Information

Contact person name: Henrietta Tam

Contact person title: Owner

Contact telephone: (415) 421 – 8882

Contact email:

Business Location(s)

List the business address of the original San Francisco location, the start date of business, and the dates of operation at the original location. Check the box indicating whether the original location of the business in San Francisco is the founding location of the business.

If the business moved from its original location and has had additional addresses in San Francisco, identify all other addresses and the dates of operation at each address.

Original San Francisco address: 753 Clay St. Zip Code: 94108

Is this location the founding location of the business? (Y/N): Y

Dates at this location: From: 1978 To: 1982

Other address (if applicable): 735 Clay St. Zip Code: 94108

Dates at this location: From: 1982 To: Present

Other address (if applicable): Zip Code:

Dates at this location: From: To:

Other address (if applicable): Zip Code:

Dates at this location: From: To:

Other Address (if applicable): Zip Code:

Dates at this location: From: To:

Other address (if applicable): Zip Code:

Dates at this location: From: To:

Section Three:

Disclosure Statement.

San Francisco Taxes, Business Registration, Licenses, Labor Laws and Public Information Release.

This section is verification that all San Francisco taxes, business registration and licenses are current and complete, and there are no current violations of San Francisco labor laws. This information will be verified. A business deemed not current with all San Francisco taxes, business registration and licenses, or has current violations of San Francisco labor laws, will not be eligible to apply for grants through the Legacy Business Program.

In addition, we are required to inform you that all information provided in the application will become subject to disclosure under the California Public Records Act.

Please read the following statements and check each to indicate that you agree with the statement. Then sign below in the space provided.

- ☒ I am authorized to submit this application on behalf of the business.
- ☒ I attest that the business is current on all of its San Francisco tax obligations.
- ☒ I attest that the business's business registration and any applicable regulatory license(s) are current.
- ☒ I attest that the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement (OLSE) has not determined that the business is currently in violation of any of the City's labor laws, and that the business does not owe any outstanding penalties or payments ordered by the OLSE.
- ☒ I understand that documents submitted with this application may be made available to the public for inspection and copying pursuant to the California Public Records Act and San Francisco Sunshine Ordinance.
- ☒ I hereby acknowledge and authorize that all photographs and images submitted as part of the application may be used by the City without compensation.
- ☒ I understand that the Small Business Commission may revoke the placement of the business on the Registry if it finds that the business no longer qualifies, and that placement on the Registry does not entitle the business to a grant of City funds.

Henrietta Tam
Name (Print):

8-24-2022
Date:

[Signature]
Signature:

DRAGON SEED BRIDAL & PHOTOGRAPHY

Written Historical Narrative

INTRODUCTION

a. Describe the business. What does it sell or provide?

Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography designs and customizes traditional Chinese qipao, also known as the cheongsam.

The qipao is a long, figure-fitting, one-piece garment with a standing collar that was developed in the 1920s and evolved in shapes and design over the years. It is currently the national dress of China and continues to evolve with the times as it responds to contemporary modern life.¹

In addition to the qipao, Dragon Seed is a “one-stop shop” for weddings, ceremonies, and beauty pageants, including photography, rentals, decorations, and emcee services.

b. Describe who the business serves.

Dragon Seed’s customers are usually people shopping for ceremonies and beauty pageants. The business serves a lot of clients from the Chinese community who comprise their main customer base. However, Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography also serves a lot of non-Chinese customers, which makes their service more diverse. Dragon Seed’s products cover all ages, from children, to teenagers, to adults, and the elderly.

c. In about 2-5 words (15-30 characters), describe what the business is known for.

Customized, traditional Chinese qipao.

CRITERION 1: The business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years

a. Provide a short history of the business, including locations and owners.

Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography was founded by spouse Thomas Tam and Henrietta Tam in 1978. The store’s original location was 753 Clay Street in Chinatown, and the name of the business at the time was New Style Tailoring Company.

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheongsam>

Thomas and Henrietta immigrated to the United States from Hong Kong in the late 1970s. They decided to open a traditional Chinese bridal store because they were in that business before they immigrated. They also saw a need in San Francisco by the Chinese community for a traditional bridal store for wedding ceremonies. They decided to establish their business in Chinatown where it would have the most benefit from, and influence on, Chinese culture.

Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography moved to its present location at 735 Clay Street in 1982. The new space was much larger than the original location, allowing more customers to visit and providing a better shopping environment.

Thomas and Henrietta changed the name of the business from New Style Tailoring Company to Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography in February 1996.

b. Provide the ownership history of the business in a consolidated year-to-year format.

1978 to Present: Thomas Tam and Henrietta Tam

Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography is owned by spouses Thomas and Henrietta Tam. They own 100 percent of the business. This is the first generation of the business, and they hope that their legacy and tradition can last and be passed on to the next generation.

c. Describe any circumstances that required the business to cease operations in San Francisco for any significant length of time.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the store needed to be shut down for 6 months, from March 2021 to September 2021, because of San Francisco health orders and directives. Also, the shutdown led to the cancellation of almost 90% of the wedding events, which is the main services Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography provides.

CRITERION 2: The business has contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community

a. Describe the business' contribution to the history and/or identity of the neighborhood, community, business sector, or San Francisco as a whole.

At Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography, politicians and ordinary people alike flock to purchase handmade qipaos and cheongsams, traditional Chinese dresses worn for special occasions. First popularized during the 1920s by Shanghai socialites, the form-fitting qipao is now worn at weddings, banquets, galas, and the annual Miss Chinatown USA pageant, hosted in San Francisco. Co-owners Thomas and Henrietta Tam, along with tailor Andy Wong, fashion custom qipaos, as well as qun kwa, which are traditional skirt and jacket combinations. The custom

dress shop is one of the last of its kind, and neighborhood advocates hope it will survive for many years to come.²

Dragon Seed not only contributes to the history and identity of Chinatown and San Francisco not only through the clothing and bridal services they provide, but also by helping retain Chinese culture and customs.

b. Is the business associated with significant people or events, either now or in the past?

Some of San Francisco's most prominent leaders have worn Dragon Seed's designs. The late Mayor Ed Lee and his wife Anita, San Francisco Symphony's Board of Governors Vice President Goretti Lo Lui, and Mayor London Breed have all ordered custom outfits from the Tams. The shop also creates the winning gown for the Miss Chinatown U.S.A. Pageant, and has for more than three decades.³

In addition to the Miss Chinatown pageant, the business has participated in other large events in the neighborhood and the city, including Qipao Culture Month featuring the Queen of Classical Qipao of San Francisco.

c. How does the business demonstrate its commitment to the community?

Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography is committed to helping preserve and promote traditional Chinese marriage customs. Through their clothing designs and techniques, Dragon Seed shares the ideals of marriage and love to the younger generations, the Chinese community, and beyond.

d. Has the business ever been referenced in the media, business trade publication, and/or historical documents?

Over the years, Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography has been referenced in the media, including the San Francisco Chronicle, 48 Hills, and Sing Tao Daily. Following are some notable media references:

- “Inside a traditional dress shop in S.F. Chinatown”
San Francisco Chronicle
By Carolyn Fong
February 11, 2022
<https://www.sfchronicle.com/projects/2022/visuals/sf-chinatown-dragon-seed-clothing/>

² San Francisco Chronicle, “Inside a traditional dress shop in S.F. Chinatown,” Carolyn Fong, February 11, 2022, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/projects/2022/visuals/sf-chinatown-dragon-seed-clothing/>

³ Ibid.

- “A display of belonging and hope in Chinatown (and on Instagram)”
48 Hills
By Emily Wilson
July 6, 2020
<https://48hills.org/2020/07/a-display-of-belonging-and-hope-in-chinatown-and-on-instagram/>

Dragon Seed was also featured in Sing Tao Daily on June 26, 2022, and July 11, 2022.

e. Has the business ever received any awards, recognition, or political commendations?

On July 10, 2022, Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography received a commendation from California State Treasurer Fiona Ma in recognition of the store’s dedication to preserving Chinese history and culture and promoting diversity within California.

f. How would the community be diminished if the business were to be sold, relocated, shut down, etc.?

Dragon seed Bridal & Photography is a business that engages in the tradition of the Chinese bridal dress. Its culture and craftwork represent the progress of the Chinese community and the combination of the East and the West. If the business were to close or relocate, the solidarity of the Chinatown community would be weakened. Chinese traditions should not be reduced; they should be emphasized to demonstrate the success of the Chinese community to the new generation.

