

The
MAKING
of
ASIAN AMERICA
A History

Erika Lee

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For my students



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Introduction

The 19.5 million Asian Americans in the United States today make up almost 6 percent of the total U.S. population. They increased in number by 46 percent from 2000 to 2010 and are now the fastest-growing group in the country. They are settling in places that have traditionally welcomed immigrants like New York City, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, as well as in other cities where such large-scale immigration is new: Atlanta, Las Vegas, Houston, Phoenix, and Minneapolis-St. Paul.¹ Asian Americans are changing the face of America. But most people know little about their history and the impact that they have had on American life.

The Making of Asian America tells this story.

Over the centuries, millions of people from Asia have left their homes to start new lives in the United States. They have come in search of work, economic opportunity, freedom from persecution, and new beginnings that have symbolized the "American Dream" for so many newcomers. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Asian immigrants joined millions of others from around the world to turn the United States into a "nation of immigrants." In the past fifty years, more have come as a result of new immigration policies, as refugees following the wars in Southeast Asia, and as part of increasing globalization.

The making and remaking of Asian America is the story of these global journeys and histories. This book digs deep into the historical record with sources like the first world atlas (printed in 1570), newspaper accounts, and long-forgotten immigrant autobiographies. It also explores contemporary American life through the latest census statistics, policy reports, and social media campaigns. There is an extraordinary range of Asian American lives and experiences.

Consider, for example, Afong Moy, a nineteen-year-old “beautiful Chinese lady” who arrived in New York in 1834 aboard a ship full of snuffboxes, walking canes, and fans imported to satisfy Americans’ taste for imported Chinese goods. She was the first-recorded Chinese woman to arrive in the United States. A decade or so later, Jacinto Quintin de la Cruz and other Filipinos founded a fishing village in Barataria Bay south of New Orleans. They named it Manila Village to remind them of the home they left behind. While South Asian and Chinese indentured laborers were being brought to the Caribbean, Peru, and Cuba, my great-great-great-grandfather joined another stream of Chinese heading across the Pacific to seek their fortunes in the California Gold Rush. In 1919, Shizu Hayakawa left her home in Japan as a “picture bride” to marry a man she had never met. Around the same time, Whang Sa Sun and his wife, Chang Tai Sun, fled from Japanese rule in their native Korea and arrived as refugees. Vaishno Bagai, an Indian nationalist, also sought freedom in the United States and entered the country through Angel Island with his wife, Kala, and their three children. By the 1920s, Francisco Carino had learned from his teachers in the Philippines that America was full of riches and glory, so he too boarded a ship bound for the United States.

Small numbers of family members, students, and professionals began to come after World War II and during the Cold War. They have been joined by even more immigrants and refugees since 1965. Chiyoko Toguchi Swartz married an American soldier and left her home in Okinawa in 1966. That same year, Kang Ok Jim was adopted from Korea and brought to Palo Alto where she grew up as Deann Borshay. Fear of persecution forced Le Tan Si and his family to flee from Vietnam in 1979 while Yeng Xiong joined an exodus of Hmong from Laos after the communists took control of the country. Korean engineer Han Chol Hong arrived in 1983 and after failing to find work, he opened a store in South Central Los Angeles. Vicki Diaz,

originally from the Philippines, works as a housekeeper in LA to support her family back home. Rashni Bhatnagar, from India, recently joined her husband, who is an IT worker here on a temporary visa, and Chinese students are now the largest group of international students in the United States.

These Asian American journeys may not be well known, but they have been central to the making of Asian America and of America itself.

Broadly speaking, Asian Americans are people who can trace their roots to countries throughout East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.² Obscured by the broad definition of “Asian” and “Asian American” is a staggering diversity of peoples that represent twenty-four distinct groups. Chinese and Japanese were the largest Asian American communities in the United States before World War II, but South Asians, Koreans, and Filipinos also came in significant numbers. New immigration since 1965 has brought an even greater diversity of Asians to the United States, including new immigrants from China, Korea, the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, as well as refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.³

Asian Americans have differed not only in their country of origin, but also in their immigration and generational status, class position, religion, and gender. These differences have resulted in distinct experiences and histories. It is fair to ask whether there is even one “Asian America,” or one “Asian American history.” Asian Americans with long roots in this country may wonder what they have in common with today’s recent arrivals. Similarly, new Asian immigrants and their descendants may not think that the histories of earlier Asian Americans are relevant to their own experiences. But they should. There is great diversity within Asian America and across Asian American history, but there are also significant similarities and connections. The experiences of previous generations shaped the world that Asian Americans live in today. Likewise, new immigration has helped us see the past in fresh ways. Both the diversity and the shared experiences of Asian Americans reveal the complex story of the making and remaking of Asian America. There is not one single story, but many.

Asian American history begins long before the United States was even a country and has its roots in world history. Asia and the Americas first became connected through European colonization and global trade after Christopher

Columbus embarked on his search for Asia and “discovered” America. Even though Columbus missed his mark, the idea of Asia remained central to the invention of America, and European colonization on both sides of the Pacific Ocean led to the first migrations of Asians to the Americas.⁴

Beginning in the sixteenth century, Spanish trading ships known as “Manila galleons” brought Asian sailors, slaves, and servants to present-day Mexico as part of the creation of Spain’s Pacific Empire. Thereafter, Asian immigration followed the ebbs and flows of global history. The rise of the British Empire led to the movement of South Asian indentured laborers from British-controlled India to British colonies in the Caribbean while Chinese coolies were sent to Cuba after the end of the African slave trade. And as the United States became a world power and expanded its reach into Asia beginning in the late eighteenth century, Asians have steadily come to our shores. Seen through the lens of world history, Asian American journeys are part of longer and larger patterns that help us understand the making of America in a global context.

The history of Asian Americans is also immigration history. The most common view of immigration to America is still framed around the “push and pull” idea: conditions in one country—like war, natural disaster, civil unrest, and economic instability—push desperate peoples out while the United States pulls them in with better-paying jobs, land, and freedom from persecution. Once uprooted, these immigrants successfully transplant themselves into the United States where they achieve American dreams of success.⁵

But this is just part of the story. We know that people and families move for complex reasons. Asian immigration has been particularly tied to the U.S. presence in Asia. Americans first crossed the Pacific Ocean in search of trade, investment, and empire. Nineteenth-century trading vessels gave way to massive transpacific steamships that soon brought both Asian goods and laborers to the United States. American labor recruiters and transportation companies encouraged and facilitated Asian immigration into the early twentieth century. Immigration to the United States became an economic lifeline for many families on both sides of the Pacific Ocean even after immigration laws greatly restricted and even excluded Asian immigrants from the country.

U.S. colonial and military occupations and engagements in the Philippines, Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia also brought Asians to the United States as colonial subjects, military brides, adoptees, and refugees. And U.S.-Asian international relations, including U.S. relationships with its allies, neighbors, and enemies, continue to affect both Asian immigration patterns and the treatment of Asian Americans in the United States.⁶

Asian immigration is about moving from Asia to the United States and making new homes in America. But it is also about moving temporarily or moving multiple times across the Pacific Ocean and throughout the Americas in search of education, employment, family, and freedom from persecution. The multifaceted journeys that have brought Asians to the United States reveal new ways of understanding both Asian American life and American immigration history in general.⁷

Once here, Asian immigrants have “become American” by becoming U.S. citizens when they could and by participating in American life.⁸ There are some stunning individual success stories that show how Asian Americans have contributed to American society and the American economy. Most recently, the “rise of Asian Americans” as the “highest-income, best-educated and fastest-growing racial group” in the United States has been widely covered in mainstream media.⁹ Pro basketball player Jeremy Lin, Yale law professor Amy Chua, aka the “Tiger Mom,” and Bobby Jindal, Republican governor of Louisiana, are all cited as examples of the proven success of Asian Americans. But Asian Americans have often encountered an America that has excluded them from full participation in American life based on their race. The history of Asian Americans is thus also a history of how race works in the United States.

Broadly speaking, the concept of race has been used to divide humanity into distinct groups. Racism exists when race is used to treat people unequally and to confer different rights and freedoms upon some groups while denying them to others. In the United States, the concept of race was used to justify the enslavement of Africans and the dispossession of indigenous peoples because these groups were believed to be naturally inferior to whites. After the United States became an independent nation, the definition of American became tied to white settlers, and the privileges of American citizenship were extended to whites only as early as 1790. As successive

groups of European immigrants came to the United States, they were mostly deemed “white on arrival” and were granted the benefits of citizenship and belonging that were denied to Asian immigrants, who were classified as “aliens ineligible for citizenship” on racial grounds.¹⁰

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these racial beliefs were accepted and supported by pseudoscientific research that allegedly proved the biological basis of human difference and ability. Only after Nazi Germany’s genocidal regime was condemned at the end of World War II did scientific racism lose its credibility. In the United States, new attitudes about race paved the way for new laws, and discrimination based on race was outlawed by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. More than fifty years later, however, discrimination and inequality still exist, and we have recently seen the rise of new kinds of racism that use racial difference in complicated ways. There’s color-blind racism, which claims that since race no longer matters, racial discrimination and race-based inequality are now things of the past. There’s also cultural racism, in which the term “culture” has come to stand in for “race” to describe how certain cultures possess inherent beliefs, mores, and traditions that determine a group’s abilities.¹¹ Moreover, racial micro-aggressions, or everyday indignities and racial slights that differentiate and denigrate peoples of color, have become increasingly common.¹² Simply put, race still matters in the United States.

There are two main ways in which this history of race has played out for Asian Americans. The first is the simultaneous lumping together of diverse Asians into one homogenous group and the persistent treatment of Asian Americans as foreigners tied to Asia rather than as Americans loyal to the United States. Long before there were sizable communities of Asians in the Americas, Western ideas about Asia, or the “Orient,” circulated widely and laid the foundation for how Asia and Asians would be viewed and treated in the West. Asia was consistently viewed as the West’s Other, an array of exotic lands and peoples that both fascinated and terrified Europeans. Opinions about the vast differences between East and West, what theorist Edward Said called “Orientalism,” justified European conquest and domination of Asia and treated the diverse peoples and empires of Asia as one, homogenous land and culture.¹³

Americans formed their own type of Orientalism. By the time that

large-scale Asian immigration to the United States began in the mid-nineteenth century, diverse Asian peoples were considered one monolithic group, regardless of national origin, ethnicity, class, and religion and were fixed in the American mind as backward, submissive, and inferior. They were seen as the opposite of the forward-thinking expansionist American: always Asian and never American.¹⁴ Thus, when Chinese immigrants—the first group to come in large numbers to the United States from Asia—were labeled as foreigners who were racially inferior to whites and incapable of assimilation, all succeeding Asian immigrants were similarly classified with only slight variations. From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, Asian immigrants were considered a single “despised minority.” They faced discrimination in every part of their lives. Asian Americans fought for equal rights in the workplace, in the courts, and on the streets, but they remained largely excluded, segregated, and disfranchised until during and after World War II.

Class and education sometimes made a difference. In the early twentieth century, immigration laws granted privileges to merchants, students, and professionals that were denied to working-class immigrants. International relations and U.S. imperialism also differentiated some Asians from others. But more often than not, laws and practices that treated Asians the same were obstacles to all.

Gender discrimination added another layer of complexity for Asian immigrant women, for both their right to enter the United States and to stay in the country were linked to their husband’s or father’s immigrant status. U.S. citizenship had a gendered dimension as well. Barred from becoming naturalized citizens, Asian Americans could only gain U.S. citizenship through birth in the country. But for some years, native-born Asian American women lost their U.S. citizenship if they married Asian immigrant men, a consequence that did not apply to Asian American men.

How Asian Americans have been defined in relation to the enduring racial divide between African Americans and whites in the United States is the second way in which race has affected Asian American life. Until after World War II, Asians were treated as peoples unfit for U.S. citizenship and as outsiders in American society. They were, as historian Ellen Wu has explained, “definitely not white” and were denied equal rights alongside

African Americans and Native Americans.¹⁵ For Asian Americans, this took multiple forms. They were barred from becoming naturalized citizens, prohibited from owning or leasing land and marrying whites in some states, and harassed, driven out, and segregated from the rest of America.

Most importantly though, Asian immigrants were simply denied entry to the country. In response to fears that Asians were threats to the economic, social, and political well-being of the country, new laws like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 were passed to prevent most Chinese immigrants from entering the United States. America became a “gatekeeping nation,” and new policies to inspect, interrogate, detain, identify, and deport immigrants followed. So did undocumented immigration. By the 1930s, all other Asian immigrants were largely excluded from the country as well. These policies almost destroyed Asian America before World War II.¹⁶

Moreover, the U.S.’s Asian exclusion laws had a global impact. Anti-Asian racism moved across national boundaries and contributed to an emerging worldwide system of immigration regulation. By the early twentieth century, the United States had set the terms and logic of the Asian “immigration problem” that nearly every country in the Western Hemisphere—from Canada to Argentina—adopted or adapted to. During World War II, these policies merged with new concerns about national and hemispheric security. Japanese Americans were uprooted from their homes and incarcerated in the name of “military necessity.” Similarly, Japanese Canadians were sent into exile. Japanese Latin Americans faced restrictions in their daily lives and some were even expelled.

Even as discriminatory laws were struck down and as social attitudes have mellowed, Asian Americans have still not achieved full equality in American life. In contemporary America, Asian Americans occupy unique and constantly shifting positions between black and white, foreign and American, privilege and poverty. Depending on what is happening inside and outside the United States, certain Asian American groups have been labeled as “good Asians” (“model minorities,” “honorary whites,” cultural brokers, and loyal citizens), while others have been labeled as “bad Asians” (perpetual foreigners, religious others, unassimilated refugees, spies, terrorists, and the enemy within). These labels and stereotypes serve myriad purposes. During the Cold War, the Asian American model minority who achieved the

American Dream was held up as proof of American democracy at a time when the United States was being criticized by communist rivals abroad and civil rights activists at home. Today, the privileged model minority continues to be a useful reminder that American success is still achievable even as income inequality grows, the achievement gap between whites and African Americans and Latinos persists, and the United States’ power in the world diminishes.

But this portrait of Asian American success is uneven and incomplete. While some Asian Americans have achieved economic success and cite hard work and perseverance as the keys to their positions of privilege, others—especially working-class immigrants, undocumented immigrants, and refugees fleeing the ravages of war—remain mired in generational poverty and struggle at the margins of American society. Even some of those who have been touted as models continue to occupy an unstable status that can change overnight. Korean storeowners in South Central Los Angeles were targeted in the aftermath of the verdict in the Rodney King case in 1992. South Asian Americans, along with Muslim and Arab Americans, became the victims of hate crimes and labeled as terrorists after 9/11.

On a more daily basis, Asian Americans continue to be seen as outsiders in the United States despite the fact that many are U.S. citizens and are from families who have been in the country for generations. “Where are you from?” they are continually asked. And when the answers “Oakland,” “New York,” or “Chicago” do not satisfy the questioner, they are asked, “No, where are you *really* from?” The underlying assumption behind these questions is that Asians cannot possibly be real Americans and do not belong in the United States. Instead, they are perpetual foreigners at worst, or probationary Americans at best.¹⁷ The persistence in treating Asian Americans as outsiders in their own country has resulted in everyday racial slights as well as targeted violence, murder, and hate crimes.

Race has never been just a matter of black and white in the United States. Asian Americans have been both included and excluded from the country, sometimes simultaneously. In exemplifying this complicated and contingent history of American race relations, Asian Americans remain absolutely central to understanding the ongoing ways in which race works today.

The history of Asian Americans is lastly a history of America in a global age. Like many Americans today, Asian Americans live transnational lives and form their identities across national borders. Over the decades, Asian American families, businesses, as well as social, political, and religious organizations have all existed and flourished both within the United States and across nations. During the late nineteenth century, the majority of Chinese immigrant families, including my own, lived in so-called split households. Fathers and husbands worked in American Chinatowns while mothers and children remained in China.¹⁸ The same was true for many South Asians and Filipinos. Today, H-1B visa holders from India toil in Silicon Valley separated from their families back home. Taiwanese high schoolers leave their parents behind to attend American schools and universities. Lao refugee grandparents living in the upper Midwest leave their American-raised children and American-born grandchildren during the bitter winter months and become long-distance snowbirds in sunny Laos.

Asians' pursuit of equality in the United States has also been connected to homeland politics, whether it was the Chinese Revolution or Korean and Indian nationalism during the early twentieth century, the anti-martial law campaign in the Philippines during the 1980s, or human rights issues in Southeast Asia today. Asian Americans continue to confront both American racism and global inequalities through their transnational lives, activities, and identities that are simultaneously effecting change in the United States and across the Pacific Ocean.¹⁹

Furthermore, contemporary Asian Americans are creating new, multi-layered identities. They are simultaneously racial minorities within nations, transnational immigrants who engage in two or more homelands, and diasporic citizens making connections across borders. Like many contemporary immigrants around the world, they "don't trade in their home country membership card for an American one," as anthropologist Peggy Levitt explains. Rather, they "belong to several communities at once."²⁰ They might raise their children in the United States, yet send money to elderly parents or extended family in India. They might shop at Walmart as well as the local Korean grocery store, contribute to their children's local parent-teacher association and to their alma mater in the Philippines, or vote in both the United States and Taiwanese national elections.

Today's immigrants challenge the either/or dichotomy of becoming American or not. They are transnational not because they don't want to or cannot become fully American. They are transnational because it allows them to achieve something that is quintessentially American: to improve their lives and socioeconomic status for themselves and their families whether that may be solely within the United States, or often, in the United States and somewhere else at the same time.²¹ These transnational immigrants are helping us all become global Americans.

Exploring how Asian Americans have made and remade American life over the centuries, this book offers a new and timely history of this important and diverse community. But more than that, it offers a new way of understanding America itself, its histories of race and immigration, and its place in the world today.

PART ONE

Beginnings: Asians in the Americas

Los Chinos in New Spain and Asians in Early America

Long before Asians came to the United States, they went to Latin America. The earliest came as part of Spain's Pacific empire stretching from Manila in the Philippines to Acapulco in New Spain (present-day Mexico)—an empire that had been built on Christopher Columbus' accidental “discovery” of America while searching for Asia.

Europeans, dating as far back as ancient Greece, had long been fascinated with Asia—including the Middle East and Far East—its people, its civilizations, and its fabled riches.¹ In the European imagination, Asia was Europe's polar opposite, its Other. Asia and Asians differed in “every respect” from Europe and Europeans, as the Greek physician and recognized father of medicine Hippocrates explained in the fourth or fifth century BCE.² For centuries this difference between East and West was the subject of endless speculation, informing a Western-held understanding of a masculine, conquering Europe and a feminized Asia ripe for conquest.³ This worldview helped direct the West's search for Asia and influenced its presence there. It was also a significant factor in propelling Asian peoples to the Americas.

During the Roman Empire, trading networks were established that eventually stretched from the British Isles to the Indian subcontinent. European pilgrims, merchants, and others shared their first impressions of Asia through

sporadic travel writings. Crusaders rediscovered Asia when they set off for the Middle East on their quest to reclaim Jerusalem from the Muslims in 1095. Lasting almost 200 years, the Crusades gave generations of western Europeans firsthand knowledge of the Middle East and some idea of the vastness and richness of the rest of Asia. European travelers described the bizarre creatures, alien plants, and strange customs of the “East” and helped to define Asia as an “other world” that stood in opposition to Europe.⁴

Sustained long-distance travel and trade between Europe and Asia followed the establishment of the Mongol Empire that stretched across Asia to the eastern fringes of Europe in the early thirteenth century. The so-called Pax Mongolica of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries brought Asia and Europe closer together as both Asians and Europeans ventured far from their homelands. Asian goods and Asia itself came within reach of more and more Europeans. During this period travelers could journey eastward and back in relative safety and those who returned found ready audiences for their tales of exotic lands and abundant riches.⁵

Among the most well known in western Europe was the story of Marco Polo, a young Italian merchant who journeyed 15,000 miles throughout the Middle East and Asia over a twenty-four-year period at the end of the thirteenth century. *The Travels of Marco Polo* contained accounts of fantastical unicorns, exotic sexual customs, and mountain streams flowing with diamonds. Marco described the court of the Mongol leader Kublai Khan as having “so many vessels of gold and silver that none without seeing could possibly believe it.”⁶

Published in 1356, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* also told incredible tales of the East, becoming a highly popular and influential book among a large audience of Europeans interested in understanding the larger world and the place of both Asia and Europe in it. Written under a pseudonym and allegedly the autobiography of an English knight, it described the Holy Land, Egypt, Arabia, and China as a region filled with cannibals and headless beasts as well as tantalizing spices, gems, and abundant quantities of gold and silver.⁷

By the dawn of the European age of exploration and conquest in the fifteenth century, wealthy Europeans had developed a growing taste for Asian imports such as spices, silks, and sugar, and they demanded more. Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama relied upon an Indian navigator to

become the first European to sail directly to Asia from Europe in 1497. His route took him around the Cape of Good Hope along the Atlantic coast of present-day South Africa to the legendary spice routes of India. When he returned to Portugal two years later, his spice-laden cargo yielded a 600 percent profit, paved the way for Portugal’s colonial empire in Asia, and spurred further European exploration of Asia that would last through the twentieth century. Profit was far from the only motivation. As England’s Sir Walter Raleigh predicted in 1615, “whosoever commands the sea commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself.”⁸

Technological advances in shipbuilding and navigation as well as breakthroughs in astronomy and geography made Europe’s oceangoing exploration possible. Spanish seafarers used the latest oceanic sailing ships to explore the Pacific and followed the Polynesian voyagers who preceded them. By the late fifteenth century, the ocean sea was no longer a barrier and soon became a passageway to the other side of the world.⁹

Inspired by Marco Polo, Christopher Columbus dreamed of Asia. His well-worn copy of Marco’s *Travels* contained numerous comments in the margins; it was through these adventures that Columbus formed his impressions of the Christian converts and fabulous riches that Asia promised. When he and his crew first spotted land in the Caribbean on October 12, 1492, Columbus imagined that he would soon be viewing Asia’s rich spice markets and gold-roofed houses. When he and his landing party rowed to the beach the next morning in the *Santa María*’s launch, however, nothing matched the men’s expectations.