CRITERION 3: The business is committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business

a. Is the business associated with a culturally significant building, structure, object, signage, mural, architectural detail, neon sign, or any other special physical feature that defines the business?

The products that are on display throughout Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography are themselves culturally significant. Dragon Seed will continue to maintain all the traditional decorations and designs associated with the business.

b. In a few words, describe the main business activity you commit to maintaining.

Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography is committed to maintaining its historical tradition as a qipao business. Thomas and Henrietta Tam immigrated to the United States with their dreams and business skills, and have established a successful enterprise preserving traditional Chinese

marriage culture in San Francisco. They are committed to retaining handcrafted items, which is one of their strengths.

It's all about the details for the Tams. Everything is sewn by hand, from the stiff, high-necked collars to the appliqué phoenixes and dragons. For generations of Miss Chinatown USA winners who have worn Dragon Seed creations, it's a point of pride to wear custom dresses from a local boutique. "That artistry is really hard to find," said Jasmine Lee, Miss Chinatown USA 2018. "I hope we find a way to preserve their history and knowledge of qipaos." ⁴

c. What challenges is the business facing today?

Dragon Seed's biggest challenge is the promotion of traditional Chinese culture. Fewer people today recognize and practice Chinese bridal traditions. As one of the only traditional bridal and qipao tailoring shops in San Francisco, it is difficult promoting the culture by themselves. The community should support this kind of traditional business and share it more with everyone, both within and beyond the Chinese community.

Legacy Business Program staff will add the following details:

a. Features or traditions that define the business and should be maintained for the business to remain on the Legacy Business Registry.

Clothing store featuring special occasion attire.

b. Other special features of the business location, such as if the property associated with the business is listed on a local, state, or federal historic resources registry.

The Planning Department Historic Resource Status of the building at 735-739 Clay Street is "A - Historic Resource Present." The brick building, constructed in 1907, is a contributor to the Eligible Chinatown Historic District.

⁴ San Francisco Chronicle, "Inside a traditional dress shop in S.F. Chinatown," Carolyn Fong, February 11, 2022, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/projects/2022/visuals/sf-chinatown-dragon-seed-clothing/>

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SCENIC DRIVE
←

DRAGON SEED INC.
Fashion
龍子行

RIGHT
LANE
BUSES
TAXIS
ONLY
7AM TO 9AM
3PM TO 6PM
MON - FRI

NO PARKING
4am - 6am
TUES THURS SUN
STREET CLOSING

龍子行
DRAGON SEED
龍子行

TOHAI 2022-01-24-032
我希望看到
人們安居樂業，
一個祥和的
世界。
CHINESE =
CHINESE =
SAFE &
HEALTHY.
少歧視，
多理解。
在華埠的
每個人
都安全健康。
LESS
DISCRIMINATION
MORE
UNDERSTANDING
對華埠的
希望

對華埠的希望
HOPE IN CHINESE
華埠的
愛與關懷
繼續傳承。
CHINATOWN'S
GENERATIONS OF
LOVE & CARE
= CONTINUITY
SUNFLOWS

State Farm
John Yan 415-3
SE SE SHI JA
批發 415-60
WHOLE SALE 745 0

2022 Google



TO DES FOR CITIZEN

我希望看到
人們安居樂業，
一派祥和的
景象。

EVERYONE IN
CHINATOWN WILL
BE SAFE &
HEALTHY.

少歧視，
多理解。

對華埠的希望

TO SEE PEOPLE
LIVING & WORKING
IN PEACE &
HARMONY.

在華埠的
每個人都
安全健康。

LESS
DISCRIMINATION.
MORE
UNDERSTANDING.

ALINA

匿名 ANONYMOUS

Christine Wong (wongchristine@gmail.com) | 黃翠珊 (Christine Wong)















<https://www.sfchronicle.com/sf/article/One-shop-in-San-Francisco-s-Chinatown-shows-why-16854437.php#photo-22052796>

San Francisco Chronicle

[BAY AREA/SAN FRANCISCO](#)

One shop in San Francisco's Chinatown shows why this year is so critical for the neighborhood's recovery

[Gwendolyn Wu](#)

Feb. 11, 2022

Updated: Feb. 13, 2022 10:32 a.m.



1 of 10

Co-owner Thomas Tam fits a custom made cheongsam on customer Ariea Xu at Dragon Seed dress shop in San Francisco on Jan. 29, 2022.

Carolyn Fong/Special to The Chronicle

In the era of Amazon and drop-shipped clothes from wholesalers, Henrietta and Thomas Tam worry that their business designing traditional Chinese dresses is a dying art.

When the Tams opened Dragon Seed in Chinatown in 1978, there were a handful of specialty seamstress shops in San Francisco. Now, the Tams believe their shop at 735 Clay St. — a few doors down from the original location — is the only one left of its kind.

Henrietta Tam sketches the concepts. Her husband brings her ideas to life on fabric, importing silks and satins from all over the globe and embellishing her ideas with meticulous care. Each dress can take two weeks to make — months if a bride-to-be is coming in for multiple fittings.

“We don’t ship anything over to China to finish. We do this all in house,” Thomas Tam said in Cantonese.



2 of 10

Cheongsams for sale and rent hang in Dragon Seed dress shop in San Francisco's Chinatown.

Carolyn Fong/Special to The Chronicle



3 of 10

Co-owners Henrietta and Thomas Tam in their dress shop, Dragon Seed, in San Francisco's Chinatown.
Carolyn Fong/Special to The Chronicle



4 of 10

Dragon Seed co-owner Thomas Tam looks through albums of past beauty pageant contestants wearing their dresses.
Carolyn Fong/Special to The Chronicle

Chinatown stores like Dragon Seed are holding on by a thread during the pandemic, neighborhood advocates say.

“My concern is that this is the year we’re really going to see the impacts of the pandemic,” said Malcolm Yeung, director of the Chinatown Community Development Center.

A good start during Lunar New Year, which began Feb. 1, could give businesses like Dragon Seed the boost they need to survive.

Like other Chinatown retailers, the pandemic dealt a severe blow to Dragon Seed.

Wedding plans were postponed indefinitely, the Miss Chinatown USA pageant was canceled last year, banquet halls found themselves devoid of galas and parties — and Dragon Seed found itself without customers for its dresses.

Business was about 10% of pre-pandemic levels when they first reopened in 2020, six months after the city essentially shut down.

Dragon Seed received small loans and grants (“so little, we didn’t even want to think about it,” said Henrietta Tam) to help struggling businesses in 2020, but has not seen any additional relief since. They let go of two employees, leaving the Tams and tailor Andy Wong as the only workers.

Last year, thieves smashed the windows of a jewelry store three blocks away and made off with several pieces. Attacks against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have also put the neighborhood on edge.

Dragon Seed, like other shops with little foot traffic, boarded up their windows when they were first forced to close and kept them boarded, fearing vandalism and more attacks.

In the era of reduced guest lists and Zoom weddings, few people are coming in to get reception or tea ceremony dresses.

“You only get one wedding, I’d think,” Henrietta Tam said. “But now, people don’t want to spend money on that.”



5 of 10

Dragon Seed co-owner Thomas Tam holds up a traditional Chinese wedding kwa. The garments are sold or rented at the Chinatown shop.

Carolyn Fong/Special to The Chronicle

Cheongsams are high-necked, form-fitting dresses that became popular in China among socialites during the 1920s. The term qipao originally referred to a looser-fitting dress, but is now used interchangeably with cheongsam to describe the formalwear.

For many Chinese American women, it's become the norm to have both a white wedding dress and a cheongsam, usually red, for the tea ceremony or reception.

Traditional Chinese outfits are available online, but those don't have the same "cultural essence," Henrietta Tam said, as a dress crafted by her husband and Wong, two tailors who completed apprenticeships in Hong Kong and have a collective 70 years of dress design experience between them.

It's all about detail for them, crafting buttons shaped like flowers, trimming red sequin phoenixes and sewing golden dragons on the dress by hand.

“你著裙, 裙唔係著你,” Henrietta Tam said: You wear the dress, the dress doesn’t wear you.

Dragon Seed’s off-the-rack qipaos and cheongsams range from \$400 to \$700; more elaborate dresses and flashy skirt suits for special occasions can cost as much as \$5,000.