Nevertheless, Columbus explored the surrounding islands over the next few months and returned to Spain in February of 1493 believing that he had accomplished his dream of reaching Asia. His accounts echoed the fantastical descriptions of exotic peoples and fabulous riches that numerous travelers to Asia had told before him. The new lands, he claimed, were full of boundless wealth and populations ripe for conversion to Christianity. Columbus would make three more voyages across the Atlantic to the New World before his death in 1506, forever convinced it was Asia.¹⁰

Columbus’s voyages and subsequent discoveries by other explorers such as Amerigo Vespucci helped Spain dispossess the indigenous peoples of

Mesoamerica and establish its huge land-based American empire, *Nueva España*.¹¹ Between 1520 and 1540, the Spanish added over three quarters of a million square miles to their empire in the Americas. In 1519, Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés founded the town of Veracruz on the Mexican Atlantic Coast. The Aztec Empire was defeated by 1521, and Francisco Pizarro conquered the Incas of Peru a decade later. The wars of conquest and dispossession were violent affairs that cost many human lives among the indigenous peoples. But this death toll paled in comparison to the untold millions who perished as a result of the introduction of European diseases like smallpox.



1. "Americae Sive Novi Orbis, Nova Descriptio." This map of the Americas, prominently featuring Manila galleons sailing across the Pacific from Manila to Acapulco, was included in what is considered to be the first world atlas, by Abraham Ortelius, initially printed in 1570.

Long after they realized that the lands Columbus had discovered were not in fact Asia, the Spanish continued to seek routes to Asia's fabled empires. Asia and the Americas were linked in Spain's imagination and became two parts of the New World, *ambas Indias*, both Indies, that could be

conquered and converted to Christianity.¹² Spain's new American empire allowed explorers to continue the search for a transpacific trading route with Asia, but the vast size of the Pacific and the general lack of knowledge of winds and currents made this difficult. By 1522, Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan's crew had successfully circumnavigated the world, traveling from the Atlantic to the Pacific and back again. In doing so, they proved that Europeans could indeed sail westward to reach the riches of Asia. Of far greater consequence for Spain was navigator and friar Andrés de Urdaneta's 1565 discovery of a route from Asia to New Spain by way of the Philippines, the new Spanish colony and seat of its Pacific empire. Urdaneta's route set in motion a wave of Pacific exploration and conquest that was motivated by "God, gold, and glory." *Presidios* (military bases), missions, and *pueblos* (settlements) rose up from Mexico to northern California.¹³ It also inaugurated a new era of transpacific migration and global trade.

Asia's own history of maritime exploration and trade played an equally important role in connecting Asia and the Americas. Long before Europeans began their oceangoing missions, the Chinese navigator Zheng He commanded seven expeditions to explore the waters of Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean in 1405. Zheng's fleets ventured as far as the Persian Gulf, Aden, East Africa, and the south coast of Arabia.¹⁴ Following these successful expeditions, however, the Chinese emperor officially isolated China from the rest of the world and ended China's maritime expansion. An imperial decree prohibiting private overseas trade was in place until 1567. Throughout the years of the ban, however, private Chinese traders from Fujian and Guangdong sailed their Chinese junks to ports throughout the Indian Ocean and South China Sea. As a result, Chinese junks came yearly to Manila, bringing a wealth of goods from throughout the Asian maritime world.¹⁵ At the crossroads of a flourishing trade established by both Chinese traders and the Portuguese in India, Manila became a vibrant global marketplace through which flowed the "riches of the Orient and the Occident," as a Jesuit historian explained in 1663.¹⁶

With Urdaneta's new route connecting Asia and the Americas in place by 1565, transpacific trade began. The first Spanish ship, known as a Manila galleon (*nao de China* or *nao de Acapulco*), left Manila and arrived in

Acapulco in late 1565. The Manila galleon trade took off eight years later, when the *Santiago* and the *San Juan* carried 712 pieces of Chinese silk and 22,300 pieces of Chinese porcelainware to Acapulco. By 1576, the galleon trade was firmly established and controlled by a monopoly of merchants from Seville, Spain.¹⁷

From 1565 to 1815, 110 Manila galleons traveled across the Pacific between Manila and Acapulco. By imperial decree, all trade between Spain and Asia went through the Philippines, then by sea to Acapulco, overland to Veracruz via *el camino de China* (the China highway), and then across the Atlantic to Spain. Two ships were allowed to sail from each port annually, accompanied by several other vessels that protected the trading ships from British and Dutch pirates. These enormous teakwood “castles in the sea” ranged in size from 78 to 174 feet long and displaced from 300 to 2,000 tons.¹⁸ On the lengthy and arduous voyage to Acapulco, ships were at sea around six difficult months and had to sail northward to avoid westerly trade winds. A 1620 order required that the galleons leave Manila by the last day of June in order to guarantee their arrival in Acapulco by the end of the year. The return trip to Manila typically took seventy-five to ninety days and was mandated to begin by the end of March.¹⁹

The galleons brought to New Spain an enormous array of goods: porcelain, spices, furniture, and silk, cotton, satin, velvet, and linen fabric from China; emeralds, rubies, and diamonds from India; ivory from Cambodia; ebony from Siam; cinnamon from Ceylon; pepper from Sumatra; Persian carpets from the Middle East; and fans, umbrellas, and lacquered wood and silverware from Japan. Over the centuries, the Manila galleons also sent 2 million Mexican silver pesos to China, turning it into the world’s first currency. This unprecedented era of world trade would last for 250 years.²⁰

Representing the first migrations of Asians to the Americas, some 40,000 to 100,000 Asians from China, Japan, the Philippines, and South and Southeast Asia crossed the Pacific from Manila and landed in Acapulco during the 250-year history of the galleon trade.²¹ Among the very first may have been Filipino crewmembers on Friar Urdaneta’s trailblazing voyage to New Spain in 1565. Also, a small number of Filipino crewmembers were likely on the Manila galleon that made a brief stop in Morro Bay, California, in

1587, where they battled with locals before heading back out to sea. According to some reports, Filipinos were also among the first settlers of Alta California after it became a province and territory in the Viceroyalty of New Spain in 1769.²² Others—mostly sailors, servants, and slaves—also came during the two and a half centuries of the Manila galleon era. Native Filipinos and mestizos (mixed race peoples) of Filipino/Chinese/Spanish descent were in the majority, but there was a sizable number of Chinese, Japanese, and South Asians as well.²³

Filipino and Chinese sailors were among the most numerous, arriving as members of crews that ranged in size from 60 to 200. By the 1600s, they made up the majority of crewmembers sailing out of Manila to New Spain.²⁴ Filipino sailors, called “Indians,” were highly valued. In a memorial to the Spanish king in 1765, Francisco Leandro de Viana, a Spanish official in Manila, praised the sailors, saying, “There is not an Indian in those [Philippine] islands who has not a remarkable inclination for the sea; nor is there at present in all the world a people more agile in manoeuvres on ship board, or who learn so quickly nautical terms and whatever a good mariner ought to know.”²⁵

The ships they sailed, however, were filthy and often unseaworthy. Disease ran rampant and killed many crewmembers and passengers. During one voyage in the late seventeenth century, Pedro Cubero Sebastián’s ship barely survived a massive storm that lasted for eighty hours. Of 400 passengers and crew, 208 died before reaching Acapulco.²⁶ In his book about his voyage around the world, Italian adventurer and traveler Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri titled the chapter describing his 1697 passage on a Manila galleon “the Author’s tedious and dreadful Voyage, to the port of Acapulco,” claiming that the transpacific voyage was “enough to Destroy a Man, or make him unfit for any thing as long as he Lives.” As he described it, the provisions brought on board the ship were full of maggots and the galleons swarmed with “little vermine”—bugs that “ran all over the cabin, in the food, and onto human passengers and crew.” With all available space devoted to cargo, he also noted, the ships often lacked proper crew quarters, and the sailors were required to sleep on deck.²⁷

Despite their skill, Asian crewmembers received half the rations provided to Spanish crewmembers or were never paid the wages they were promised.

And when provisions grew scarce near the end of the transpacific voyages, they were given even less.²⁸ They were treated “like dogs,” according to Hernando de los Ríos Coronel, a Spaniard living in the Philippines who served as the Procurator General, the sole representative of the Philippines at the Spanish court. In his appeal for reform, Ríos Coronel explained that the crew arrived on board ship without adequate clothing for the cold weather, and because they slept in the open air many froze to death. “When each new dawn comes there are three or four dead men,” Ríos Coronel recounted. The Asian sailors suffered so much, Ríos continued, that to “tell in detail the evil that is done to them, would fill many pages.”²⁹

The perilous and long journey, unfair wages, and harsh working conditions convinced many sailors that their fortunes lay in the New World. To prevent desertion, ship captains paid sailors only a portion of their wages when they sailed out of the Philippines toward America. Only on their return to the Philippines was the rest of their promised pay to be given. The outbound journey was so horrendous, however, that many sailors opted to forfeit their pay rather than suffer through another ship voyage. Many even came prepared with a few bundles of Asian fabrics to sell. On one ship alone in 1618, only five out of an original crew of seventy-five Asian sailors returned to their ship for the journey back to Manila. The remaining seventy easily blended into local society with their ability to speak Spanish. Some married and settled down.³⁰

Some Asian servants also accompanied their Spanish masters across the Pacific to New Spain. The galleons carried a good number of Spanish passengers traveling across the Pacific as returning residents, new settlers, colonial and church officials, soldiers, and travelers. Their Asian servants catered to their needs on the sea voyage and in the new homes.³¹

After sailors, slaves made up the next largest group of Asians coming to the Americas. The importation of Asian slaves began in Manila with Portuguese slave traders traversing Portugal’s extensive Southeast Asian empire. European travelers in Asia and Spanish officials in Manila regularly recorded Portuguese ships arriving in Manila with both spices and slaves in their holds. These ships brought African slaves as well as slaves from Macao, the Malabar Coast of India, Pegu (Burma), Malacca, Java, and other areas where they conducted trade in the Indian Ocean. In 1625, for example, one

Portuguese ship left the port of Bengal with rice, oil, textiles, and slaves in its hold on its way to Malacca and Manila. Japanese sources chronicle how Portuguese slavers bought “several hundred men and women” in the Goto islands, Hirado, and Nagasaki, and took them aboard their “black ships,” where they were chained hand and foot. Portuguese slavers were known to use deception and outright kidnapping in acquiring slaves. As a result, several hundred Asian slaves are estimated to have arrived in the Philippines each year from the Indian Ocean world.³²

Licenses to transport slaves to the New World through the ports of southern Spain date back to the early sixteenth century, and African slaves had been brought to the Americas by the first conquistadors. When epidemics ravaged the indigenous populations during the first half of the seventeenth century in New Spain, slaves became a much sought-after commodity. By 1607, the Indian population of central Mexico had fallen to between 1.5 and 2 million, down from an estimated 20 million in 1520. Approximately 300,000 African slaves arrived in Spanish America and another 335,000 in Brazil from 1492 to 1650.³³

In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries Manila became a center of transpacific slave trading. Facilitated by the Manila galleon trade, Asians constituted another pool of slave labor in New Spain, albeit much smaller than the African population. Colonial merchants, priests, and military and civil officials involved in the trade all profited handsomely. In 1604, Father Pedro Chirino observed that slaves from India, Malacca, and Maluco fetched the highest prices, because “the men are industrious and obliging, and many are good musicians; the women excellent seamstresses, cooks, and preparers of conserves, and are neat and clean in service.”³⁴ An estimated 6,000 entered the colony each decade during the seventeenth century.³⁵

Some of the Asian male slaves were skilled workers; others were not. A man named Francisco Corubi testified in 1616 that he had been captured by fishermen when he was a young boy and then sold to Portuguese masters, who took him from Goa to Malacca and then to Manila. He eventually ended up in Mexico.³⁶ In 1642, a twenty-five-year-old slave named Gaspar sailed from Manila to Acapulco. Gaspar’s owner, who was a “citizen of the city of Manila” named Francisco de Araujo, put Gaspar into the custody of Manuel Joan de Alcántara, a sailor on the *Nuestra Señora del Rosario*,

anchored in Manila Bay. Their contract stipulated that Alcántara would “give him [Gaspar] food and drink on the entire voyage” and “keep him comfortably in his quarters.” When the ship reached New Spain, Alcántara was instructed to “sell the said slave at the highest price offered.” Upon returning to Manila, Alcántara was to deliver the proceeds to Araujo. In return, the sailor could keep one third of the profits.³⁷

Some women were captured for sale on the concubine market or as sex slaves. They faced particularly harrowing ordeals. Spanish officials and nobles were known to bring Filipina women on board as concubines and then abandon them once they reached Acapulco. One prominent official reportedly embarked with fifteen women. “Several were delivered of children by him, while others left the ship at Acapulco in a pregnant condition,” an observer noted with disgust. This abuse of women caused a “great scandal,” and a 1608 decree sought without much success to abolish the practice.³⁸ Spain tried to restrict transpacific slavery, but the trade continued for many decades. In 1626, a tax of 4,000 reales was levied on every slave brought from the Philippines. In 1672, Asian slaves were emancipated in New Spain, and in 1700 a royal order prohibited the Asian slave trade. Only then did the number of Asians transported as part of the transpacific slave trade drop dramatically.³⁹

Historians estimate that the first Asians—collectively known as *los chinos*—landed in Acapulco in the 1580s.⁴⁰ Small but stable populations of *chinos*, the indigenous women they married, and their descendants formed communities along the Pacific coast in cities and *pueblas* like Acapulco, Coyuca, and San Miguel. The towns of Guerrero, Jalisco, and Michoacán were also popular settlements, as were the large settlements along *el camino de China* that connected Acapulco on the west coast to Mexico City, Puebla, and Veracruz on the east coast. According to historian Edward Slack Jr., Asians could be found in almost every corner of colonial Mexico during the late sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, from Loreto in Baja California to Mérida in Yucatán.⁴¹

A small Japanese community traces its origins to the arrival of an official Japanese delegation in 1611, when Ieyasu, the powerful shogun of Japan, sent twenty-three tradesmen and an official to New Spain in the hopes of

negotiating a trade agreement with Spanish American officials. They stayed for five months and returned to Japan with wine, cloth, and velvet, but no agreement. Three years later, Masamune Date, a lord of Sendai, sent a delegation via New Spain on the first leg of his journey to pay homage to the Spanish court in Madrid and then to the pope in Rome. One hundred eighty samurai and merchants led by Tsunenaga Hasekura arrived in Acapulco in January of 1614. While the majority traveled on to Spain and eventually returned to Japan, a small number settled in New Spain and started families.⁴²

Other Asians ventured to different locales in the Americas. A 1613 census of the inhabitants of Lima, Peru, found “Indians of China and Manila.”⁴³ Chinese shipbuilders worked in Spanish-controlled lower California, present-day Baja California in northwestern Mexico, during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Chinese from the Philippines were employed in the textile mills of Peru in the seventeenth century, and reports of Chinese miners in the gold mines of Minas Gerais in Portuguese Brazil were recorded in the early 1700s.⁴⁴

Along the Pacific coast of New Spain, Asians worked as fishermen or as farmers or farm laborers tending rice, corn, cotton, and tobacco fields. They transported goods and people along the coast and labored in the silver mines, textile workshops, or sugar mills. In Acapulco, Mexico City, and Puebla they took up a variety of occupations, including as laborers and craftsmen in the Acapulco royal shipyards, and as dancers, tailors, shoemakers, and butchers. Large numbers were peddlers, barbers, or merchants, selling Asian cotton and silk textiles or food in Mexico City’s Plaza Mayor. On a visit to Mexico City in the 1620s or 1630s, Dominican monk Thomas Gage marveled at the number of “people of China” who had converted to Christianity and excelled in goldsmithing. They had “perfected the Spaniards in that trade,” he observed.⁴⁵ And Asians so dominated the field of barbering in the city that Spanish barbers filed a petition in 1635 complaining of unfair practices and competition.⁴⁶

Filipinos were notably successful in making palm wine, or *tuba*, a liquor made from palm trees that was popular in the Philippines. In 1619, Philippine official Hernando de los Ríos Coronel reported that “Indian natives of the Filipinas Islands” who had arrived in Mexico as seamen had deserted their ships and were now turning a profit making the wine along the coast.

Palm wine was so popular, Ríos observed, that the indigenous peoples in the colony were now drinking “none except what the Filipinos make,” which was as “strong as brandy.” This entrepreneurial success worried Ríos. Not only did the new palm wine threaten the import (and tax revenue) of Castilian wine, but Ríos predicted that its ready availability would cause harm to the natives of Nueva España, “a race inclined to drink and intoxication.”⁴⁷

Some Asians in New Spain became well integrated into their local societies. They formed Catholic confraternities that provided charitable services and served in militias on the west coast of New Spain.⁴⁸ They also rose to prominent and respected positions in their communities. Take, for example, the life histories of two Japanese merchants in seventeenth-century Guadalajara. Born in 1595 in northern Japan, a man who adopted the Spanish name of Luis de Encío had settled in the town of Ahuacatlán by 1620 and worked as a peddler. Fourteen years later, he and some business partners opened a shop in Guadalajara’s city center, and he married a local woman named Catalina de Silva. By the 1640s, Encío managed the monopoly of all coconut and mescal wine sales and became the major supplier of delicacies popular with local elites. He was also a leader in the Asian community in Guadalajara that developed as small numbers of new immigrants trickled into the city over the years. One of these newcomers was a Japanese-born man known as Juan de Páez.⁴⁹

Born in 1608 in Osaka, Juan de Páez was just ten years old when he arrived in New Spain on a Manila galleon. He may have been an orphan in the care of Jesuits expelled from Japan during an anti-Christian purge. Despite his humble beginnings, Páez had become well established by the 1630s through his financial and legal services business and gained the approval of Luis de Encío to marry his daughter Margarita. One of the richest businessmen in town, Páez became part of the city’s elite, the mayor of Zapopan, as well as the steward of the Guadalajara cathedral. He drew his friends from among other social elites, clergy, and Spanish colonial authorities and was listed as the executor of a remarkable number of estates. When he died at the age of sixty-nine in 1675, Páez’s final resting place was at the foot of the Altar of the Santo Cristo in the Guadalajara cathedral.⁵⁰

Perhaps the most well known and revered *chino* in New Spain was Mirra-Catarina de San Juan, who in 1610 arrived in Puebla a sexually

abused slave and died a holy woman respected by rich and poor alike. Mirra’s exact birthplace and family origin are unknown. Seventeenth-century church biographies tell us that Mirra was born in the “distant provinces” of China, Mogor, or India.⁵¹ She was just twelve years old when she was abducted from her home by Portuguese slave traders in 1618 or 1619 and confined and raped. She sailed with her captors to several port cities in the Indian Ocean. In Cochin, on the west coast of India, she was baptized before being sold in Manila to Spanish captain Miguel de Sosa.⁵²

Mirra crossed the Pacific Ocean on a Manila galleon with her new owner and then lived and worked in Captain de Sosa’s household in Puebla. When the captain died in 1624, Mirra was granted her freedom. She continued to work as a domestic servant in the home of Padre Pedro Suarez, who ordered her to marry an Asian slave named Domingo Suarez. The two were married in 1627, but by that time, Mirra had decided to dedicate her life to Christ. After both husband and master died by the 1640s, Mirra began her life as a lay holy woman. In her later years, she became known as a healer and a Catholic visionary who worked among the poor and sick. When she died in 1688, devotees unofficially turned her former homes into shrines and Mirra’s funeral was attended by crowds that included some of the most prominent members of colonial Mexican society. The Jesuit order also nominated her for sainthood.