“They’ve not only been reputable locally, but globally as well,” said Judy Lee, who sits on the board of directors for the San Francisco Chinese Chamber of Commerce.



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Thomas Tam shows the hand stitching on the back of a kwa available for sale at Dragon Seed dress shop in San Francisco.

Carolyn Fong/Special to The Chronicle



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Thomas Tam puts away a traditional Chinese wedding kua available for sale at Dragon Seed, the Chinatown dress shop he and his wife first opened in 1978.

Carolyn Fong/Special to The Chronicle



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Henrietta Tam adds a decorative design to a custom-made and designed cheongsam in Dragon Seed dress shop.

Carolyn Fong/Special to The Chronicle



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Joanne Li (left) looks on as co-owner Henrietta Tam (center left) works on fitting a custom cheongsam on customer Cathy Li (center) along with tailor Andy Wong (right) at Dragon Seed dress shop in San Francisco.
Carolyn Fong/Special to The Chronicle

Lee has known the Tams — Tam taitai and Tam sifu, the polite way to refer to her elders in the community — since she was a UC Davis student competing for Miss Asia Sacramento in 2012.

She rented a shiny cream-and-crimson cheongsam emblazoned with a soaring phoenix and dragon for that competition. In 2019, she returned to Dragon Seed for a red gown to wear as emcee of the Miss Chinatown USA pageant, and brought Mayor London Breed along to find her an outfit as grand marshal of the annual Lunar New Year parade.

In stacks of photo albums on their counters, there are photographs of San Francisco boldfaced names in their designs: the late Mayor Ed Lee and his wife, Anita, posing in a Chinatown banquet hall; years of Miss Chinatown USA contestants and emcees. In the digital age, the photos now live on Henrietta Tam's phone, including an album dedicated to Breed shopping for a kwa, a silk jacket that usually comes in a skirt suit set.



Mayor London Breed during the 2019 Chinese New Year Parade,
Santiago Mejia/The Chronicle 2019

Miss Chinatown USA is returning Feb. 12, after taking a one-year hiatus in 2021. Several contestants are renting or purchasing their pageant gowns from the Tams.

The organization also commissioned Dragon Seed to craft the winner's dress, to be worn at the Lunar New Year parade on Feb. 19. It's an ivory gown with crimson sequined flowers trailing down the chest and skirt and intricate gold swirls decorating the sides.

Supporting local mom-and-pop enterprises like Dragon Seed is crucial to maintaining Chinatown's spirit, Yeung said. "We're all living day to day and pivoting on a continuous basis to figure out how to support the community, to keep its doors open."

The Tams have hope: Business is back at 50% of pre-pandemic levels, and Saks Fifth Avenue in Union Square is featuring their traditional dresses in one of its window displays.



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Judy Lee rented a gown from Dragon Seed when she served as emcee of the Miss Chinatown USA pageant in 2019.

Courtesy Judy Lee



Dragon Seed's outfits are also on display at Saks Fifth Avenue at Union Square.
 Courtesy Henrietta Tam



Dragon Seed dress shop co-owners Thomas Tam (reflected in mirror on left) and Henrietta Tam. The traditional Chinese dress shop is one of the last of its kind in San Francisco.
 Carolyn Fong/Special to The Chronicle

For now, they're not at risk of shutting down or letting yet another employee go. But their future is far from guaranteed.

"How much is San Francisco going to support us?" Thomas Tam wondered at his desk.

A hand-lettered and digitally created piece installed in front of Dragon Seed's windows by a local artist, Christine Wong Yap, lays out the hopes for this one-square-mile community: "Chinatown's generations of love and care will continue."



Dragon Seed dress shop in San Francisco's Chinatown saw business plummet during the early days of the pandemic as weddings were postponed and events canceled. Today, it has started to rebound.
Carolyn Fong/Special to The Chronicle

Correction: A previous version of this story misstated the medium of the art piece.

Gwendolyn Wu is a San Francisco Chronicle staff writer.

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THE HONORABLE FIONA MA

California State Treasurer

Recognizes

**Dragon Seed
Bridal & Photography**

◆ *Qipao Fashion Show* ◆

On Behalf of the State of California, I Hereby Award this Certificate of Recognition in Honor of Your Dedication to Preserving Chinese History and Culture. Thank You for Investing Your Resources to Promote Diversity Within Our State and Communities.