The Church rejected the nomination in the 1690s during the Mexican Inquisition, an extension of the Spanish Inquisition that sought to reaffirm the practice of traditional Catholic tenets in the New World. Biographies of Mirra were condemned as witchcraft and the Church ordered that all copies be destroyed along with any portraits of her. Despite this official condemnation, Mirra-Catarina de San Juan remained a highly respected figure in Mexico, especially in her hometown of Puebla. Located on *el camino de China* that ran from Acapulco to Veracruz, Puebla had a large criollo population of American-born Spaniards who sought to promote the city’s importance in Spanish imperial and Christian history. Mirra became a heroine to the emerging criollo class in Puebla, who revered her as a local saint even if she had arrived as a foreigner. Mirra’s own holy visions connected Asia and the Americas together in complementary ways. She reportedly made numerous spiritual journeys in which she traveled to various nations in the

Americas and Asia and witnessed the Christian conversions of the kings of Japan, India, and China. A *chino* from Asia who had become Christian and local, she represented two important historical linkages and aspirations at work in New Spain at the time: Europe's search for Asia and Christian converts, and the successful spiritual conquest of the New World.⁵³



2. "Poblanas," a nineteenth-century painting of *La China Poblana* (the Chinese girl from Puebla), by Carl Nebel (1829).

In the nineteenth century, Mirrha-Catarina de San Juan became the inspiration for *la china poblana*, "the Chinese girl from Puebla," an iconic symbol of Mexican womanhood that ironically glorified Mexico's *mestizaje* (mixed race) and indigenous peoples rather than Mirrha's own Asian origins. Representing the beauty and strength of local culture over imported European tastes, *la china poblana* is known for her indigenous country origins, distinctive behavior, hairstyle, and dress, typically a white blouse with silk and beaded embroidery, similarly decorated full skirt, and shawl resembling textiles from India, perhaps in honor of Mirrha. The red, green, and white colors of her clothes mirror the colors of the Mexican flag, and her skirt often has Mexico's eagle and serpent on it.⁵⁴ *La China Poblana* was

captured in paintings, figurines, and other forms of popular culture throughout the nineteenth century. To this day, she remains one of Mexico's most iconic symbols. Mirrha's tomb lies inside the sacristy of Puebla's eighteenth-century Jesuit church in the city's historic center. And an enormous statue and fountain dedicated to her is a local landmark.

Spain's Pacific empire had first connected Asia and the Americas together through colonization and trade. But as other European powers extended their reach into Asia and its markets, the Spanish monopoly on trade with Asia came to an end. By the 1760s, Britain was the world's leading colonizer and its East India Company exported goods from the Indian subcontinent and China to the rest of the world. As a result, the American colonies, and later the new United States, became increasingly connected to Asia and Asian goods. Eventually, Asian immigrants followed.

Just as the peoples of New Spain had become enamored with Asian porcelain and fabrics through the Manila galleon trade, North American settlers also experienced a "China-mania" for Asian goods beginning in the eighteenth century. Everything from Chinese tea, teapots, and porcelain figurines to Japanese lacquerware and East Indies furniture, textiles, trinkets, and pictures made their way into the colonies and were viewed as symbols of civilization and refinement. George Washington, for example, was known for his love of exotic goods like Chinese tea sets and kept these items close at hand even as he battled the British. With tea drinking a popular pastime in the British colonies, millions of pieces of Chinese porcelain were imported for display and use in early American homes.⁵⁵

Tea from China, of course, also helped fuel the opening acts of the American Revolution. It was both a coveted staple of American life and culture and a potent symbol of the "treachery of Britain's mercantile establishment." Americans were consuming more than a million pounds of tea each year (much of it smuggled in from non-British sources), and some suspected that American dependency on the "evil weed" was a British plot to make them weak and slavelike. When the British Parliament passed the Tea Act of 1773, which made it easier for the British-owned East India Company to import tea directly into the colonies and maintain taxes on tea, popular discontent turned into a protest movement. Americans believed that purchasing East

Indies tea meant accepting the right of the British Parliament to levy direct taxes on them; one more example of “taxation without representation.” Boston patriots decided to act. On December 16, 1773, they famously boarded three East India Company ships and dumped 342 chests of Darjeeling tea into the Boston Harbor. The Boston Tea Party became one of the major turning points leading to the War of Independence.⁵⁶

Asia remained important to Americans in the new United States. It continued to be imagined as a place of fabulous luxuries and advanced civilizations that America’s founding generation sought to emulate. But it was the lucrative trade with China (from which Europe’s great powers were already profiting) that Americans most immediately wanted to engage in. It symbolized, as historian Kariann Yokota explains, “both America’s independence and future promise.”⁵⁷ Americans set sail for China only days after the British departed New York harbor in November 1783. The first vessel to embark on this journey was the *Harriet* from Boston. She sailed in December 1783 with a cargo of North American ginseng, a native root the Chinese used as a health supplement. This was one month before the Continental Congress of the new United States of America ratified the Treaty of Paris on January 14, 1784, establishing its independent statehood.⁵⁸

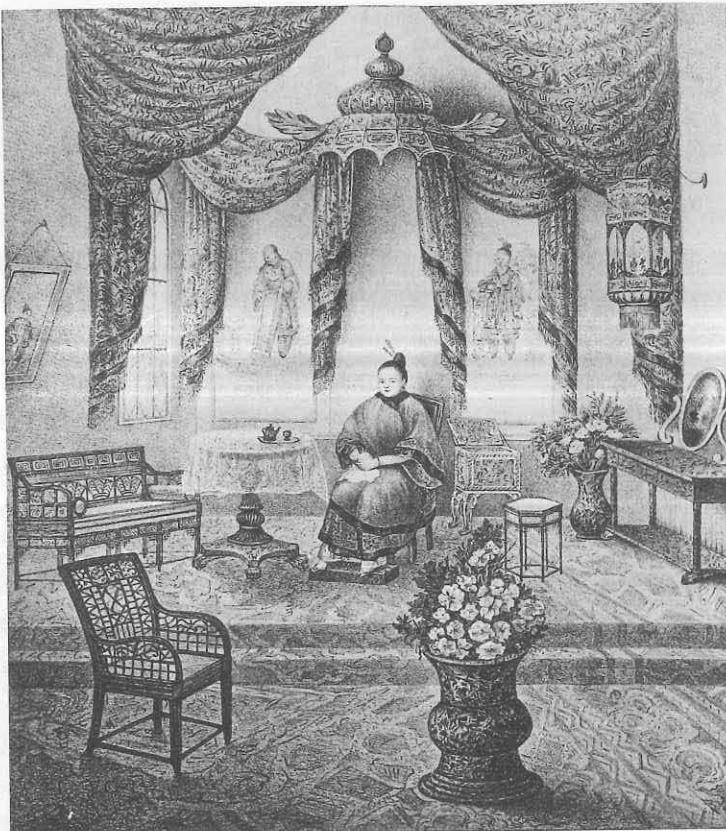
Then on February 22, 1784, the *Empress of China* set sail from New York as excited crowds gathered to witness the first U.S. vessel to travel to Canton under the United States flag. From the same harbor on the same day, another ship departed for London to deliver the congressional ratification of the Articles of Peace between the United States and Great Britain. The timing of the two launches had great significance. Finally free from King George III’s grasp, Americans were eager to voyage to the “golden regions” of the East Indies, where they had long been forbidden to go. Through China, Americans believed that the economic prosperity and the promise of the new nation itself would be secured.⁵⁹

The *Harriet* and the *Empress of China* did not disappoint. The *Harriet*’s captain traded the ginseng for tea. When the *Empress* returned in 1785 after a fifteen-month voyage, it brought a cargo hold full of Chinese teas, silks, porcelains, and fans and made a handsome profit. China was now open to the United States. Within six years of American independence, fifty-two ships sailed from the United States into the Indian Ocean and beyond. By 1814, some 618 U.S. vessels had sailed to Macao or Canton. The China

trade, which involved trading ginseng (from the mountainous backcountry regions of the northeastern United States) and pelts and furs from otters, seals, beavers, bears, and cattle (from the Pacific Northwest and California) to China in exchange for tea, porcelain, silk, furniture, and other goods, became a central part of the new U.S. economy. It helped build the fortunes of many East Coast families, turned New York into the U.S.’s commercial center, and connected European, Asian, American, and native communities on both sides of the Pacific Ocean together in a new era of global trade.⁶⁰

The growing U.S. presence in Asia also led to new migration from Asia to the United States and Canada. Many U.S. ships recruited Filipinos to serve as deckhands, cooks, servants, and other members of the crew, and as a result Filipinos ended up in many of the Pacific islands and all the way to Alaska. Small numbers of Asian sailors and merchants also made their way to the East Coast of the United States by the late eighteenth century. In 1784 the *Pallas* arrived in Baltimore with “Chinese, Malays, Japanese and Moors” along with some European crewmembers. John Huston, a seaman and naturalized U.S. citizen, arrived as a young child in 1829 from China. When New York State census takers knocked on his door in lower Manhattan in 1855, he was married to an Irish woman. There were others as well, such as Lesing Newman and John Islee, Chinese-born naturalized U.S. citizens living in New York and serving on board transatlantic ships in the 1830s and 1840s.⁶¹

The first recorded Chinese woman to arrive in the United States was brought into New York harbor in November 1834 aboard the *Washington*, a trading vessel owned by two U.S.-China traders, brothers Nathaniel and Frederick Carne. The ship’s hold was full of new Chinese goods aimed at the American middle class (shawls, lacquered backgammon boards, snuffboxes, walking canes, fans, and baskets), as well as nineteen-year-old Afong Moy, advertised as a “beautiful Chinese Lady” with bound feet whom the Carnes hoped would attract buyers for their wares. Within three weeks of her arrival in New York, the brothers had secured an exhibit space and placed Moy in a re-created “Chinese Saloon” with paper lanterns, gold and red satin drapes, Chinese furniture, and paintings. Newspapers reported widely on Afong Moy’s arrival and upcoming appearances. Soon tickets were on sale to viewers eager to see the exotic traveler from the Far East.⁶²



3. Afong Moy, the first recorded Chinese woman in the United States, 1834.

Wearing her “national costume,” or richly embroidered robes that fit a “lady of her rank,” Moy was on display for eight hours a day, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., and then again from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Viewers watched her use chopsticks and listened to her speak in Chinese. An interpreter helped viewers communicate with her, and Afong Moy was instructed to walk around the room to display her bound feet, which were the source of great fascination among men and women alike. The cost for viewing her was 50 cents. Afong Moy’s exhibit sent a clear message: China and the Chinese were exotic, different, and as Moy’s bound feet further illustrated, degraded and inferior. By relegating her to an exotic curiosity, the Carne brothers and all who came to gawk at her reaffirmed the West’s superiority as well as the

great differences between the United States and China. Moy eventually departed New York and embarked on an East Coast tour that took her to New Haven, Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore, Richmond, Norfolk, Charleston, New Orleans, and Boston. During her visit to the nation’s capital, she even met with members of Congress and paid a visit to President Andrew Jackson in the White House. By 1848, Afong Moy was sharing an exhibition space with Tom Thumb and working in a P. T. Barnum show. But two years later, she was cast aside when Barnum promoted a show featuring another “Chinese Belle” in New York. Afong Moy’s fate remains unknown.⁶³

By the early nineteenth century, small pockets of Asians had settled in the southern United States as well. Some may have arrived through Mexico as early as the late eighteenth century.⁶⁴ The earliest documented settlement dates back to the 1840s, when the Filipino fishing village of St. Malo, near the mouth of Lake Borgne in Louisiana, was founded. In 1883, Padre Carpio, one of the original inhabitants, told two journalists from the New Orleans-based *Times-Democrat* and *Harper’s Weekly* that he had been a sailor, but had deserted his ship to settle in St. Malo for its good harbor and excellent fishing and shrimping. Living in houses on stilts on the banks of the lake, the 100 male residents of St. Malo endured long, hot summers and cold winters with only mosquitoes, fleas, sand flies, alligators, and poisonous snakes for company. They worked long, hard hours to send alligators, fish, and shrimp to New Orleans for export to Asia, Canada, and South and Central America. Isolated enough to be ignored by the U.S. Postal Service and tax collectors, St. Malo residents still regularly sent money and letters to the Philippines and maintained relationships with the larger Filipino community based in New Orleans. Another Filipino named Jacinto Quintin de la Cruz founded a larger fishing village called Manila Village in Barataria Bay, and a number of Filipinos settled in New Orleans between 1850 and 1870. Long before the Philippines had become a U.S. colony in 1898 and U.S. imperialism launched a larger wave of mass migration from the Philippines during the early twentieth century, these Filipinos, or “Manila men,” had carved out a strong community for themselves.⁶⁵ They represented both the continuation of a long line of Asians who had come as part of European colonization of the Americas as well as the forerunners in a new era of mass migration that would follow during the next centuries.

Coolies

While small numbers of Asian immigrants were beginning to form communities in the United States in the early nineteenth century, a much larger migration of peoples was taking place between South Asia and China to Latin America. Between 1838 and 1917, more than 419,000 South Asians went to British West Indian plantations in British Guiana, Trinidad, and Jamaica as “coolies,” or indentured laborers bound under contract.¹ An estimated 140,000 Chinese men also went to Cuba as coolies from 1847 to 1874, and 90,000 more went to Peru from 1849 to 1874. In all of these locations, they entered worlds of hard, bitter labor.²

By the end of the nineteenth century, Asian indentured laborers had gone to Cuba, Peru, British Guiana, Trinidad, Jamaica, Panama, Mexico, Brazil, and Costa Rica in addition to other places around the Americas. Conditions and experiences varied across location and from plantation to plantation, territory to territory, and over the decades. South Asian men and women who left their homelands as indentured laborers from 1838 to 1917, for example, migrated within a larger British imperial web that connected people, capital, and goods within and across the British Empire. Every aspect of the system was under British regulation, and both Britain’s strong antislavery stance and imperial oversight affected the conditions and contracts under which they labored.³

On the other hand, the migration of Chinese, mostly men, to Cuba and Peru from 1847 to 1874 was part of an unregulated multinational business involving the transport of both indentured and nonindentured Chinese overseas while African slavery was still in effect in these two countries. The Chinese coolie trade was not as long-lived, and it was smaller than the British system. Nevertheless, it was characterized by a high level of abuse and exploitation. Many of the laborers were recruited through kidnapping, coercion, or deception. Disease led to shockingly high mortality rates on crowded and unsanitary ships, including some that had previously been used in the African slave trade. Chinese coolies in Cuba especially stand out for their status as “slaves all but in name” struggling to survive within a system that was grafted onto African slavery.⁴

The stereotype of Asian workers as coolies, cheap workers who drive down wages, take away jobs, and are servile pawns of factory owners and greedy capitalists, has a long history. Although the nineteenth-century migration of indentured Asian labor to the Americas was a Latin American phenomenon, the coolie label was effectively used to fuel violent anti-Asian movements in the United States that resulted in widespread discrimination. Consequently, both Asian immigrants in the United States and the historians who have studied them have been careful to distinguish the free Asian immigration to the United States from the unfree migration of Asian indentured laborers to Latin America that constituted what historian Hugh Tinker called a “new form of slavery.”⁵

Nevertheless, just as the roots of Asian immigration to the United States extend back to Europe’s search for Asia and the arrival of Asian sailors, slaves, and servants in New Spain, the mass movement of Asian laborers to the United States beginning in the nineteenth century overlaps with and connects to the arrival of Asian coolies in Latin America. Both movements were made possible by the growing European and American presence in Asia and the West’s search for labor following the end of African slavery in the Americas. Western slave traders, labor recruiters, steamship companies, missionaries, and officials helped to build the infrastructure that made both unfree Asian migration to parts of Latin America and free Asian immigration to North and South America possible. And the idea of the Asian coolie—an unfree laborer who represented a new kind of slavery—would shape Americans’ perceptions of Asian immigrants for years to come.

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Enslaved Africans had been brought to the Americas as early as 1501, but it was the expansion of the sugar industry in the mid- to late 1500s that set in motion the tremendous growth in slavery in the region. At first a luxury product, sugar became a staple in European households after 1700. Demand skyrocketed and sugar plantations in the Americas and elsewhere multiplied and expanded. Masses of African slaves were used to grow, cultivate, and process this notoriously labor-intensive crop.

From the beginning of the 1500s, when the first African slaves were transported across the Atlantic Ocean, to 1888, when the last slaves were emancipated in Brazil, some 10 to 12 million African slaves made European expansion and settlement of the Americas possible. Slavery became integral to many economies and shaped everyday life in the Americas. But slavery always represented a profound contradiction: how could nations that professed to value liberty and equality rely upon slave labor? By the early nineteenth century, abolitionists around the world had successfully lobbied for the end of the transatlantic slave trade. In 1807, Great Britain abolished the trade throughout the British Empire. The United States followed the year after, and by 1817 the slave trade had been banned in Spanish America north of the equator as well.⁶

As a consequence, the cost of African slaves increased, and their dwindling numbers created a labor shortage in the West Indies, Cuba, Brazil, and Peru at a time of economic expansion. Sugar continued to drive many economies, especially in Cuba, which by 1870 produced over 40 percent of the world's sugarcane. Throughout the Caribbean, the southern United States, and Latin America, the demand for minerals, raw materials, coffee, cotton, rum, tobacco, and guano fertilizer also kept the demand for labor high.⁷ In the West Indies, Cuba, and Peru, planters, labor recruiters, and politicians all looked to India and China to provide the labor needed to maintain the plantations that sustained both local and imperial economies.

It began in the British West Indies. There, the African slave population experienced a steep decline in the two decades after the end of the slave trade, from 800,000 in 1808 to 650,000 in 1830. Planters watched in dismay as estates closed and the entire economy suffered. In Jamaica, one planter described streets overgrown with weeds and abandoned houses that "look as

though something much less than a hurricane would level them with the ground."⁸ In 1802, planters began an experiment to bring Chinese contract laborers to their overseas colonies. One hundred ninety-two Chinese men landed in Trinidad that year. In 1810, several hundred Chinese tea growers were taken to Brazil by the Portuguese. About 2,947 Chinese were brought to Brazil from 1810 to 1874.⁹

The formal end of British slavery in 1834 placed the West Indies' sugar economies in a precarious situation. Freed Blacks left the plantations in droves to find other occupations, purchase small plots of land, and even organize to bargain for higher wages and better working conditions. Jamaica, Trinidad, and British Guiana experienced the greatest losses. Large numbers of freed men and women continued to work as wage laborers on sugar plantations, but planters complained that they insisted on working shorter hours and fewer days. Sugar production fell drastically, and a number of plantations shut down.

To solve their problems, planters turned to foreign immigration. The goal was, in the words of John Gladstone, one of the largest slaveholders in British Guiana, to make the planters "independent of our negro population . . . as far as possible."¹⁰ European immigrants were preferred, and many governments, including that of British Guiana, subsidized the cost of European immigration to encourage the "whitening" of their populations. But the Europeans who came fell far shy of satisfying the demand for labor, so planters turned to Asia instead. The first group of 396 Asian indentured laborers arrived in May of 1838 and were subsequently known as the "Gladstone coolies." After reports of abuse of workers surfaced, the experiment ended the next year, but the system resumed in 1844, and from 1838 to 1917, 429,623 South Asians and 17,904 Chinese went to the British West Indies as indentured laborers.¹¹

The search for labor in Asia resulted from Europe's growing presence and power in the region. Europe's quest to trade with Asia in the 1500s led to European colonization. Portugal had established its colonial empire of Portuguese India by 1503, but its dominance of the Asian spice trade was challenged by the Dutch East Indies Company, which set up its headquarters in Indonesia a century later. The English were the next challengers. In 1600,

Queen Elizabeth granted the East India Company full trading rights on all English trade east of the Cape of Good Hope. The East India Company set up a permanent trading post in Bengal in 1608. A fort at Madras followed in 1639. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the company built settlements and trading posts with the protection of a private army. By the mid-nineteenth century, the British—through the East India Company—had become the dominant European power in the Indian subcontinent. The India Act of 1784 and the 1813 Charter Act formally transferred governing power to the United Kingdom. The British expanded its rule by force and by annexation, sometimes with the cooperation of local rulers. They met heavy resistance, especially in the Punjab province of what is now present-day India and Pakistan. Annexation was finally completed in 1849. A small legion of colonial administrators fanned out throughout the region as part of the British Raj (present-day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar) and British India became the “jewel in the Crown,” representing Britain’s immense imperial, military, and commercial power in the world.¹²

British imperial rule transformed South Asia. Economic policies contributed to a century of economic dislocation. The colonial government built railroads, roads, and irrigation canals to aid colonial projects, but it was the local population who funded them by paying new and increased taxes. The British also instituted major economic changes that were geared toward the development of products, crops, and raw materials for British consumption or for British markets and manufacturers. These changes mostly benefited Great Britain while exploiting local farming families and subjecting them to diminishing economic returns. The self-sufficiency of traditional village communities eroded while exploitation by landlords and moneylenders increased. Conditions worsened even more as the region’s population exploded to 100 million over the nineteenth century.¹³

These social and economic pressures were felt most acutely in the northern provinces of Bengal, Bihar, Assam, and the United Provinces, and Madras in the south, and it is from these regions that the earliest migrants came. In later years, migrants came from the Punjab. Known as the region’s breadbasket, the Punjab had once been one of the most fertile regions in South Asia. But by the mid-nineteenth century, it mostly supplied raw materials

and cash crops to the British Empire, while local farmers suffered the effects of overcrowded and overused farmland, high rents, and famines.¹⁴

People left their homes in droves. Representing a broad cross section of the rural population, they sought out new fortunes close to their families and villages and then began to venture farther and farther away. By the mid-nineteenth century, British colonial officials and labor recruiters were sending South Asian men and women around the world as part of the British-controlled indentured labor system that was created to serve its colonies abroad and its markets and industries at home.

It all began with the *arkatia*, or local labor recruiter, who was deeply connected to the communities. Spending his days in the markets, bazaars, and railway stations, he learned who had lost their lands, was in debt, or had been cast out by their families. Then he made his pitch for work and easy money abroad. Through the efforts of these *arkatias*, over one million people migrated from throughout the region to British colonies and other locations around the world as indentured workers.¹⁵

South Asians went to Ceylon, Burma (present-day Myanmar), and the Malay peninsula in South and Southeast Asia; Mauritius, Réunion, and Madagascar in the Indian Ocean; Fiji in the Pacific Ocean; and South and East Africa. In the Americas, the largest number went to the British West Indies. The importance of their contribution to the global economy cannot be overstated. As historian Hugh Tinker has explained, it was their labor that “created the overseas wealth of Britain.”¹⁶

In 1838, the first indentured laborers from South Asia arrived in British Guiana. More than half a million South Asians were brought to the Caribbean over the next seventy-nine years. Most went to British Guiana (238,900) or to Trinidad (143,939), but some 42,326 went to Guadeloupe, 36,420 went to Jamaica, 34,304 went to Dutch Guiana, and 25,509 went to Martinique.¹⁷

They had diverse social, religious, linguistic, regional, and caste backgrounds. The first recruits came from both Madras and Calcutta, but over the years they hailed from all parts of British-controlled India as the system stabilized and expanded under the management of British colonial officials and labor recruiters. Some were Muslim; others were Hindu. They were largely men. Planters wanted male farmhands, and recruiters found very few

women who were willing to indenture themselves or families who wished to go abroad together. As long as the journey was considered temporary, most married men decided to venture abroad alone.¹⁸

Some of the male recruits had been domestic servants, entertainers, artisans, and shopkeepers. Even a few priests made the voyage. But the majority were agricultural laborers swept up in the labor recruiter's net. Their reasons for leaving home varied. Some had already traveled far in a vain search for employment. Some had been involved in the failed 1857 mutiny against the British and were fleeing arrest. Others were ex-soldiers or farmers in search of livelihoods. Most had been lured by promises made by labor recruiters who fanned throughout the countryside in search of willing (and sometimes unwilling) bodies to fill their quotas. One British Guiana planter observed in 1909 that the recruiters "tell the coolies lots of nonsense, I am sure, because a coolie has often told me that he was told . . . [that] all he had to do was to lie on his back and the cocoanuts would drop into his mouth, and the gold, and everything else."¹⁹

As the South Asian indentured labor system became established and planters sought to stabilize the overwhelmingly male labor force, new efforts to recruit women began. In 1855, a new ordinance required a ratio of 33 women to every 100 men on board the ships sailing abroad. From 1868 onward, women made up a little over 40 percent of those heading overseas as indentured laborers.²⁰

But not all women were acceptable. Planters and colonial officials only wanted "virtuous" women (i.e., docile and "moral" women who were widowed or who came with their husbands or parents) who could tame the mostly male population. Single women were purported to be "shamelessly immoral" and likely to encourage prostitution, competition for sexual partners, worker unrest, and loss of worker productivity.²¹ The women who were able to pass the morality test set by colonial officials came with diverse working backgrounds. On the SS *Zanzibar*, which arrived in Dutch Guiana in 1878, for example, there were fifty-six maids, thirty-six unemployed women, and fifteen midwives. Others listed their occupations as milkmaids, water carriers, vegetable women, peasants, fieldhands, and weavers.²²

Not all South Asian indentured laborers came willingly. Cases of kidnapping and coercion were not uncommon. An 1873 British government

study found that "very grave abuses" accompanied the recruitment of both male and female indentured laborers. In many cases, emigrants had been "entrapped by force and fraud." Many had been "systematically plundered" of their signing bonuses and advance wages as well.²³ Rev. Thomas Evans, a missionary in Allahabad in northern India, complained to British officials in 1871 that an "Indian slave trade" was at work.²⁴

South Asian indentured laborers began their journeys in Calcutta, where they were inspected, registered, and housed in special British government-regulated emigration depots. Some were even "seasoned" for their new lives on the plantations by being kept outdoors for long periods of time doing light work.²⁵ From there, they boarded crowded sailing ships that carried as many as 510 people. The trips to the Caribbean lasted anywhere from three to four months and were plagued by the killing diseases of cholera, typhoid, and dysentery, as well as severe seasickness. While conditions and mortality rates varied, and did improve over the years, many observers recorded grim anecdotes. Mrs. Swinton, a captain's wife who accompanied her husband on the coolie ship *Salsette* as it sailed from Calcutta to Trinidad in 1858, likened the journey to the African slave trade and called it "the other middle passage." Swinton recorded almost nothing but deaths—which occurred on a daily basis among the old and young, male and female—in her journal:

May 3: A woman died of dysentery. This makes seventy dead. It is dreadful mortality.

June 3: One child died of dropsy . . . Woman died.

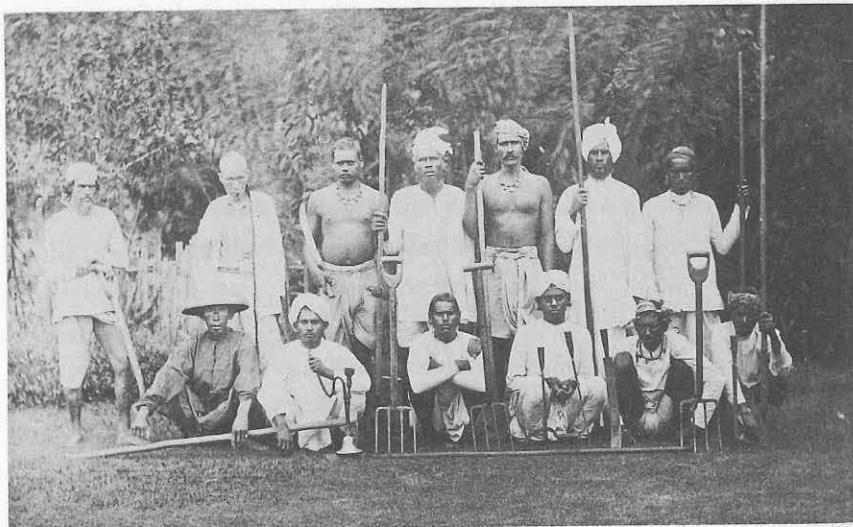
June 7: Infant died, and many sick found who are afraid to take our medicine. Doctor gave me his list . . . and makes 110 [dead] all told . . . Fearful!

June 30: Mustered the coolies, and find only 108 men, 61 women, 30 children, two infants, and two interpreters left of the 323 or 324 we sailed with from Calcutta.

Over one third of the 324 coolies on the *Salsette* died on the voyage from disease and poor diet. The death toll on this ship may have been extreme, but between 1857 and 1862 the mortality rate on ships heading to British

Guiana was 10.9 percent. By the 1870s, it had decreased to between 2 and 3 percent.²⁶

Transported halfway across the world to a foreign and hostile land, under contract to perform backbreaking work, and thrust among strangers who spoke different languages, ate strange food, worshipped different gods, and practiced different social customs, South Asian indentured laborers struggled every day to survive. Their contracts generally bound them to five years of indenture working nine to ten hours a day, six days a week. They were supposed to receive a daily wage of 16 to 24 cents, return passage, free housing, medical attention, and some food rations. Reality did not often match the terms of the contracts. In some colonies, like Trinidad and British Guiana, for example, return passage was granted only after workers had worked an additional five years in the colony after their contracts had expired.²⁷ And the entire system was inhumane. Some of the first workers to arrive in British Guiana were treated with severe brutality just like the African slaves they had recently replaced. The first reports out of British Guiana described conditions of “unalleviated wretchedness” and “hopeless misery.” The workers had a mortality rate of almost 25 percent.²⁸



4. Coolies. Demerara, British Guiana, c. 1890.

Over the decades, South Asian indentured laborers became central to the production of sugar in the West Indies. By 1891, they were over 80 percent of the workforce on British Guianan sugar plantations, and the terms “sugar worker” and “Indian” became almost synonymous in British Guiana and Trinidad.²⁹

Work on the sugar plantations was divided according to sex, age, ability, and experience. Gangs of men, for example, took on the heaviest and hardest work of forking and cutting sugarcane. They sometimes worked alongside freed blacks who also performed the heaviest manual labor. Monotony and brutal labor were the norm. “Sahib, we are not donkeys to work so hard, give us time,” Jhangir Khan protested to his overseer on the Rose Hall estate in British Guiana.³⁰

Women were supposed to be in the fields as many hours as the men, and they kept up their work even when they were in the advanced stages of pregnancy. They earned less than their male counterparts and were prohibited from working in the higher-paying and higher-status positions on the plantations. And when their work in the fields ended, their work at home began: cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the men and children in their own homes. Their double duty often meant waking before dawn and toiling until the late hours of night.³¹

Female indentured workers were additionally vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Overseers commonly kept “Hindu and Muslim females as paramours or concubines,” according to a government commission. In the 1840s, a medical doctor even reported to the governor of Trinidad the scandalous case of seven indentured women on one plantation simultaneously pregnant with the estate manager’s children. On another estate, South Asian women were regularly brought in by the South Asian overseer to serve as prostitutes for the male workers.³²

Like black slaves, South Asian indentured workers were severely punished and convicted under the law for neglect or refusal to work, absenteeism, desertion, vagrancy, and insufficient or incomplete work. Some estate drivers prided themselves that the laborers were “always either at work, or in hospital, or in gaol” (prison).³³ Labor ordinances imposed penalties for damaging, breaking, or losing estate tools and equipment. Laborers were also bound to certain plantations and could not switch employers at will.

Punishment involved physical violence, imprisonment, and withholding of the pass that allowed indentured laborers to travel outside the plantation boundary.³⁴

If this system of criminal penalties and social and disciplinary control was a legacy of African slavery, so, too, were the racist attitudes that planters used to justify mistreatment and unequal status. Indentured laborers were, in the eyes of the planters who brought them, “more akin to the monkey than the man.”³⁵ Indentured laborers inherited old slave quarters that were often sparse, lacked latrines, and suffered from leaky roofs, bad ventilation, and poor drainage. Colonial authorities and plantation managers justified the poor conditions by claiming the quarters were “much more sanitary than that of the houses in an ordinary Indian village.”³⁶

South Asian workers who had been recruited for their supposed subservience turned out to be quite militant. Strikes, mass marches, violent demonstrations, mass desertions, and organized work stoppages—even though they were illegal—were common throughout the years of the indentured labor system in the West Indies. Usually, these protests were sporadic, small-scale, and quickly repressed. But occasionally, worker-led riots and work stoppages took place on a larger scale and spread across plantations. For example, one hundred strikes occurred between 1886 and 1889 alone, and another 141 erupted between 1900 and 1913.³⁷

Even though the indentured labor system had been designed to bring South Asian laborers to the West Indies on a temporary basis and then return them to their homeland to be replaced with a fresh crop of laborers, the majority chose to remain. Some had failed to acquire the wealth and riches they had hoped for and did not wish to return home in disgrace. Others had married partners of different castes and believed that these unions would not be accepted in their home villages. Still more tried to find economic opportunities in the islands after their contracts ended. They reindentured themselves, sometimes for two, three, or four one-year terms. Others hired themselves out as wage laborers or became landowners themselves.³⁸

By 1920, South Asians represented 33 and 42 percent of the populations in Trinidad and British Guiana, respectively. Replacing Africans as the largest part of the population in the islands, they transformed the fabric

of everyday life in the Caribbean, becoming part of the callaloo (mixed) societies there.³⁹ A small middle class also formed, and community activism around the general welfare and rights of South Asians became more noticeable.

Some of this activism centered around abolishing the entire indenture system. Critics had consistently railed against it from its earliest days. But between 1900 and the beginning of World War I, opposition to the indentured labor system grew in South Asia, Britain, and elsewhere as the suffering of indentured laborers and the discrimination that South Asians faced worldwide was tied to the plight of India under British colonialism. Nationalists like Mahatma Gandhi attacked the system with new fervor. In 1912, G. K. Gokhale, leader of the Indian National Congress, declared indenture “degrading to the people of India . . . [and] a grave blot on the civilization of any country that tolerates it.”⁴⁰

The British government defended the system, but the colonial government of India, headed by Viceroy Charles Hardinge, came to a different conclusion. Describing the system as “differing but little from a form of slavery,” he argued that “it is not the duty of the Government of India to provide coolies for the colonies.” Connecting the indenture system to growing nationalist sentiment in India, Hardinge strongly urged the total abolition of the system in order to “remove a racial stigma that India deeply resents.”⁴¹ In 1917, the Indian government suspended emigration altogether. By 1920, the entire indenture system was abolished and outstanding indentures were terminated.⁴²

Just as British imperialism influenced modern migration from South Asia, the growing presence of European powers in China similarly resulted in Chinese migration abroad. Ruled by the Qing Empire since 1644, China was already suffering from weak political leadership and corruption, a population explosion, regional factionalism, and economic instability before Britain, France, Germany, and Portugal sought to carve the nation up in the nineteenth century. When unequal economic relationships between China and European powers caused even greater instability in the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese began to move around the world in ever greater numbers.

The European interest in China in the late eighteenth century began

with tea. An expensive luxury afforded by only the European elite in the 1600s, tea became by the 1800s Britain's favorite drink and a national pastime. The tea and the Chinese porcelain that British and European consumers desired most could only be bought in China. But European traders were strictly controlled by the Chinese government, which allowed business to be conducted only through specific treaty ports. Additionally, Chinese officials insisted that there was nothing that it desired from Europe. In a letter to Britain's King George III in 1793, Chinese emperor Qianlong famously declared that "our Celestial Empire possesses all things in prolific abundance and lacks no product within its own borders."⁴³ As European consumers clamored for more tea and porcelain, European traders became concerned about the growing trade imbalance with China.

British traders found a solution in opium, which they began to illegally import from British India to make a profit on their tea export businesses. As the Chinese demand for the drug increased, so did British power in the region. Chinese attempts to end the opium trade led to war. Britain's victories in the Opium Wars (1839–1842 and 1856–1860) forced the opening of several southern Chinese ports to international trade: Canton, Fuzhou, Amoy (Xiamen), Ningbo, and Shanghai.

As a result of this dramatic economic restructuring, a dynamic market economy sprang up around Canton, and the Pearl River Delta became one of China's busiest centers for domestic and international trade. Hong Kong, which became a British colony after the first Opium War, grew into a center of the expanding Pacific economy, and, under British control, both Chinese trade and labor markets were opened to the rest of the world. As foreign labor recruiters and agents descended upon South China, transpacific trade networks expanded to include a growing market in both indentured and nonindentured laborers.⁴⁴

In the southern Chinese provinces of Guangdong and Fujian, economic, political, and social conditions set the stage for mass migration. By 1850, the country's population had grown exponentially to 450 million from 150 million in 1700.⁴⁵ And a seemingly endless stream of natural disasters struck southern China beginning in the early nineteenth century. Droughts, storms, typhoons, earthquakes, plagues, floods, and famines all took their toll on the Chinese people. High taxes and dissatisfaction with the Qing led to a number of rebellions and civil unrest in the form of the Taiping

Rebellion (1850–1864), the Red Turban uprisings (1854–1864), and feuds between the Punti and Hakka ethnic groups. At the same time, unequal treaties between China and Western imperial powers resulted in higher taxes on local peasants.

Chinese who could no longer make a living as farmers or laborers increasingly began to leave their home villages and head to larger cities in Guangdong province. This migration from the rural areas to the cities became the first stepping-stone to migration abroad, and 96 percent of Chinese came to the Americas from Guangdong. From 1801 to 1900, an estimated two and a half million Chinese migrated to Southeast Asia as well as to the United States, the Pacific islands of Hawai'i, Tahiti, and Western Samoa, and to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the West Indies, South America, and Africa. The most widely dispersed group of Asian migrants, Chinese worked and lived abroad on almost every continent on earth by the 1940s.⁴⁶

Chinese migration was more varied than migration from South Asia. In general, there were three ways to go abroad. The first was to pay one's own way across the Pacific, a choice reserved for only the most prosperous. The second was to borrow the necessary funds from family members or from a moneylender with the promise to pay back the loan with interest after arrival. This was known as the credit-ticket system and was the primary way that Chinese made it to the United States, Canada, Southeast Asia, and Australia. The Chinese who were able to pay their own way or use the credit-ticket system were not the poorest of the poor; as a rule, they had resources and saw migration as a way to remain upwardly mobile. The third way, which 11 or 12 percent of emigrants leaving Hong Kong chose, was to migrate as indentured laborers. These individuals were more likely to be "very poor and needy . . . and destitute," according to one British investigator. Some ultimately ended up as coolies in Latin America.⁴⁷

Eighteen forty-seven was the first year that Chinese were sent to Cuba as part of the coolie trade. By 1874, 142,000 Chinese had been brought to Cuba. From 1849 to 1874, another 90,000 Chinese went to Peru.⁴⁸ *La trata amarilla* (the yellow trade) of Chinese indentured laborers to Cuba was horrific in its barbarous recruitment and transportation practices as well as its exploitation of laborers on the plantations. Unlike in South Asia, where the indenture system was regulated (if somewhat negligently) by British colonial

officials, the Chinese coolie trade was largely unregulated. That Chinese coolies were introduced into Cuba while African slavery was still in full swing (it would not be abolished until 1886) meant the latter also greatly influenced the experiences of the former.⁴⁹

Cuban planters initially relied upon the Real Junta de Fomento y Colonización, a company led by the Zuluetas, the most powerful slave-trading family in Cuba, to secure Chinese labor. The Chinese coolie trade became a profitable multinational business involving shipping companies, labor recruiters, government agencies, and banks based in Great Britain, Spain, Portugal, the U.S., the Netherlands, and France—the same countries that had been the top traffickers in African slaves.⁵⁰ Because of the demand for labor, profits from *la trata amarilla* were huge. A *New York Herald* correspondent noted in 1872 that one ship had brought 900 laborers into Cuba at a cost of \$50,000 and netted over \$400,000. "Never in the palmiest days of the African trade were such tremendous profits realized," he observed.⁵¹

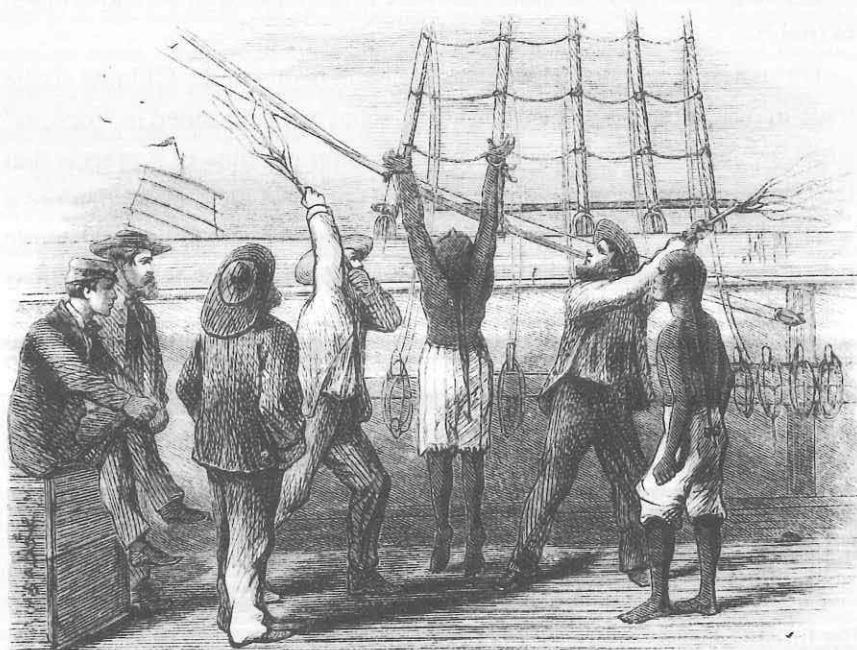
These profits motivated foreign and Chinese labor recruiters to use deception and force to fill coolie ships. Chinese commissioners investigating the abuses of the coolie system in Cuba concluded that 80 or 90 percent of all Chinese laborers had been brought there against their will.⁵² Indentured laborer Ren Shinzen wrote a lengthy petition for the commissioners that described how Cuban recruiters were "crafty in their hearts and greedy and cruel in their nature. . . . Their ships go into China and collude with wicked civilians [who] pointed falsely at a gold mountain and promised to show the way."⁵³ Cheng A-mou and other workers explained that they had been "induced" to go to Macao "by offers of employment abroad at high wages." They were even told that "the eight foreign years specified in the contracts were equivalent to only four Chinese [years]" and that then they would be free.⁵⁴

Recruiters were also deliberately vague about the types of work and the exact locations that Chinese were headed to. The 400 Chinese on board the *Robert Browne* heading out of Amoy on March 21, 1852, for example, believed they were heading to San Francisco and the promise of the gold fields. Instead, they were destined for Peru, where they were to work as coolies on the guano islands. When this news was revealed on board the ship, they organized a mutiny. The captain, two officers, and four crewmembers

were killed. The Chinese mutineers were eventually captured and brought to trial.⁵⁵

Portuguese-controlled Macao was the main center of the Chinese coolie trade in Asia. New recruits were sent there and were restrained in "pigpens" while awaiting sale to European and U.S. ship captains in a process that the Chinese called "the buying and selling of pigs." One such pigpen was a wooden shed "like a slave baracoons," 120 feet by 24 feet, holding 500 nearly naked and suffocating men. White letters were stamped or painted on their chests to indicate their intended destination. A "C" meant California, a "P" meant Peru, an "S" referred to the Sandwich (or Hawaiian) Islands.⁵⁶ The kidnapped, deceived, and voluntary migrants were all mixed up together, and it was sometimes impossible to distinguish among them. Over the next four to eight months, they slowly made their way across the Pacific to the Americas on American, British, Spanish, Dutch, Italian, and French ships that were often nothing more than overcrowded prisons.⁵⁷

Ships heading to Cuba took a westward route from China sailing through the Indian Ocean, around Africa's Cape of Good Hope, and then across the Atlantic. Ships heading to Peru sailed across the Pacific on journeys lasting 80 to 140 days.⁵⁸ To control the passengers—especially those who were victims of kidnapping or deceit—ships were commonly outfitted with "iron gratings over hatchways, walls between crew and coolie quarters, armed guards, [and] cannons trained on hatchways."⁵⁹ There was insufficient food and water, and coolies were often crowded together and chained in the suffocating hold. They were frequently beaten and killed. One hundred seventy-three men were chained with foot irons and 160 men were stripped and flogged with rattan rods during the journey that brought Huan A-fang to Cuba. Three hundred died of thirst on Chen A-sheng's ship. Twenty men cast themselves overboard to escape the misery on Liu A-san's ship.⁶⁰ During a twenty-six-year period, approximately 16,400 Chinese, or one third of all Chinese coolies destined for the Americas, reportedly died from physical violence, suicide, and thirst on European and American ships to Cuba. The Chinese began calling them "devil ships" and others referred to them as "floating coffins." The mortality rate on the coolie ships rivaled those on African slave ships, when an average of 20 percent of all Africans died during the Middle Passage from 1590 to 1699.⁶¹



5. Chinese immigrants were often beaten and chained on board the coolie ships that brought them from China to Cuba. "Preserving the Peace," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 29 (June 1864).