Congratulations and Best Wishes for Continued Success



Fiona Ma, CPA

California State Treasurer

Dated this 10 Day of July, 2022



LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HEARING DATE: February 15th, 2023

Filing Date: January 18, 2023
Case No.: 2023-000666LBR
Business Name: Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography
Business Address: 735 Clay Street
Zoning: CCB – Chinatown Community Business District
50-N Height and Bulk District
Block/Lot: 0226/045
Applicant: Henrietta Tam
735 Clay Street
Nominated By: Supervisor Aaron Peskin
Located In: District 3
Staff Contact: Heather Samuels – (628) 652-7545
Heather.Samuels@sfgov.org

Recommendation: Adopt a Resolution to Recommend Approval

Business Description

Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography, which first opened its doors in 1978 by Thomas and Henrietta Tam, is a special event and custom dress shop which specializes in making custom traditional Chinese qipao, which is also known as the cheongsam. Being the national dress of China, the qipao is a long, figure-fitting, one-piece garment with a standing collar that was developed in the 1920s and evolved in shapes and design over the years. In addition to these traditional dresses, Dragon Seed is a “one-stop shop” for weddings, ceremonies, and beauty pageants which includes services for photography, decorations and emcee services.

When Mr. and Mrs. Tam immigrated to the United States from Hong Kong in the late 1970s, they decided to open a traditional Chinese bridal store because it was their line of business before when they had moved to San Francisco. Upon their arrival, they had noticed that the Chinese community of San Francisco was in need of a traditional bridal store for wedding ceremonies. This is why they chose to locate their store in the heart of Chinatown, so they could provide the most benefit and have the most influence on their native Chinese culture. Their first store was located on 753 Clay Street and went by the name New Style Tailoring Company.

In 1982, Mr. and Mrs. Tam decided to move their business to 735 Clay Street to a larger location to expand their business and provide a better shopping experience for their customers. In 1996, they decided to change the name of their business to Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography.

Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography is committed to helping preserve and promote traditional Chinese marriage customs. Through their clothing designs and techniques, Dragon Seed shares the ideals of marriage and love to the younger generations, the Chinese community, and beyond.

The business's address location at 735 Clay Street is a Category A (Historic Resource Present) structure on the South side of Clay Street between Grant Avenue and Kearny Street in the Chinatown neighborhood. The structure is in the Chinatown-Community Business District and a 50-N Height and Bulk District. 735 Clay Street was identified as eligible for listing within the Eligible Chinatown Historic District on the California Register or National Register in the 1978 Foundation for San Francisco Architecture Heritage survey, 1994 Chinatown survey, and 1997 National Register survey.

Staff Analysis

Review Criteria

1. *When was business founded?*

The business was founded in 1978.

2. *Does the business qualify for listing on the Legacy Business Registry? If so, how?*

Yes. Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography qualifies for listing on the Legacy Business Registry because it meets all of the eligibility Criteria:

- a. Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography has operated continuously in San Francisco for 45 years.
- b. Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography has contributed to the history and identity of the Chinatown neighborhood and San Francisco.
- c. Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the organization.

3. *Is the business associated with a culturally significant art/craft/cuisine/tradition?*

Yes. Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography is a special event and custom dress shop which specializes in making custom traditional Chinese qipao, which is also known as the cheongsam. Being the national dress of China, the qipao is a long, figure-fitting, one-piece garment with a standing collar that was developed in the 1920s.

4. *Is the business or its building associated with significant events, persons, and/or architecture?*

Yes, some of San Francisco's most prominent leaders have worn Dragon Seed's designs. The late Mayor Ed Lee and his wife Anita, San Francisco Symphony's Board of Governors Vice President Goretti Lo Lui, and Mayor

London Breed have all ordered custom outfits from the Tams. The shop also creates the winning gown for the Miss Chinatown U.S.A. Pageant and has for more than three decades. In addition to the Miss Chinatown pageant, the business has participated in other large events in the neighborhood and the city, including Qipao Culture Month featuring the Queen of Classical Qipao of San Francisco.

Additionally, On July 10, 2022, Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography received a commendation from California State Treasurer Fiona Ma in recognition of the store's dedication to preserving Chinese history and culture and promoting diversity within California.