Facing such horrific conditions, mutiny was not uncommon. In 1871, the crew on the *Dolores Ugarte* responded to a threat of mutiny by its several hundred Chinese coolies by firing shots through the iron grates down into the hold. A fire began below deck and the flames spread. The captain and his crew abandoned the ship by lifeboat, but left the Chinese passengers remained locked in the hold, where they either suffocated or burned to death. Some survivors managed to struggle on deck. As the ship burned, they jumped into the sea, where some were saved by fishermen. Of the 650 Chinese coolies who boarded the ship in Macao, only 50 survived the journey.⁶² An estimated 3,000 to 4,000 Chinese died during mutinies on their way to Cuba, Peru, and the British West Indies during the coolie era.⁶³

Upon arrival in Havana, Chinese coolies were taken from the ship and readied for sale. "Once we got to the Havana Selling People House, our

plaits were cut off, our clothes were changed, and people were allowed to choose and buy," coolie Xian Zuobang later recalled. "No matter what status one had in China, one will become a slave."⁶⁴

By 1860, the Chinese had become the main solution to the labor problems in both Cuba and Peru. Planters and labor agents wanted laborers, not settlers, and therefore recruited men almost exclusively. Chinese cultural constraints also frowned upon women traveling or immigrating abroad. This gender imbalance was apparent in government population statistics. Women were less than one percent of Chinese arriving in Cuba from 1847 to 1874. The 1861 Cuban census recorded only fifty-seven Chinese females out of a population of 34,807. In Peru, women were less than one percent of the country's total Chinese population from 1847 to 1874.⁶⁵

Because the bondage system ensnared a vast array of peoples in its nets, the Chinese coolies who arrived in Cuba and Peru were occupationally very diverse. The largest group (around 20 percent) of Chinese coolies worked in agriculture, but an amazing array of craftsmen, traders, business owners, and even doctors and government employees were brought on the coolie ships bound for Cuba. They were mostly young, and mostly from Guangdong province. But there were also children and some who came from central, northern, and eastern provinces like Tianjin, Henan, and Anhui.⁶⁶

Ninety percent of Cuba's Chinese coolies worked in the sugar plantations on the western half of the island. On some plantations, they made up as much as 50 percent of the labor force. A small percentage worked as carpenters, cigar makers, or machinists in the cities or in mines or the railroads. In Peru, Chinese picked cotton and sugarcane on coastal plantations and toiled in the noxious guano pits on the Chincha Islands, but they also built railroads in the mountains and worked as domestic servants in the cities.⁶⁷

Coolies in Cuba and Peru were legally free men who signed labor contracts. Unlike slaves, who were considered property, coolies were legally bound to eight years' servitude (three years longer than South Asians in the British West Indies) and could become free upon the completion of their contracts. They could enter into marriages, assume parental control over their children, and could not be separated from spouses. They could also buy and sell property and bring charges against their *patrones*, the owners

of their contracts. They were supposed to receive a monthly wage, adequate food and health care, lodging, and one day of rest on Sundays, plus holidays. These elements made coolie labor unique from both slavery and the free labor system. Freedom was theoretically an option, and coolies had certain rights during their terms of indenture that were denied to slaves.⁶⁸

In reality, however, the daily experiences of Chinese coolies in Cuba did not follow the terms of their contracts or reflect their status as free laborers. Whatever freedoms they had were temporary and arbitrary. Coolie life on the plantations revolved around backbreaking work, routine beatings and intimidations, little or poor-quality food, and exploitation by cruel overseers. They worked daily for twenty to twenty-two hours, from 2:00 and 4:00 a.m. until midnight. "I had to labour night and day, suffered much from cold and hunger, was flogged when seriously ill, and was chained and imprisoned even for resting a few moments," Yang Wan-sheng testified. The mortality rate among Chinese coolies was shockingly high.⁶⁹

The status of Chinese coolies and African slaves—Cuba would not abolish slavery until 1886—often overlapped. They worked alongside each other and often lived in close proximity. They lacked the same basic freedoms and were subjected to the same systems of control. Coolies were required, for example, to "renounce the exercise of all civil rights which are not compatible with the compliance of contract obligations." Thus, marriage and any buying and selling of property had to be approved of by the *patrón*, and coolies had little freedom of movement. They could not leave the plantation without written permission, and if they were caught without it, they could be arrested as runaways, beaten, and even killed.⁷⁰ As one Chinese laborer told visiting Chinese commissioners in 1874, "The police are bent solely on profit and oppress the Chinese . . . you could die easily like an ant."⁷¹

Even their punishments were the same. The 1849 regulations issued by the Spanish government to guide the coolie system lifted—almost verbatim—language from existing Cuban slave codes. Chinese indentured laborers who did not follow orders or who ran away could be flogged, shackled, and confined. The consequences were horrific. "There are shackles on my feet and chains around my neck," one coolie testified in 1874.⁷² Due to mistreatment and malnourishment, over 50 percent of Chinese coolies in Cuba perished before their contracts ended.⁷³

Moreover, the terms of the contracts, which were subject to interpretation by masters, were routinely ignored or manipulated to further exploit the laborer. For example, regulations allowed Chinese coolies to purchase their contracts at any time, but they had to pay their masters back for their purchase price, any value added to their contract since the time of purchase, including clothing and sick days, and the cost of finding a replacement laborer. Owners set the terms and price of these costs.⁷⁴

In short, Chinese coolies were slaves in all but name. At best, they inhabited a unique status as unfree laborers, somewhere between slave and free, that allowed them to demand better treatment and eventual freedom. In practice they were, according to historian Philip S. Foner, "bought, sold, and transferred like slaves, and treated like slaves."⁷⁵

Like South Asian laborers in the British West Indies, the Chinese in Cuba and Peru found ways to challenge exploitative work conditions. They routinely slowed the pace of their work, refused to work, committed acts of sabotage, and stole from their plantations. Chinese coolies also took their rights to sue employers very seriously. They filed protests and complaints against *patrones* who mistreated them and local authorities who failed to enforce the laws. Chinese often tried to escape their indentures by running away, and in extreme cases Chinese attacked their overseers and *patrones*.⁷⁶

Suicides were also common. Ch'en Ming-yuan told commissioners that "no count can be made of the number of those who have thrown themselves into wells, cut their throats, hanged themselves, and swallowed opium."⁷⁷ Wen Changtai gave specific details: "I witnessed nine workers who hanged themselves, one who jumped into a hot sugar cauldron . . . and some who ran into the mountains and starved to death."⁷⁸

Others joined the fight to overturn the entire Spanish political system in Cuba and joined insurgents to overthrow Spanish colonialism. They fought in *la Guerra de los Diez Años* (the Ten Years' War of 1868–1878), *la Guerra Chiquita* (the Little War of 1878–1879), and *la Guerra de Independencia* (the War of Independence, 1895–1898). Many histories of Cuban independence tell the inspiring tale of Chinese indentured laborer Bu Tak (José Bu), who joined insurgents in 1860 and eventually rose up the ranks to become a celebrated Cuban freedom fighter. In 1869, Bu guided Cuban forces through treacherous terrain in order to deliver orders to a Cuban

general. He was known for charging into battle ferociously waving a machete and shouting in Spanish, "For Cuba! Spanish go to hell!" Bu fought in all three wars for Cuban independence from Spain over a thirty-year period and eventually became a lieutenant colonel.⁷⁹

By the 1860s, the Chinese coolie system prompted a global debate over race and labor that would shape Chinese immigration to the United States. On the one hand, Chinese indentured laborers were seen as a necessary cure for the labor shortages that plagued industrializing settler societies after the end of slavery. Chinese laborers were cheap, easily available and exploitable, and their labor made it possible for plantation economies to prosper. However, at a time when most countries were debating abolishing slavery or had already abolished it, the advantages of Chinese coolie labor came under fresh scrutiny.⁸⁰

This was especially true in the United States, where the impending Civil War over slavery shaped every news report and traveler's account of the coolie labor system in the Caribbean. Both abolitionists and pro-slavery activists in the United States closely studied the "coolie problem" in Latin America and the Caribbean and used the specter of Asian coolies to further their political agendas. Coolies were either portrayed as an industrious labor force that would make slavery unnecessary or as another inferior race that was vulnerable to cruel exploitation. After African slaves were emancipated in 1863, southern planters championed coolie labor in order to revitalize the southern economy and to counter the effects of black enfranchisement. Political battles between federal officials and Louisiana planters and merchants over the status of coolies erupted in the late 1860s. In the end, the United States outlawed coolie labor and U.S. involvement in the coolie trade in 1862. The Coolie Trade Act of that year became the first step in the eventual exclusion of all Chinese laborers that occurred in 1882.⁸¹

By the 1870s, condemnation of the coolie trade had spread internationally. On December 27, 1873, the Portuguese governor of Macao closed the colony to the coolie trade. The last coolie ships set sail to Latin America three months later.⁸² In 1874, an international commission traveled to Cuba to investigate coolie conditions. Representatives from China, Britain, and France heard 1,176 oral testimonies and read 1,665 written petitions. One

after another, Chinese coolies described their experiences, begged for help, and called attention to the abuses and exploitation of the coolie system, or what one called "a hell on earth."⁸³ As a result of the commission's findings, the Chinese emperor issued a decree calling for the immediate end of the coolie trade in 1875. In 1877, Spain and China signed a treaty terminating all contracts of Chinese laborers still under indenture in Cuba and established a Chinese consulate general in Cuba to protect the interests of Chinese still there. Peru and China reached a similar treaty in 1876.⁸⁴

Freedom, however, remained elusive for Chinese coolies in Cuba. Even after the coolie trade was abolished, slavery remained in place until 1886 and affected the mobility of all slave, indentured, and free laborers. Laws, such as one that required coolies to reindenture themselves or leave Cuba within two months at their own expense, also forced some to continue their terms of indenture. And many *patrones* refused to give the papers documenting a coolie's freedom at the end of his contract period.⁸⁵

Those who were able to secure their freedom found limited opportunities available to them. Some organized themselves into *cuadrillas*, or contract work gangs under Chinese management, and were slowly able to transition into agricultural wage work. A small number of Chinese became engaged in retail and truck farming. A larger number concentrated in the laundry business or as domestic servants, like their compatriots in the United States and Canada.⁸⁶

By the 1860s and 1870s, a large community of free Chinese had settled in Havana. Two former coolies, Chung Leng and Lan Si Ye, are credited with establishing Havana's Chinatown near Zanja Street by opening up a café and grocery store in 1858. Other businesses followed. By the early 1870s, a recognizable *barrio chino* had been formed around the market plaza.⁸⁷

Other former Chinese coolies remigrated within the Americas to countries like Panama, Mexico, and the United States. The first Chinese cigar makers in New York City, for example, were transplants from Cuba. The largest number went to Louisiana, where planters and labor recruiters hoped that the Chinese could help replace emancipated African Americans, and by 1867 at least 2,000 Chinese had left Cuba for New Orleans.⁸⁸

By then, thousands of other Chinese immigrants were crossing the Pacific

Ocean and working throughout the Western United States in search of what they called "Gold Mountain." Building on the first transpacific Asian migrations to the Americas during the Manila galleon era and overlapping with the migrations of coolies to Latin America, they helped to create early Asian America.

PART TWO

**The Making of Asian America During the
Age of Mass Migration and Asian Exclusion**

Chinese Immigrants in Search of Gold Mountain

On January 24, 1848, James W. Marshall discovered gold along the American River in northern California. Gold seekers from around the world swept into California, and the Gold Rush was on. The news took some time to reach China, but once it did, it spread like fire. "Good many Americans speak of California," wrote one man in Canton to his brother. "They find gold very quickly. . . . I think I shall go to California next summer."¹

Three hundred twenty-five Chinese forty-niners made their way to California in 1849. In 1850, 450 more came. Within a year, the numbers grew exponentially: 2,716 Chinese came to California in 1851 and 20,026 in 1852. Only a few struck it rich in the goldfields, but there were enough economic opportunities in the United States as well as problems back home in China to set in motion a new era of Chinese immigration. Labor recruiters in China bombarded prospective immigrants with the message that, as one advertisement proclaimed, "Americans are very rich people. They want the Chinaman to come. . . . Money is in great plenty and to spare in America." By 1870, there were 63,000 Chinese in the United States, most of them (77 percent) in California.²

Among the thousands of gold seekers who flocked to California was Moy Dong Kee, my maternal great-great-great-grandfather. He arrived in San

Francisco in 1854 as a twenty-year-old married father from Sun Jock Me Lun village in the Pearl River Delta of southern China. He left his wife and two sons behind while chasing dreams of *Gum Saan*, or Gold Mountain, as the Chinese called the United States. By the time he made it to California, there was little gold left in the foothills. He stayed anyway. We don't know much about what he did in these early years. When he shows up in official U.S. records, some forty-five years later, it is in an affidavit filed with the U.S. Bureau of Immigration stating his intention to travel to China and return to the United States.³

This type of paperwork was required only of Chinese immigrants. Beginning in 1882, the United States passed a series of Chinese exclusion laws that barred Chinese laborers from entering the country and allowed only

certain "exempt" classes of merchants, students, teachers, diplomats, and travelers to enter or reenter the country. After protests by the Chinese American community, U.S. citizens of Chinese descent and the wives and children of citizens and merchants were also allowed to apply for admission or readmission. But all Chinese in the United States were under strict surveillance, and my great-great-great-grandfather found that he needed to fill out a number of government forms, subject himself to interrogations and investigations, and provide affidavits from two white witnesses who vouched for him and his status as a merchant whenever he left or reentered the country.

His 1899 application was filed in New York City, where he had been a resident and merchant for twenty years. He had followed the growing number of Chinese who left the West Coast in search of better opportunities and friendlier neighborhoods. He opened the Yuet Sing & Company store at No. 10 Chatham



6. Moy Dong Kee's business card, 1899.

Square in New York's Chinatown in 1882 and then moved it to No. 6 Mott Street a few years later. By the 1890s, he had another store in Philadelphia's Chinatown, and had opened the Kwong Wah Tai & Co. at No. 14 Mott Street. His bilingual business card identified the company as "importers and dealers in Chinese Groceries, also General Merchandise."

But like many Chinese immigrants during this time, Moy Dong Kee's life stretched across the Pacific. His family remained in Sun Jock Me Lun village, and he traveled back and forth to China at least three times over his forty-five-year sojourn in the United States before he retired in the village where he was born. He passed on his business to his oldest son, Moy Quong Shee, who continued the transpacific shuttle between China and the United States, leaving his wife and children in China while running the family business in New York and Philadelphia and adopting the name of John Moy.

By 1907, my great-grandfather Moy Wah Chung entered the United States. With him, the transnational family pattern that the Moy family had practiced for three generations eventually broke. In 1911, he married Yuen Si, and a daughter named Sau Bik, my grandmother, was born in 1912. A son named Chong Mon followed in 1918. The next year, my great-grandfather decided to settle in the United States permanently and became Raymond Moy. As a Chinese merchant, he was eligible to bring his wife and his children to the United States. But when he filed the necessary forms with the U.S. government to sponsor them into the country, Raymond listed his wife and two sons. One was Chong Mon. The other was his nephew, Chong Don. Sau Bik was never mentioned, and according to the records of the U.S. Bureau of Immigration, she did not exist. Chong Don, given her immigration slot, came to the United States in her place. My grandmother remained in Canton with her grandparents and attended school.⁴

There are many reasons why my great-grandfather might have made the decision to leave his daughter behind in China. Perhaps he believed that boys were more likely to find steady work and contribute to the family economy. Maybe there was no other way for Chong Don to immigrate, and giving him the immigration slot was great-grandfather's way of performing some act of filial duty. Perhaps he thought it was safer for my grandmother to remain in China. Whatever the reason, his actions effectively excluded

my grandmother from the United States. She would never see her mother alive again, and she would not immigrate herself until 1933, when she married my grandfather Huie Bing Gee (Ben Huie), a merchant and restaurant owner in New York City.



7. Huie Bing Gee (Ben Huie) and Moy Sau Bik (Gladys Huie) wedding portrait, 1931.

My grandmother deeply resented being left behind in China, but once in New York, she and my grandfather started new lives and had three daughters. My grandfather ran two successful restaurants in Brooklyn. One was named the New Deal Chow Mein Inn after President Franklin D. Roosevelt's federal program, and it catered to a mostly Jewish clientele in the

Brighton Beach neighborhood nicknamed Little Odessa. The restaurant was a family affair. My grandfather ran the business side of things and many of the cooks came from my grandfather's home village in China. My grandmother wore elegant cheongsams, Chinese-style dresses, and served as the restaurant's hostess. My mother and her sisters made eggrolls after school, earning a penny a piece. Dishes at the New Deal included Lobster Cantonese, Chicken Chop Suey, and New Deal Lo-Mein. The New Deal wontons became locally famous and were remembered years later in a cookbook featuring New York City's great culinary traditions.⁵ By the 1930s, my mother and aunts attended public school in Brooklyn, went off to college, and grew up identifying as "Americans first, Chinese second."⁶

After four generations of immigrating back and forth between China and the United States, my family was finally becoming Chinese American.

The Moy family offers a window into the worlds of Chinese immigrants during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Families were split across the Pacific Ocean but remained connected to each other through visits home—infrequent as they were—letters, and remittances. Moy Dong Kee spent almost fifty years in the United States, but when it was time to retire, he returned to the village where he was born having fulfilled the dream of returning home a rich, successful "Gold Mountain Man."

The Moys "became American" in ways that were common for many immigrants. Moy Dong Kee did not become a U.S. citizen, because naturalization laws barred Chinese and other Asians from naturalized citizenship. But he lived most of his life in the United States, first in San Francisco, then New York and Philadelphia. His businesses in the Chinatowns of New York City and Philadelphia were likely among these cities' first. He conducted business with non-Chinese suppliers and customers and learned enough English to read and write. (His signature on all of his U.S. government documents is in English.) And even though he retired in China, the family's future was tied to the United States.

Moy Dong Kee's immigration file also reveals how U.S. immigration law—and specifically the Chinese exclusion laws—intruded on the lives and movements of Chinese immigrants in the United States and their families in China. When he first arrived in 1854, Moy Dong Kee needed no documentation to enter the country, and there were no interrogations, medical

examinations, or testimony required from white witnesses. As another early immigrant remembered, "In those days . . . people came and went freely. We rolled up our bedding, packed our baskets, straightened our clothes . . . and pile[d] into one of the waiting wagons."⁷ But by the time that Moy Dong Kee filed his affidavit in 1899, everything had changed as race- and class-based inequality became part of immigration law and everyday experiences. As a merchant family, the two successive generations of Moy sons were able to enter the country with little difficulty. But my grandmother's exclusion from the United States reveals how gender inequality also became part of immigration law and Chinese immigration strategies.

The Moys were just one part of the massive global migrations of Chinese around the world. The Chinese who came to the United States paralleled the movement of those who went to Southeast Asia, Australia, New Zealand, and other parts of North and South America. An estimated 550,000 Chinese immigrated to Southeast Asia from 1801 to 1875, while 65,000 went to Australia, 178,000 to the United States, and 30,000 to Canada.⁸ The immigration of men like my Moy ancestors especially overlapped with the immigration of other Chinese immigrant men to Canada, Mexico, and Latin America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Together, all of these migrations helped to form the modern Chinese diaspora that has lasted for generations.

Dreams of gold first propelled Chinese, most from just eight districts in the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong province, to the United States. But it was a mixture of domestic crises and foreign intervention in China that sustained and expanded the immigration of Chinese from this region to the United States over the next several decades. As the center for American and European trade in China, the Pearl River Delta was home to American labor recruiters, businessmen, and missionaries, and the growing American presence in the region helped to establish a lucrative transpacific business in Chinese immigration. By the 1860s, Hong Kong had become a "city built on migration."⁹

While public opinion often mischaracterized Chinese laborers in the United States as unfree coolies, the system that brought Chinese to the United States was different from the one sending migrants to Latin America.

Those heading to the United States did not come under contract and either paid for their own passage or borrowed money for the steamship ticket. The most common way to do this was through the credit-ticket system. Family or district associations lent money for the ticket and borrowers promised to pay it back with interest. Sometimes exorbitant rates were charged and it took years, even decades, to pay back these loans, but unlike coolies in Cuba and Peru, they were not legally bound to others.

The Chinese coming to the United States, however, did share common experiences with those going to Latin America as indentured laborers. Both were heavily recruited by foreign labor agents, for example. It started with the search for workers to build the Central Pacific Railroad in the 1860s. The recruitment of Chinese laborers grew even more after regular transpacific steamship service between Hong Kong, Shanghai, and San Francisco was established in 1867 by the Pacific Mail Steamship Company. Over the next several years, U.S. and Japanese steamship companies launched new routes to Seattle, Vancouver, and a number of other ports along the West Coast of the United States and Canada.¹⁰ A new era of immigration began.

Foreign and domestic crises also continued to propel Chinese abroad during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Political, economic, and social unrest in China deepened as the Qing Empire faltered, Japan defeated China in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), and European imperialist powers strengthened their economic positions in the country. The 1911 Chinese Revolution led by Sun Yat-sen brought an end to China's history of imperial rule, but it could not bring long-lasting political stability. Instead, powerful warlords emerged as the dominant power brokers in many parts of the country and internal rivalries between the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) and the communists increased in the 1920s. By the 1930s, China was at war again with Japan, and by the end of the decade, Japan controlled parts of the country. World War II and the Communist Chinese Revolution in 1949 brought new upheavals.

Meanwhile, the United States continued its imperialist expansion westward through a war with Mexico and further dispossession of Native Americans. Industrialization and the growth of American capitalism created an insatiable desire for labor in the United States. Large numbers of workers

were especially needed in western states to tap natural resources and build a transportation infrastructure. The Chinese filled a need. They were hired again and again for jobs that were believed to be too dirty, dangerous, or degrading for white men. But they were also paid on a separate and lower wage scale from whites.

Soon, a culture of Chinese immigration was established through letters, returning migrants, and even folksongs. "Try to leave the village," Wong Sing Look's brother (already in the U.S.) advised him in a letter. "You can never make a living there."¹¹ Early-twentieth-century Cantonese folksongs praised the "sojourner [from] Gold Mountain" who had at least "eight hundred," if not "one thousand in gold."¹² Young men like Lee Chew saw firsthand how fellow villagers left home poor and returned home rich. One Gold Mountain man in Lee's village made enough money to build a massive four-block-long family compound complete with a palace, summer house, streams, bridges, walks, and roads.¹³ By the 1930s, Chinese heard time and time again that "anyone who comes to *Gam Saan* will make money fast and go home a rich man."¹⁴

For some, immigration was simply about survival. Lee Chi Yet, orphaned at a young age in Poon Lung Cheng village, was "kill[ing] himself for nothing" as a farmer in the early 1900s. People were starving to death around him, and the situation in his village was desperate. He immigrated to the United States in 1917. More than eighty years later, he explained his decision: "What the hell kind of life I have? I suffer! I got to look for a way to go. I want to live, so I come to the United States."¹⁵ Conditions were equally bad in other villages. "The reason we Chinese come to the United States," one Chinese American organization explained in 1910, "is because . . . we have no other method by which we can keep our bodies and souls together. Should we be blocked in this . . . will our calamity not be inexpressible?"¹⁶

Once the initial stream of people had gone abroad, an immigration chain fell easily into place helped by a number of international businesses. Transpacific steamship agents sold tickets for passage aboard a growing number of modern vessels to San Francisco, Victoria, and Callao, Peru. Letter offices, banks, and *gam saan jong*, or Gold Mountain firms, moved people, information, money, and goods from China to locations around

the world. Prospective immigrants could buy tickets, have health exams, arrange documentation, and fill out consular forms all at their local *gam saan jong*. The firms also provided emigrants with a place to stay in Hong Kong while they waited for their paperwork to be processed and sold them the essential items needed for the long journey, such as comforters, food, trunks, and toiletries. Immigrants traveled to where they already had relatives or fellow villagers, and they in turn encouraged more people from home to follow in their footsteps. Through these chain migrations, or immigrant "grooves," Chinese spread throughout the United States and to other places around the world.¹⁷

Chinese American communities were predominately made up of men—more than half of them married—during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Like many European immigrant groups, Chinese men often came to the United States as sojourners, or immigrants who intended to return home after working and living abroad temporarily. They were known as *gam saan haak*, or Gold Mountain men. Chinese women did immigrate to the United States, but their numbers were small. During the nineteenth century, the traditional Chinese patriarchal family system discouraged and even forbade "decent" women from traveling abroad. Chinese folk sayings said as much: "A woman's duty is to care for the household, and she should have no desire to go abroad."¹⁸ Married women were expected to remain in China, take care of their husband's parents, and perform the filial duties of their absent husbands. The harsh living conditions in California, high levels of anti-Chinese violence, expensive transpacific transportation, and the lack of available jobs for women were also factors that discouraged Chinese women from immigrating.

But U.S. immigration laws presented some of the most formidable barriers to female Chinese immigration. The 1875 Page Act barred Asian women suspected of prostitution as well as Asian laborers transported to the country as contract laborers. The Exclusion Act of 1882 further discouraged the entry of Chinese women. Although they were not explicitly barred from the United States, the exempt categories listed in the exclusion law—merchants, students, teachers, diplomats, and travelers—were professions that were held almost exclusively by men in nineteenth-century China.

Court cases initiated by Chinese in the United States eventually allowed the wives and children of Chinese merchants and U.S. citizens of Chinese descent to come. But Chinese women could not initiate immigration on their own. Because their admission into the country was based on their relationship to a male relative, they were dependent upon their husbands or fathers to sponsor them. Moreover, their own right to enter and remain in the United States was based on their sponsor's legal immigration status. If their husband or father lost his right to remain in the country, so did they. Still, these families were among the lucky ones. For the vast majority of working-class Chinese, like laundrymen and restaurant workers, bringing their wives to the United States was virtually impossible.

As a result, women accounted for only 0.3 percent of the total number of Chinese admitted into the United States in 1880. In 1900, they made up only 0.7 percent of the total number of Chinese entering the country. The situation was slightly different in Hawai'i, where plantation owners encouraged Chinese immigrant women to come as a way of tying down the Chinese immigrant labor force in the islands. In 1900, women made up 13 percent of the Chinese population in Hawai'i compared to just 5 percent of the Chinese population in the continental United States.¹⁹

Most Chinese immigrant families during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were thus split across the Pacific Ocean. Visits were infrequent if they happened at all, and many women were essentially "Gold Mountain widows" or "grass widows."²⁰ If they were fortunate, they could at least rely on letters and remittances to support them. But surviving letters discovered in the Kam Wah Chung Company Building in John Day, Oregon, record some of the broken relationships, disappointment, and sadness that characterized many transnational Chinese immigrant families. A small town that supported the area's mining, ranching, farming, and logging industries, John Day had a population of 500 to 600 Chinese in its heyday in the 1870s and 1880s. The Kam Wah Chung store served as an employment agency, social gathering place, and post office for letters coming in and going to China. These letters—discovered almost a century after they were written—were either never sent or were not picked up.

From an unknown husband, undated:

My Beloved Wife:

It has been several autumns now since your dull husband left you for a far remote alien land . . .

Because I can get no gold, I am detained in this secluded corner of a strange land.

From a mother in China, February 2, 1898:

Chin-Hsin My Son, Take Notice:

You have been away from home for years. During that time, your second elder brother died, then your father died, and then your eldest brother died, too. . . . I am old and weak now and I may die at any moment. . . .

You should save some money and should come back at least next year. . . . Come back, don't forget your mother, please.

Your Mother.²¹

Small numbers of women did begin to immigrate by the end of the nineteenth century, though the number of Chinese men always outnumbered Chinese women in the United States until after World War II. Some of the first to make the journey came as prostitutes who had been kidnapped, lured, or purchased and imported as indentured or enslaved laborers. One woman testified in 1892 that she had left China after being promised marriage to a rich and good husband in the United States. But when she arrived in San Francisco, she was sold for \$400 to a slave dealer. The dealer then sold her to another man for \$1,700. "I have been a brothel slave ever since," she told investigators.²²

A small number of Chinese prostitutes became concubines or mistresses to wealthy Chinese men. Most were sold to parlor houses in Chinatown that catered to well-to-do Chinese and white men. Those who ended up in alley cribs—small, sparsely furnished shacks—were forced to entice customers until they were sold again or died from venereal disease. Called *lougeui*

("always holding her legs up") and *baak haak chai* ("hundred men's wife"), Chinese prostitutes were virtual slaves.²³

The rare Chinese prostitute escaped. Polly Bemis (Lalu Nathoy) had been sold into prostitution as a young girl in China for one thousand pieces of gold and brought to San Francisco and then to Idaho. Through perseverance and luck, she eventually gained her freedom, married, and owned and operated a well-known business and ranch. Over the years, she became respected as a businesswoman and community member. Her house is now a museum registered on the National Register of Historic Places.²⁴

Some Chinese prostitutes were able to turn to Christian missionary women who managed two "rescue" homes in San Francisco to provide an escape from prostitution, arranged marriages, and abusive relationships. The largest was the Presbyterian Mission Home run by Margaret Culbertson and then Donaldina Cameron, which claimed to have rescued 1,500 women. Many Chinese mission home women gained valuable skills that served them in later years. Tye Leung, for example, escaped an arranged marriage at the age of twelve by fleeing to the Presbyterian Mission Home. She stayed to work as an interpreter and helped missionaries rescue Chinese prostitutes. Her work earned her praise by Cameron, who personally recommended her for a position with the U.S. Bureau of Immigration as an interpreter and assistant matron for Chinese women detainees at the Angel Island Immigration Station. Christian missionary women were among the prostitutes' only allies, but with their missionary zeal and self-righteousness, these women and their rescue efforts also perpetuated negative stereotypes about Chinese immigrant men as immoral slave dealers and Chinese immigrant women as degraded sex slaves that contributed to growing anti-Chinese sentiment.²⁵

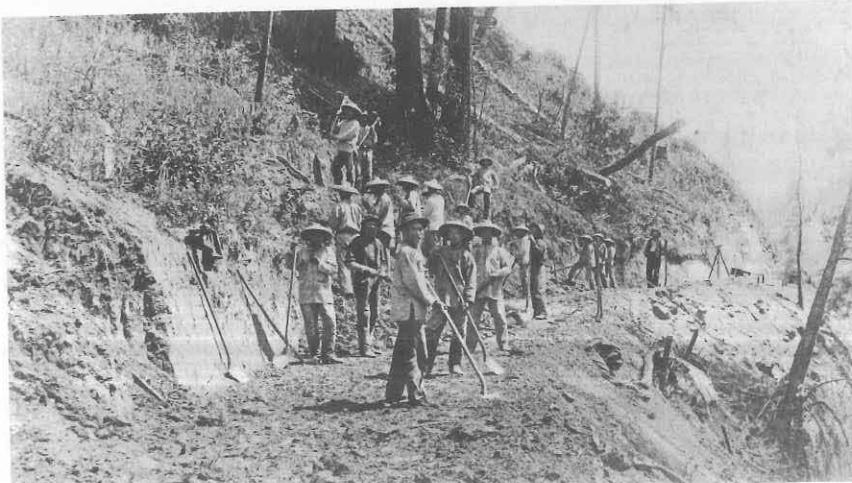
As Chinese men decided to stay in the United States, an increasing number of women came as wives or daughters. Changing attitudes about gender roles and an easing of cultural restrictions on Chinese female emigration made it easier for some women to leave China. By 1910, women were 9.7 percent of the total number of Chinese immigrants entering the country. Ten years later, they were 20 percent, and by 1930 the percentage of women immigrants had risen to 30 percent.²⁶

Many of these women viewed both marriage and immigration in terms of economic opportunity. Wong Lan Fong's experience was not

uncommon. A lack of steady work plagued her family following the 1911 revolution in China, and they were forced to move around Canton in search of work. "I remember moving every couple of years," she reflected. "The house would become smaller and not so nice." The Wongs sold off their possessions with mounting sadness. After Wong Lan Fong's mother fell ill and died, her father and new stepmother urged her to look for a *gam saan haak*, a Gold Mountain man, to marry so that she could go to the United States. It was the only way to secure her economic future, they explained. In 1926, she married Lee Chi Yet and came to the United States a year later.²⁷ Law Shee Low's family was in even worse shape. Bandits had robbed them of all of their possessions and destroyed their farmland. "We became so poor that we had no food to go with rice," she remembered. Some of the neighboring families started begging for food or even sold their daughters. "That was when my parents decided to marry me off to a *gam saan haak* from the next village. They thought I would have a better future in Gold Mountain."²⁸

The men they joined, however, were often barely scraping by working in difficult jobs for low pay. The Chinese first found work in the mines, and by 1860, 70 percent of all employed Chinese in California were miners.²⁹ Most worked independently, but some organized themselves into small companies. Only a few found gold. Others supported themselves by opening up restaurants and laundries in mining country. The Chinese also spread out to mine in other states throughout the U.S. West. In every location, they endured a great deal of hostility. Whites resented their large numbers and competition in the goldfields. Harassment, robberies, and mob violence were so common that Chinese tried to work in isolated and inaccessible places to avoid conflict.

Over the decades, the demand for Chinese labor increased. Chinese immigrant men quickly became indispensable as they worked on railroads and in factories, canneries, fisheries, and fields. In 1869, the *Daily Alta California* praised the role that Chinese immigrants were playing in developing the state's economy. "The Chinamen are ploughmen, laundrymen, placer miners, woolen spinners and weavers, domestic servants, cigar makers, shoemakers, and railroad builders to the great benefit of the State," the reporter pointed out.³⁰



8. Chinese workers building the Loma Prieta Lumber Company Railroad in Santa Cruz County, California, c. 1885.

Western railroad companies were the largest employers of Chinese laborers. In 1865, the first Chinese were hired by the Central Pacific Railroad as track layers on the great transcontinental railroad heading east from Sacramento. Company president Leland Stanford praised the Chinese as “quiet, peaceable, industrious, economical,” and rightly acknowledged that “without them it would be impossible to complete the western portion of this great National highway.”³¹ As the railroad was being built eastward, the Union Pacific Railroad was being built westward, beginning with construction from Omaha, Nebraska, to Promontory Point, Utah, where the two railroads would meet and finally link the country by rail for the first time from east to west. Chinese laborers proved to be such a capable and reliable workforce that Central Pacific agents sent for more laborers from China and paid their passage over to the United States. By 1867, 12,000 Chinese, representing 90 percent of the workforce, were building the railroad.³²

The Chinese cleared trees, blasted rocks with explosives, picks, and shovels, carried away debris, and laid tracks. The rugged mountains of the Sierra Nevada “swarmed with Celestials, shoveling, shoveling, carting, drilling and blasting rocks and earth,” described one observer. The work was difficult and dangerous. Many Chinese died during the winter of 1866, when snowstorms

covered construction workers and trapped them under snowdrifts. Others lost their lives in explosions while trying to dynamite tunnels through the mountains. One newspaper estimated at least 1,200 Chinese immigrants died in the building of the railroad.³³

In 1867, 5,000 Chinese went on strike. They were working long hours for little pay. “Eight hours a day good for white men, all the same good for Chinamen,” they declared. Railroad baron Charles Crocker responded by cutting off the miners’ food supply. Isolated and starving in their work camps in the mountains, the strikers surrendered.³⁴ A final indignity occurred when the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads met at Promontory Point on May 10, 1869, to lay the last spike to link the transcontinental railroad: the Chinese workers who had made it all possible were nowhere to be found in official photographs commemorating the occasion.



9. On May 10, 1869, the western and eastern halves of the transcontinental railroad were linked together at Promontory Point. Chinese railroad workers, who made up 90 percent of the workforce building the western half of the railroad, are noticeably absent from the official photographs celebrating this historic event. “East and West Shaking Hands at Laying Last Rail, 1869,” Andrew J. Russell (1829–1902).

Chinese and other Asians were also heavily recruited to harvest sugarcane on the Hawaiian Islands (just as they were in the Caribbean), where sugar was king during the nineteenth century. More than 300,000 Asians arrived in Hawai'i between 1850 and 1920. The Chinese came first, recruited by planters in the Royal Hawaiian Agricultural Society. Seven hundred came during the 1850s. Another 25,497 Chinese arrived between 1875 and 1887. By 1890, Chinese were almost 19 percent of the total population in the islands.³⁵ Unlike Chinese laborers on Cuban sugar plantations, the Chinese in Hawai'i worked under contracts, but were unindentured. They called Hawai'i *Tan Heung Shan*, or fragrant sandalwood mountains. Sugar planters praised the Chinese for being "prompt at the call of the bell, steady in their work, and quick to learn." They encouraged even more Chinese to come and to stay. But the Chinese had other ideas. The vast majority left the plantations after their contracts expired to grow rice, coffee, bananas, and taro and to raise livestock. Many found opportunities in towns and in the city of Honolulu. Others left the islands altogether and went to other parts of the United States.³⁶

When railroad construction jobs dried up in the western U.S. after 1869, thousands of Chinese laborers drifted into San Francisco, where they helped to expand the city's emerging industries in shoes, textiles, and cigars. By 1872, nearly half the workingmen employed in factories were Chinese.³⁷ They were paid low wages, and in shops where they worked alongside whites performing the same work, Chinese were paid less than their white counterparts. The charge that Chinese competed unfairly with white workers would become one of the central arguments in the anti-Chinese movement by the 1870s.

The demand for Chinese immigrant labor was not just in the West. Chinese were also recruited to work in shoe factories in North Adams, Massachusetts, and on plantations in the South. By 1880, there were small communities based in New Orleans and in Mississippi. In the racially segregated South, Chinese occupied an in-between, "partly colored" place among blacks and whites. They had more freedom of movement and other privileges that were denied to African Americans. But they were never accepted as equal to whites.³⁸

In California, Chinese also turned to agriculture. In the Sacramento-San

Joaquin River deltas, they were hired to construct irrigation channels, levees, dikes, and ditches. Working with shovels in waist-deep water, they drained the swamplands and turned them into some of the most productive and fertile farmland in the country. Chinese immigrants also constructed roads, cleared land, planted, pruned, and harvested grapes for the Napa and Sonoma valleys' wine industry. They grew citrus fruits, beans, peas, and sugar beets. On their own small farms, they grew potatoes, vegetables, and fruit and trucked their produce into cities and small towns. By the turn of the century, 95 percent of the Chinese population in the Sacramento and San Joaquin delta region worked as farmers, farmworkers, fruit packers, and in other agriculture-related occupations.³⁹ "They were *the vital factor*" in making California's agricultural transition possible, noted historian Carey McWilliams.⁴⁰ But wage inequality followed the Chinese into the fields. They were paid around \$10 to \$20 less per month than whites doing the same work.⁴¹

Among the Chinese in agriculture were two horticulturalists who helped transform the industry. One was Ah Bing, who bred the famous Bing cherry in Oregon. The other was Lue Gim Gong of Florida, who succeeded in growing a hearty, juicy orange that could be shipped around the country in large quantities. In 1911, the Lue Gim Gong orange won the American Pomological Society's distinguished Wilder Medal. He went on to develop a new grapefruit strain and several other unusual plant combinations. When he died in 1925, Lue Gim Gong, known as the "citrus wizard," was memorialized for the significant role he played in the Florida citrus industry.⁴²

By the early 1900s, Chinese immigrants had spread out to big cities and small towns throughout the West and into the Midwest, Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and South. More often than not, they supported themselves by running small businesses, especially laundries, restaurants, or stores. In 1920, 48 percent of the Chinese in California worked in small business.⁴³ In spite of the stereotypes, these enterprises were in no way traditional Chinese occupations. "The Chinese laundryman does not learn his trade in China," laundryman Lee Chew explained in 1906. "There are no laundries in China. The women there do the washing in tubs and have no washboards or flat irons."⁴⁴ Nor did the Chinese particularly like this kind of work. Rather, the Chinese became laundrymen, writer and activist Wong Chin Foo explained

in 1888, "simply because there is no other occupation by which they can make money as surely and quickly."⁴⁵

It all seemed to start with a man named Wah Lee, who hung up a "Wash'ng and Iron'ng" sign over a storefront at the corner of Dupont and Washington Streets in San Francisco in 1851. With so few women, including washerwomen of any ethnic background, in Gold Rush California, the city faced an acute shortage of launderers. It cost \$8 to wash and iron a dozen shirts. At one point, the cost of cleaning clothes was so high that some resorted to shipping their laundry to Honolulu, which was actually less expensive than having it done in San Francisco. The one downside was that it could take several months to get the clean clothes back. Lee and others capitalized on an opportunity. By 1860, there were 890 Chinese laundrymen in the state. Ten years later, almost 3,000 Chinese were recorded as washing and ironing clothes for a living.⁴⁶

Chinese restaurants had similar origins. Gold Rush era California was filled with few women and even fewer men who were willing to cook and feed others. Like the entrepreneurial Wah Lee, Chinese immigrants seized on the opportunity to support themselves and worked as camp cooks and as operators of small eating establishments. By the early twentieth century, restaurants were a mainstay for many immigrant families, who opened up chop suey houses catering to non-Chinese clientele across the country.