5. *Is the property associated with the business listed on a local, state, or federal historic resource registry?*

Yes, the subject property was surveyed several times and was determined to be eligible for the National Register or California Register within the Eligible Chinatown Historic District.

6. *Is the business mentioned in a local historic context statement?*

No, not as of the date of this Executive Summary.

7. *Has the business been cited in published literature, newspapers, journals, etc.?*

Over the years, Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography has been referenced in the media, including the San Francisco Chronicle, 48 Hills, and Sing Tao Daily. On February 11th, 2022, Carolyn Fong wrote an article for the San Francisco Chronicle entitled "Inside a Traditional Dress Shop in SF Chinatown", in which they displayed images within the business and of the fashion while telling the business's story. On July 6th, 2020, Emily Wilson wrote an article in 48 Hills entitled "A Display of Belonging and Hope in Chinatown (and on Instagram)" which speaks about the temporary public artwork they have on display on the front of the business created by Wong Yip entitled "Hopes for Chinatown". Dragon Seed was also featured in Sing Tao Daily on June 26th and July 11th of 2022.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business

Location(s) associated with the business:

Current Locations:

- 735 Clay Street (1982 – Present)

Previous (No Longer Extant) Locations:

- 753 Clay Street (1978 – 1982)

Recommended by Applicant

- Clothing store featuring custom special occasion attire.

Additional Recommended by Staff

- Traditional decorations and designs displayed within the business.
- Commitment to traditional Chinese design attire.

Basis for Recommendation

The Department recommends the Historic Preservation Commission adopt a resolution recommending the business listed above be adopted by the Small Business Commission to the Legacy Business Registry.

ATTACHMENTS

Draft Resolution

Legacy Business Registry Application:

- Application Review Sheet
- Section 1 – Business / Applicant Information
- Section 2 – Business Location(s)
- Section 3 – Disclosure Statement
- Section 4 – Written Historical Narrative
 - Criterion 1 – History and Description of Business
 - Criterion 2 – Contribution to Local History
 - Criterion 3 – Business Characteristics
- Contextual Photographs and Background Documentation



HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RESOLUTION NO. 1312

HEARING DATE: FEBRUARY 15, 2023

Case No.: 2023-000666LBR
Business Name: Dragon Seed Bridal & Photography
Business Address: 735 Clay Street
Zoning: CCB – Chinatown Community Business District
50-N Height and Bulk District
Block/Lot: 0226/045
Applicant: Henrietta Tam
735 Clay Street
Nominated By: Supervisor Aaron Peskin
Located In: District 3
Staff Contact: Heather Samuels – (628) 652-7545
Heather.Samuels@sfgov.org

ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSION APPROVAL OF THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY NOMINATION FOR DRAGON SEED BRIDAL & PHOTOGRAPHY CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 735 CLAY ST , BLOCK/LOT 0226/045.

WHEREAS, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has contributed to the City's history and identity; and

WHEREAS, the subject business is committed to maintaining the traditions that define the business; and

WHEREAS, at a duly noticed public hearing held on February 15, 2023, the Historic Preservation Commission reviewed documents, correspondence and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry nomination.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends that 735 Clay Street qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) as it has operated for 30 or more years and has continued to contribute to the community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions for 735 Clay Street.

Location(s):

Current Locations:

- 735 Clay Street (1982 – Present)

Previous (No Longer Extant) Locations:

- 753 Clay Street (1978 – 1982)

Recommended by Applicant

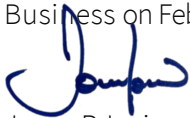
- Clothing store featuring custom special occasion attire.

Additional Recommended by Staff

- Traditional decorations and designs displayed within the business.
- Commitment to traditional Chinese design attire.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission's findings and recommendations are made solely for the purpose of evaluating the subject business's eligibility for the Legacy Business Registry, and the Historic Preservation Commission makes no finding that the subject property or any of its features constitutes a historical resource pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5(a).

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby directs its Commission Secretary to transmit this Resolution and other pertinent materials in the case file 2023-000666LBR to the Office of Small Business on February 15, 2023.



Jonas P. Ionin
Commission Secretary

AYES: Wright, Black, Foley, So, Nageswaran, Matsuda

NOES: None

ABSENT: Johns

ADOPTED: February 15, 2023