As Chinese moved across the United States, so did Chinese laundries and restaurants. Shut out from other jobs because of racial discrimination, Chinese were forced into self-employment, ethnic economies, and work that no one else wanted. But these two businesses also fit the needs of Chinese immigrants as well. Neither required professional skills, proficiency in English, or education, and the businesses could be operated by single owners, small families, or larger group partnerships. Moreover, they filled an economic niche in many cities and towns. Lee Chew, who got his start washing clothes in a California railroad camp, left the state in the 1880s after he and his partner were robbed and driven out of town. When he arrived in Chicago, he supported himself by operating another laundry before moving to Detroit, Buffalo, and New York City, where he also opened up laundries.⁴⁷

The work was difficult and physically punishing. Boston laundry worker Tung Pok Chin remembered that his workday lasted from seven in the

morning until two the next morning, "day in and day out, six days a week." He and the five other workers in his laundry ate supper at two in the morning and slept at two-thirty, leaving them only four and a half hours of sleep.⁴⁸ Still, the wages earned in the United States were better than what most could earn in China. During a good week in the 1920s, a laundryman could earn up to \$50. He could generally support his family in China on that income if he was frugal. An enterprising laundryman might eventually own his own business. Sociologist Paul Siu found that in the 1920s and 1930s, a laundry could be set up for the relatively low investment of \$2,800 to \$3,000.⁴⁹

Working long hours in laundries and restaurants, often in small towns far away from other Chinese communities, immigrants retreated to the Chinatowns that began to spring up around the country. Home to the oldest and largest Chinese community in the United States, San Francisco and its Chinatown—known as *Dai Fou*, or "Big City"—was the economic, cultural, and political center of Chinese America for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A bustling Chinese section of the city had sprung up during the Gold Rush with general merchandise stores, restaurants, boardinghouses, and butcher, herb, and tailor shops. By the 1870s, the Chinese quarter was six blocks long starting at California Street and running all the way to Broadway. By 1900, 45 percent of all Chinese in California lived in the San Francisco Bay Area.⁵⁰ Most Chinese immigrants and Chinese goods entered the United States through the port of San Francisco, and from there, people and things were dispersed around the country and to other places within North and South America.

San Francisco Chinatown was also home to a number of organizations that provided support and mutual aid to make life easier in America. There were fraternal organizations, political parties, chambers of commerce, secret societies, regional associations, and labor unions. *Fongs* were formed by family associations to assist clan members in the United States. Meaning "house" or "room," *fongs* were clubhouses that served as boardinghouses and community centers where members could meet, exchange news, mail and receive letters, and arrange for the remains of deceased relatives to be shipped back home. *Tongs* (fraternal lodges or organizations) were organized around sworn brotherhood loyalty and patterned after the secret societies, or

triads, that were formed in opposition to the Qing Empire in China. They also helped immigrants find jobs, pool economic resources, and provided other forms of mutual assistance. As they grew and expanded, *tong* activities also extended into the opium, gambling, and prostitution trades, all common vices in bachelor societies.

Above the *tongs* and *fongs* were *huigan*, or regional associations based on immigrants' native districts. In San Francisco, the first Chinese immigrants formed six district associations linked to areas in the Pearl River Delta. They later joined together as the Chinese Six Companies, which acted as a representative for Chinese in the United States, settled inter-district conflicts, and provided legal, educational, and health services. Eventually, it managed overseas branches in Canada and Latin America from San Francisco as well.

These organizations may have provided the social and economic backbone of the Chinese community in the United States and other parts of North and South America, but for most Chinese immigrants San Francisco's Chinatown was simply home. This is where they could speak their native language, eat favorite foods, stock up on supplies and Chinese food-stuffs, visit with family and fellow villagers, and hear news from home. On their days off, Chinese immigrant men would stroll through the streets of Chinatown or maybe gather in Portsmouth Square. There would be tea to drink and wall notices to read about the latest political news from China, changes in U.S. immigration laws, and community announcements. In the evening, they might gamble or visit the theaters, temples, and brothels. As one Chinatown resident told an interviewer in the 1920s, "most of us can live a warmer, freer, and more human life among our relatives and friends than among strangers. . . . It is only in Chinatown that a Chinese immigrant has society, friends and relatives who share his dreams and hopes, his hardships, and adventures."⁵¹ As Chinese moved throughout the state and across the country, other Chinatowns sprung up in cities like Sacramento and Minneapolis and towns like Butte, Montana. And there were growing Chinatowns as well in the big cities of Chicago, Boston, St. Louis, Philadelphia, and New York.

Between 1880 and 1890, the number of Chinese in New York tripled to over 2,000, for example, with most settling in the Five Points neighborhood on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.⁵² The first Chinese in New York had

arrived as sailors. By the 1850s, there was a small community of Chinese who worked as street peddlers, cigar makers, laundrymen, cooks and restaurant owners, and Chinese grocery store operators. And while social reformer Jacob Riis described the Chinese as "a homeless stranger among us," the Chinese in New York City were busy building a vibrant world that included strong community institutions, families, and organizations.⁵³

Some Chinese immigrants married Irish immigrant women, like the well-known "exemplary Chinaman" Quimbo Appo, an English-speaking tea seller who was born on Zhusan, an island off the Chinese coast southeast of Shanghai. The island was frequently visited by Western opium traders, and it was probably through them that Appo secured passage on a ship heading to California (then Mexican territory), in 1847. From there, he sailed to Boston as a cook and steward. In New Haven, he met and married Catherine Fitzpatrick, an Irishwoman. They moved to New York, where Appo worked at a tea store in lower Manhattan. When their son was born on the Fourth of July, 1856, they named him George Washington Appo.⁵⁴ By the 1860s, such Chinese-Irish marriages were so common that the *New York Tribune* remarked that "these Chinamen have a peculiar fancy for wives of Celtic origin."⁵⁵

Mott Street was the center of the city's Chinatown and was crowded with boardinghouses, family association lodges, grocery stores, herbalists, and restaurants. While other immigrant groups, including the Irish, Italians, and Jews, eventually left the neighborhood where Chinatown now stands, the Chinese stayed, and New York's Chinatown remains one of the largest and most dynamic in the world.

While the streets of Chinatown bustled with activity, Chinese homes were often places where Chinese immigrant women were "doubly bound by patriarchal control in Chinatown and racism outside" as historian Judy Yung has explained.⁵⁶ Early immigrant women—including both the prostitute at one end of the social and economic ladder and the merchant's wife at the other—lived circumscribed lives. They often spoke no English and were confined to the enclosed world of their families and communities by their husbands and fathers and by the patriarchal values in both Chinese and American societies. "Poor me!" one Chinese immigrant woman

complained. "In China I was shut up in the house since I was ten years old, and only left my father's house to be shut up in my husband's house in this great country. For seventeen years I have been in this house without leaving it save on two evenings."⁵⁷

By the early twentieth century, the women who were coming to the United States found their lives shaped by changing attitudes about women's roles and status in both China and the United States. They began to educate themselves, work outside the home, and participate in community activities. And they began to take an active role in the nationalist movement in China and in the struggle for equality in the United States. As Chinese women in China became "new women," so did Chinese women in the United States.⁵⁸

In 1902, Chinese student and social reformer Sieh King King stood before a packed San Francisco crowd and introduced the idea that the emancipation of Chinese women was central to the emancipation of China. An ardent believer in the reform movement in China, which viewed modernization as a way to free China from foreign domination, Sieh made history by being the first Chinese woman to introduce feminist ideas to San Francisco's Chinatown. As the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported, Sieh "boldly condemned the slave girl system, raged at the horrors of foot-binding, and . . . declared that men and women were equal and should enjoy the privileges of equals."⁵⁹

Other Chinese immigrant women took advantage of changing attitudes and new educational and professional opportunities for women. Chinese immigrant Jane Kwong Lee earned a master's degree in sociology at a time when few women pursued advanced degrees. She went on to direct the Chinese Young Women's Christian Association's programs that provided women with English classes and assistance with immigration issues, employment, education, and domestic problems. In her role as a community worker, Lee served as a crucial link between different groups and generations of Chinese women in San Francisco, between the Chinese and non-Chinese communities, and between the Chinese and the United States governments.⁶⁰

Chinese immigrant women also worked alongside their husbands in Chinese-owned restaurants, shops, and laundries. Or they worked for wages in factories, canneries, and other businesses. By World War I, Chinese women dominated the garment industry in San Francisco. Some immigrant

families also took in boarders as a way of adding to their income, and in these homes it was the wife's job to prepare food and clean for the additional household members. Juggling their dual responsibilities as homemakers and wage earners, Chinese women were indispensable partners in their families' struggles for economic survival in the United States.⁶¹



10. A Chinese American family in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, California, 1890s.

The same immigration laws that barred or discouraged Chinese women from immigrating to the United States slowed the growth of Chinese American families. With so many families split between the United States and China, the presence of women and children in many communities was rare until after the 1920s. But as increasing numbers of Chinese women immigrated as wives (and less commonly as daughters) of merchants and U.S. citizens, women and children became more common on the streets of Chinese communities across the country. Between 1900 and 1940, the U.S.-born Chinese population quadrupled.⁶²

Chinese American families learned to adapt Chinese cultural practices to

their new American environments. Children's births were often celebrated with a traditional Chinese "full moon" celebration 100 days after birth. But newborns were also baptized in Catholic and Protestant churches. Families celebrated Chinese New Year and the Fourth of July. Children were given both Chinese and American names, which signaled the family's growing attachment to the United States. Pardee Lowe's father named him after the governor of California. His siblings were given names of U.S. presidents, vice presidents, and their wives: Woodrow Wilson, Thomas Riley Marshal, Helen Taft, Alice Roosevelt, and Mabel.⁶³

Family life often revolved around the family business and school. Children headed off to public school in the morning, like San Francisco's Oriental Public School, and then attended Chinese school in the afternoon, where they studied the Chinese language, and for the older kids, Chinese history and classics. Faith-based social service organizations like the Chinese Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Chinese Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in San Francisco also offered opportunities to learn music, play basketball, take classes in English, Mandarin, and mechanical drawing for boys, and classes in English, sewing, piano, and cooking, as well as recreational sports like table tennis and badminton for the girls.⁶⁴ In the evening, children were put to work in the family restaurants and laundries washing dishes, preparing food, or ironing clothes.

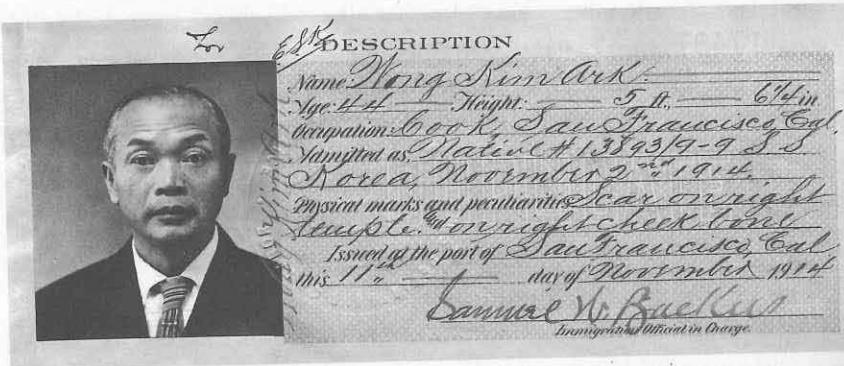
Like other immigrant groups, the coming of the American-born second generation brought new ways of becoming American. Learning English was one way in which Chinese learned to navigate through American life, and many Chinese immigrants relied on English-Chinese phrase books. A common edition was an 1888 version that focused on "dialogues on ordinary and familiar subjects for the use of the Chinese resident in America." With sections on meeting friends, conducting business at the post office, serving customers in the laundry, getting a job as a cook or waiter, and handling immigration matters with government officials, the phrase book offered basic English communication skills that readers might expect to use in daily life, such as: "Is this the right way to the post office?" "Can you tell me where No. 10 Fifth Avenue is?" "I heard, sir, that you wanted a waiter."⁶⁵ Phrase books also revealed some of the hardships and other experiences Chinese

faced with entries like: "He took it from me by violence." "He was choked to death with a lasso, by a robber." "She is a good-for-nothing hussy."⁶⁶

Chinese immigrants additionally adapted to life in the United States by changing their clothing, eating habits, and social customs. Some married white, Native American, Mexican, Native Hawaiian, and African American women and blended into non-Chinese local communities when and where permitted. They became Christian, changed their names, and a small number of Chinese immigrants even managed to become naturalized citizens in spite of federal law. But Chinese immigrants also became American by drawing on American values of equality in their protests against discrimination and in using the U.S. justice system to try to overturn discriminatory laws.

A few Chinese made American legal history with their attempts to guarantee equality for the Chinese in America. In 1884, Mary and Joseph Tape went to enroll their daughter Mamie in San Francisco's Spring Valley School. Citing state education codes that allowed schools to exclude children who had "filthy or vicious habits, or children with contagious or infectious diseases," school officials and the San Francisco School Board refused their application. Characterizing all Chinese children as dangerous or diseased, the School Board trustees used these codes to maintain a strict policy of racial segregation in the public schools. The Tapes launched a legal battle for equal access to education. In a letter of protest to the board, Mary Tape wrote: "I see that you are going to make all sorts of excuses to keep my child out of the Public Schools. . . . Is it a disgrace to be born a Chinese? Didn't God make us all!!! What right! Have you to bar my children out of the school because she is of Chinese Descent." The Tapes eventually sued the San Francisco School Board and argued that as a native-born citizen of the United States, Mamie was entitled to the free education that was every American's birthright. A San Francisco superior court judge agreed, but the San Francisco School Board refused to allow Mamie to attend school with whites and established a separate Chinese primary school in the Chinatown district. Although it was not the outcome that the Tapes would have liked, Mamie and her younger brother, Frank, were the first two students to show up for class when the school opened in April 1885. The Tapes' legal challenge had affirmed that Chinese children in the United States had the right to a public education.⁶⁷

Wong Kim Ark was a native-born American citizen of Chinese descent whose 1898 Supreme Court challenge affirmed the constitutional status of birthright citizenship for all persons born in the United States. A restaurant cook and native of San Francisco, Wong was twenty-four in 1894 when he returned to California after a visit to China. To his surprise, he was denied reentry into the United States. John H. Wise, U.S. collector of customs in charge of immigrant processing in San Francisco, claimed that Wong, though born in the United States, was not a citizen because his parents were Chinese nationals who were ineligible for citizenship under the Chinese exclusion laws. A self-described “zealous opponent of Chinese immigration,” Wise attempted to apply the exclusion laws as broadly as possible, including to second-generation Chinese Americans. Wise ordered that Wong be “returned” to China.



11. Despite the fact that his 1898 Supreme Court case affirmed the right of birthright citizenship to all persons born in the United States regardless of race, Wong Kim Ark was still treated as an unequal citizen in the United States. Like all Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans in the country, he was forced to carry this certificate of identity (c. 1914) with him at all times to demonstrate his legal residence in the United States.

Wong and his lawyers challenged the decision with a writ of habeas corpus. He claimed that he had a right to be readmitted into the United States based on his status as a United States citizen under the Fourteenth Amendment. The question for the court was: how does the United States determine citizenship—by *jus soli* (by soil) or by *jus sanguinis* (by blood)?

The District Court for the Northern District of California ruled for Wong, but the U.S. attorney appealed the decision and the case was argued before the United States Supreme Court in March 1897. With a majority opinion by Justice Horace Gray, the court ruled in Wong's favor. *United States v. Wong Kim Ark* affirmed that all persons born in the United States were, regardless of race, native-born citizens and entitled to all the rights of citizenship.⁶⁸

Other Chinese in America, like writer and activist Wong Chin Foo, used the public sphere to challenge discrimination in the U.S. Born in 1847, Wong was twenty years old when he came to the United States with an American missionary woman who, with her late husband, had taken care of him in China after his family fell on hard times. He studied in schools in Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania before returning to China to marry and start a family. But when he began to criticize the Qing Empire, he was expelled from China and returned to the United States in 1873. The next year, he became a naturalized U.S. citizen in Grand Rapids, Michigan. (Federal laws prohibited the naturalization of Asian immigrants, but they were not enforced rigidly around the country until after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was passed and explicitly spelled out the prohibition against naturalized U.S. citizenship for Chinese.) Wong lectured throughout the country on topics related to China and the Chinese in the United States. As the anti-Chinese movement grew during the 1870s and 1880s, he defended the Chinese community, attacked anti-Chinese leader Denis Kearney, and established the *Chinese American*, the first Chinese newspaper in New York City. During the next decade, he formed the Chinese Equal Rights League in 1892 and continuously spoke out against the Chinese exclusion laws, including when he testified before the U.S. Congress in 1893 (likely the first Chinese person to do so).⁶⁹ His was an unequivocal voice for justice. “We claim a common manhood with all other nationalities,” Wong’s Equal Rights League stated in an 1892 appeal, “and believe we should have that manhood recognized according to the principles of common humanity and American freedom.”⁷⁰ Wong continued to push for Chinese American citizenship rights until his death in 1898.

While Chinese were fighting for equality in the United States, they were also fighting for “a modern strong Chinese nation.” Because China’s weak

status in the world translated into the weak status of Chinese abroad, the two movements were inextricably connected, explained the Chinese language newspaper *Chung Sai Yat Po* (Chinese Western Daily) in 1900.⁷¹ European and American powers continued to dominate China through unequal treaties and territorial expansion in the late nineteenth century. The Qing imperial court was largely powerless to resist. A growing number of Chinese began to advocate for reforms that ranged from modifying the traditional imperial system to a complete revolution to replace the empire with a republic. Banned from China because of their subversive views, reformers and revolutionaries went abroad to gain financial and political support for their causes. They found eager audiences.

Sun Yat-sen, a Chinese Christian who had attended school in Hawai'i, was the recognized leader of two major political organizations active in the Chinese nationalist movement abroad. The Xingzhonghui, founded in Hawai'i in 1894 with the assistance of the Chinese Hawaiian middle class, introduced the Chinese revolutionary movement to the Chinese in the Western Hemisphere. In 1905, he formed the Tongmenghui in Japan, which brought several groups together in one coalition and offered a more sophisticated and detailed revolutionary ideology based on nationalism, democracy, and people's livelihood.

Another major Chinese nationalist organization had its roots in North America. In 1899, Kang Youwei, a scholar and former advisor to the Chinese emperor, arrived in North America preaching reform of the imperial system. Along with his student Liang Qichao, Kang and his followers formed the Baohuanghui, Chinese Empire Reform Association, in Victoria, British Columbia. With its focus on reform rather than on revolution, the Baohuanghui proved to be popular. At its peak, it published its own Chinese-language newspaper, the *Chinese World*, and boasted 5 million members. These reform efforts—supported in part by the Chinese in North and South America—helped lead to the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty in 1911. A Provisional Government of the Republic of China was established in 1912 with Sun Yat-sen as president. The Tongmenghui formed a coalition with other political groups to become the Kuomintang, or Chinese Nationalist Party. The Chinese in the United States would continue to support the new Republic of China, especially during the war of resistance against Japan

(Sino-Japanese War) beginning in 1937 and during World War II. “To save China, to save ourselves” became the rallying cry for Chinese throughout the Americas during the long war years.⁷²

But “saving” China and challenging discrimination in the United States was not easy. Inequality continued to shape Chinese Americans’ daily lives. In the 1930s, sociologists studying the Chinese community in the U.S. found that Chinese immigrants and Chinese American citizens suffered from a deep-rooted sense of insecurity and a “psychology of fear” brought on by the fact that the Chinese “did not feel at home under the conditions of exclusion and race prejudice.”⁷³ Unwelcome in the United States and prevented from becoming full-fledged citizens, many Chinese immigrants continued to view the country as a sojourner would: a place where they could make money and then leave. As one Chicago laundryman explained: “I have no other hope but to get my money and get back to China. What is the use of staying here; you can’t be an American here.”⁷⁴

Discrimination was keenly felt among the second generation of Chinese Americans who grew up acculturated into American society and yearned to realize their full potential as U.S. citizens in their pursuit of education, professions, and American social and political life. But racism in the larger society dashed many of these dreams. Discrimination, limited work opportunities, and social segregation followed them wherever they went. For many Chinese American women, becoming American additionally meant going against traditional gender role expectations of their parents.

Many also found that their citizenship status offered little protection from discrimination. In 1913 and 1923, politicians introduced bills in Congress designed to disfranchise citizens of Chinese ancestry. The Immigration Act of 1924 explicitly excluded “aliens ineligible to citizenship,” a reference to all Asians, and the 1922 Cable Act revoked the citizenship of women who married “aliens ineligible for citizenship.” The main victims of this law were Asian American women who married Asian male immigrants. Once a woman lost her citizenship, her rights to own property, vote, and travel freely were also revoked. This law would not be changed until 1931.⁷⁵

Chinese Americans expressed a marked loss of admiration for the United States as well as a frustrated sense of alienation. One explained to an interviewer that “I feel that I am more American than Chinese. I am an

American citizen by birth, having the title for all rights, but they treat me as if I were a foreigner." Another observed that "I thought I was American, but America would not have me. In many respects she would not recognize me as American. Moreover, I find racial prejudice against us everywhere. We are American citizens in name but not in fact."⁷⁶ It would not be until World War II that Chinese Americans started feeling like they were part of American society.

4

"The Chinese Must Go!": The Anti-Chinese Movement

On February 28, 1882, Senator John F. Miller of California introduced into the United States Congress a bill to exclude Chinese immigrant laborers from the country. Over the next two hours, the California Republican presented his case. He first spelled out the imminent danger that Chinese immigration posed to the United States, including the fact that, according to Miller, Chinese immigrants came from a "degraded and inferior race." Other senators jumped in to compare the Chinese to "rats," "beasts," and "swine." "Oriental civilization," they claimed, was incompatible with the United States and threatened to corrupt the nation. Chinese immigrants were also an economic danger according to Miller. They competed with white workers with their "machine-like" ways and their "muscles of iron," he claimed. As a result, the U.S. laborer, whether on the farm, the shoe bench, or the factory, simply could not compete with the low-paid Chinese worker. Miller proclaimed that a vote for Chinese exclusion was thus a vote for both American labor and the "public good" of the country.¹

There was minimal opposition to the law. Former Radical Republicans, like Massachusetts senator George Frisbie Hoar, called the discriminatory Chinese Exclusion Act "old race prejudice," a crime committed against the Declaration of Independence.² But overall, politicians in both the Senate and House agreed that the menace of Chinese immigration needed to be

stopped. "The gate . . . must be closed," Representative Edward Valentine of Nebraska succinctly declared.³ Just over two months later, the United States passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the country's first immigration law that singled out an immigrant group for large-scale exclusion based on race.⁴

The Chinese who entered the United States in the late nineteenth century were only a small fraction of the total immigrant population in the United States. From 1870 to 1880, 138,941 Chinese immigrants entered the country, representing only 4.3 percent of the total number of immigrants (3,199,394) who were admitted during the same decade.⁵ Nevertheless, their presence in the United States sparked some of the most violent and destructive racist campaigns in U.S. history that would transform the United States and shape the regulation of international migration around the world.

Americans were first introduced to the Chinese through reports from U.S. traders, diplomats, and missionaries in China. Their portrayals of Chinese as heathen, crafty, and dishonest "marginal members of the human race" quickly set Chinese apart. At first seen as exotic curiosities from a distant land, Chinese immigrants came to be viewed as threats, especially as their numbers increased throughout the Gold Rush period and other changes in the United States shaped ideas about race and what it meant to be American.⁶ Belief in U.S. Manifest Destiny and white superiority had driven the U.S. expansion westward. Indian wars, struggles over African slavery, and the conquest of the West were all tied to race-based ideas of who belonged in the United States and where they fit into the country's racial hierarchy. Chinese were the largest group of nonwhite immigrants to come to the United States. And as soon as they arrived, questions were raised about whether they should be welcomed or expelled.

On the one hand, the Chinese were praised by industrialists as an ample source of cheap, available labor to build the transcontinental railroad and help develop the lumber, fishing, mining, and agricultural industries of the West. Others believed that Chinese immigrants represented unfair economic competition. They were also concerned about the vices that the mostly male population of Chinese immigrants was accused of bringing to the United States, such as drug use, prostitution, and gang activity.

Demagogues, such as Workingmen's Party of California leader Denis Kearney, capitalized on the deep sense of economic insecurity among

the working classes in San Francisco during the depression of the 1870s. Blaming Chinese workers for unfavorable wages and the scarcity of jobs, anti-Chinese leaders such as Kearney drew upon earlier debates over Asian indentured labor in the Caribbean and Latin America and charged that Chinese were imported coolies engaged in a new system of slavery that degraded U.S. labor. Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, framed this issue explicitly by asking the question: "Meat vs. Rice—American Manhood vs. Asiatic Coolieism. Which Shall Survive?"⁷

Many of the arguments in favor of restricting Chinese immigrants also framed the problem explicitly around the sexual danger that both Chinese women and men allegedly posed to the country and its citizens. Chinese female prostitutes caused "moral and racial pollution" through their interracial liaisons, while Chinese men lured pure and innocent white women into their dens of vice and depravity. Moreover, Chinese men were depicted as undermining acceptable gender roles in American society, because they engaged in "women's work" of cleaning and cooking.⁸

Nineteenth-century popular culture in the form of theater and illustrated magazines capitalized on these images of Chinese immigrants and helped to spread them far and wide. One cartoon titled "A Statue for Our Harbor," published in 1881 in the San Francisco-based magazine *The Wasp*, seemingly captured all of white California's fears about Chinese immigration. A statue of a grotesque Chinese male coolie in San Francisco Bay mocks New York's Statue of Liberty, then under construction. His ragged robes, rat-tail-like queue, stereotypical facial features, and opium pipe symbolize the unassimilability and immorality of the Chinese. The message that Chinese immigration would bring destruction to California and the entire nation is made clear with the skull upon which the statue rests his foot, the rats scurrying around the pedestal, the capsized ships and crumbling statue foundation, the slant-eyed moon, and the rays of light emanating from the coolie's head informing readers that Chinese bring "filth," "immorality," "diseases," and "ruin to white labor." With the wide dissemination of such racist images in mainstream popular culture, the anti-Chinese movement spread.

By the time that this cartoon was published, Californians had tried to regulate Chinese immigration for decades. As early as 1850, anti-Chinese sentiment in California became part of state law in the form of a foreign miner's tax. Although the law was aimed at all foreigners, it was primarily enforced

against the Chinese. In 1870, the state had collected \$5 million in taxes from the Chinese alone, an amount that equaled a quarter to half of California's entire revenue.⁹ In 1854, Chinese were officially granted unequal status along with other racial minorities when the California Supreme Court ruled that Chinese immigrants, African Americans, and Native Americans, were prohibited from giving testimony in cases involving a white person. In support of its decision, the court argued that Chinese immigrants were a "distinct people . . . whom nature has marked as inferior."¹⁰ In 1855, California governor John Bigler set in motion the first attempt by Californians to prohibit Asian immigration by signing a bill that taxed any master or owner of a ship found to have brought Asian immigrants to the state. Although the law was invalidated by the state Supreme Court on the grounds that only the federal government had the power to legislate immigration, it foreshadowed later laws that would be successful at the national level.¹¹



12. "A Statue for Our Harbor." By George Frederick Keller, *The Wasp*, November 11, 1881.



13. The massacre of the Chinese at Rock Springs, Wyoming, drawn by T. de Thulstrup, *Harper's Weekly*, September 26, 1885.

Anti-Chinese sentiment also turned violent. Beginning in the 1850s and continuing to the end of the nineteenth century, Chinese were systematically harassed, rounded up, and driven out of cities and towns across the West. During the winter of 1858–1859, a veritable race war began in the goldfields as armed mobs forced Chinese out of various campsites and towns. In 1853, 3,000 Chinese had been working and mining in California's Shasta County. At the end of the decade, only 160 remained.¹²

By the 1870s, vigilante anti-Chinese violence was common throughout the West in cities big and small. On October 24, 1871, seventeen Chinese were lynched in Los Angeles after a policeman was shot by a Chinese suspect. A mob of nearly 500, which represented nearly a tenth of the population of Los Angeles at the time, went on the attack and dragged Chinese out of their homes while others hastily built gallows downtown to hang the victims. Police did little as a broad cross section of Angelenos, including women and children, assisted the mob in what would become the largest mass lynching in U.S. history.¹³

During the 1880s, the violence increased. In February 1885, the entire Chinese population of Eureka, California—300 in total—was rounded up

within forty-eight hours after a city councilman was accidentally killed in the crossfire between two Chinese rivals. On September 2, 1885, twenty-eight Chinese miners were killed and another fifteen were wounded in Rock Springs, Wyoming, before the rest of the Chinese population in the town—numbering in the hundreds—were driven out into the desert. On November 3, 1885, a mob of 500 armed men descended upon the two Chinese neighborhoods in Tacoma, Washington, and forced all 800 to 900 Chinese residents out of the city. Some were dragged from their homes and were forced to watch as their businesses were pillaged and their belongings thrown into the street. By the afternoon, Chinese residents were marched out of town in the heavy rain to the Lake View Junction railroad stop, part of the Northern Pacific Railroad that Chinese laborers—possibly some who had just been forced out of Tacoma—had built. Others walked, some as far as 100 miles, to Portland, Oregon, or British Columbia—anywhere but Tacoma. Three days later, Seattle also demanded that all Chinese leave town.¹⁴

Opposition to Chinese immigration also began to show up in federal laws. Beginning in the 1860s, the U.S. government passed a series of laws restricting Chinese immigration. The 1862 Coolie Trade Act outlawed coolie labor and U.S. involvement in the coolie trade. The 1875 Page Act banned Asian women suspected of prostitution as well as Asian laborers brought to the United States involuntarily. Finally, the Chinese Exclusion Act became law on May 6, 1882. The new law barred the entry of Chinese laborers for a period of ten years, allowed entry only to certain exempt classes of Chinese (students, teachers, travelers, merchants, and diplomats), and prohibited all Chinese from obtaining naturalized citizenship. The message was clear: Chinese could come for business, travel, or study, but not to settle. In 1888, a second law, known as the Scott Act, imposed further restrictions. Laborers who had returned to China were forbidden to reenter the United States unless they had wives, children, parents, or property or debts in excess of \$1,000 there. The act also nullified 20,000 return certificates that had already been granted to Chinese laborers in the country. In 1892, the exclusion laws were extended for another ten years under the Geary Act. Beginning the next year, all Chinese in the United States were required to register with the federal government to obtain certificates of residence (precursors to today's Green Cards) that proved their legal right to be in the

United States. The Chinese Exclusion Act was renewed again in 1902 and made permanent in 1904.¹⁵

The Chinese in the United States referred to the Chinese exclusion laws as a "hundred kinds of oppressive laws."¹⁶ They affected every aspect of Chinese immigration to the United States. They determined who would be able to immigrate and cast a shadow on Chinese immigrant lives in the United States. They also inspired the Chinese in America to protest. The fact that Chinese immigrants had been singled out for discriminatory treatment was clear. "Why do they not legislate against Swedes, Germans, Italians, Turks and others?" Yung Hen, a Chinese poultry dealer in San Francisco asked a newspaper in 1892. "There are no strings on those people. . . . For some reason, you people persist in pestering the Chinamen."¹⁷ They engaged in fierce battles to challenge the legality of the laws and the ways they were enforced. When the constitutionality of Chinese exclusion was upheld, Chinese immigrants and their organizations turned their attention to opening up additional immigration categories within the confines of the exclusion laws. They hired lawyers and used the courts to affirm the rights of merchant families, returning laborers, and U.S. citizens of Chinese descent and their families to enter and reenter the country.¹⁸

From 1882 to 1943, some 300,000 Chinese were admitted into the United States as returning residents and citizens, exempt-class merchants, family members, and others. Many Chinese hired immigration lawyers or brokers to assist with their cases and prepare paperwork. Others learned to evade or circumvent the exclusion laws. As immigrant Ted Chan explained, "We didn't want to come in illegally, but we were forced to because of the immigration laws. They particularly picked on the Chinese. If we told the truth, it didn't work. So we had to take the crooked path."¹⁹

The most common strategy that immigrants used was to falsely claim membership in one of the classes exempt from the exclusion laws, such as merchants or native-born citizens of the United States. A multinational business in false papers and relationships, or "paper sons," aided their efforts, and an estimated 90 to 95 percent of Chinese immigrants entered the United States with false papers during this time. The first to be restricted, Chinese became the first "illegal immigrants."²⁰

Nearly 100,000 Chinese entered the United States through San Francisco from 1910 to 1940. About half were admitted directly from their ships and another half were detained at the Angel Island Immigration Station.²¹ While popularly called the "Ellis Island of the West," the immigration station on Angel Island was in fact very different from its counterpart in New York. Ellis Island enforced U.S. immigration laws that restricted, but did not exclude, European immigrants. Angel Island, on the other hand, was the chief port of entry for Chinese and other immigrants from Asia, and as such, enforced immigration policies that singled out Asians for exclusion.



14. The Angel Island Immigration Station, San Francisco, California, c. 1910.

Chinese were first subjected to a primary inspection on board the steamship. After receiving identification numbers, new arrivals were sent to the hospital for a medical examination. The medical staff examined Chinese bodies for physical defects and even measured body parts to determine age. They looked for evidence of the parasitic "Oriental diseases" such as *uncinariasis* (hookworm), *filiariasis* (round worm), and *clonorchiasis* (liver fluke), which were all grounds for exclusion if untreated after arrival. Chinese immigrants

found these examinations extremely humiliating. They were unaccustomed to being naked in front of strangers, let alone forced to provide stool samples on demand so that the hospital staff could test for disease. "When the doctor came, I had to take off all my clothes. It was so embarrassing and shameful," Lee Puey You explained about her medical examination in 1939. She was detained for twenty months before being sent back to China. She later told interviewers that she cried a "bowlful of tears" on Angel Island.²²



15. Interrogation at the Angel Island Immigration Station, 1923.

Chinese immigrants next had to make their case for admission into the country before immigration officials. Chinese merchants, for example, were required to provide detailed documentation of their business activities, the

volume of merchandise, and lists of all business partners. Returning merchants also had to have "two credible witnesses, other than Chinese" to testify on behalf of the applicant's status and state of business. Wives and children of merchants and citizens had to confirm that their husband or father still qualified as a person exempt from the exclusion laws. They also had to prove that their relationship was genuine.

Because of the popularity of the paper son system, Angel Island officials particularly scrutinized cases involving families. As a routine part of the interrogations, family members were questioned about a wealth of minute details concerning their family history, relationships, and everyday life in the home villages—what immigration officials believed should be common knowledge to all parties: What are the marriage and birth dates of your family members? When did you last see your father? How many steps lead up to your house? How many windows are in your house? How many clocks are in your house? How many rows of houses in your village? Who lives in the third house, fourth row? In some cases, applicants were required to draw extensive maps of their villages, complete with the locations of major buildings and all houses. Sometimes wives were required to recall minute facts about their husband's extended family and native village or share intimate details about their marital relationship with the immigration officials. If any major discrepancies were discovered in the testimonies, immigration inspectors concluded that the claimed relationship did not in fact exist, and the entire case was discredited.

These interrogations were terrifying. They typically lasted two or three days, but it could take much longer if witnesses had to travel to the island to testify or if applicants had to be recalled and interrogated again. Applicants were often asked two hundred questions.²³ Some were asked up to a thousand questions. Immigrants worried about forgetting minor details or having to answer difficult or impossible questions. Law Shee Low, who was detained on Angel Island in 1922, recalled the anxiety and despair in the women's barracks over the interrogation: "One woman was questioned all day and then deported. She told me they asked her about life in China: the chickens and the neighbors, and the direction the house faced. How would I know all that? I was scared."²⁴

Because of these harsh interrogation methods, Chinese immigrants had

one of the highest rejection rates at the Angel Island Immigration Station. Of the 95,687 Chinese who applied for admission into the United States through Angel Island from 1910 to 1940, 9 percent were rejected. The vast majority appealed their decision through attorneys, and in the end, 5 percent of Chinese applicants were ultimately returned to China.²⁵ Chinese also made up the overwhelming majority (70 percent) of the detainee population at the immigration station. Between two hundred and three hundred men and thirty to fifty women were detained in the Angel Island barracks at any given time. Their average stay was for two weeks, the longest of all the immigrant groups. Kong Din Quong, who arrived in San Francisco in 1938, spent the longest recorded time in detention: 756 days. His grandfather was a native of the United States. His father, though born in China, also held U.S. native status, but Kong was born before his father had resided in the country. His admission into the United States was denied on the grounds that a father cannot transfer citizenship rights to his children until he becomes a U.S. resident. Kong appealed his case, but he was eventually deported after spending twenty-five months detained on Angel Island.²⁶

Chinese immigrants bitterly resented their long detentions on Angel Island. They watched other immigrants from Japan, Russia, and South Asia come and go while they remained imprisoned. The barracks were crowded and sparsely furnished. They were guarded at all times and were not allowed visitors. Some wallowed in feelings of helplessness and despair. Others petitioned the Chinese Six Companies in San Francisco or the Chinese consul general for help. Chinese men formed a Self-governing Association to provide assistance to the detainees. Many Chinese men expressed their frustration, anger, resentment, loneliness, and despair by writing poems on the walls. More than 200 poems from the Angel Island barracks have been recorded.²⁷ Written anonymously, they are found in almost every corner of the men's detention barracks of the immigration station (now preserved as a National Historic Landmark) and serve as powerful reminders of the costs and hardships of immigration under such a discriminatory regime. One reads:

*There are tens of thousands of poems composed on these walls.
They are all cries of complaint and sadness*

*The day I am rid of this prison and attain success,
I must remember that this chapter once existed.²⁸*

While Ellis Island has come to represent the United States' welcome to (European) immigrants and a celebration of America's immigrant heritage, Angel Island symbolized America's clear rejection of Asian and other immigrants. Through Angel Island, the United States became a gatekeeping nation designed to restrict immigration, monitor immigrants already in the country, and deport those considered dangerous or undesirable. For their part, Chinese immigrants never forgot their time on Angel Island or the shadow of exclusion they lived under for decades. For them, Angel Island became a place that symbolized broken dreams, or hard-won dreams at best.²⁹

The Angel Island Immigration Station was not the only site of Chinese exclusion in the country. The Chinese exclusion era coincided with the birth of the U.S. as an empire. As the United States advanced across the Pacific, colonizing Hawai'i and the Philippines in 1898, the restriction of Chinese immigrants became a central aspect of U.S. imperialism in these new territories, a reflection of both local conditions and new American power in the Pacific.

The U.S. presence in Hawai'i began soon after British explorer James Cook discovered the islands in 1778. European and American settlers, missionaries, and traders flocked to the islands, and foreign advisors and weapons helped Kamehameha I unite the separate island governments into the Kingdom of Hawai'i in 1810. By 1875, the United States was the dominant foreign power in the kingdom. American plantation owners were soon acquiring large tracts of land, wresting political power from the Hawaiian monarchy, and expanding the sugar plantation economy with the help of Chinese and other Asian immigrant laborers.

Many planters viewed Chinese immigration as an economic necessity that made possible the huge and profitable production of sugar and the future economic success of the islands. At the same time, they recognized that Chinese immigration posed great challenges. American missionaries, journalists, and others were quick to identify Chinese immigration as an

immense social threat. The almost exclusively male character of the immigrant population and the resulting interracial mixing between Chinese and Native Hawaiians was a primary source of concern. The alleged threat Chinese immigrants posed to public health was also an issue.³⁰ Others complained of the "grasping tendencies of the Mongolian," referring to the movement of Chinese from the plantation economy into small business and economic competition with whites.³¹ Commentators agreed that the Chinese were simply "not good citizens from principle."³²

Meanwhile, many Native Hawaiians viewed the Chinese as another group of settlers who contributed to their displacement and dispossession. Native Hawaiians first suffered terribly from the diseases brought by the foreigners. The Hawaiian censuses recorded an alarming decline in the native population. In 1853, there were 71,109 Native Hawaiians recorded in the islands. In 1890, that number had dropped to 40,622.³³ During this period, Native Hawaiian land ownership and political power was also diminishing as foreign settlers gained influence and control in the islands.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Chinese immigration had become a central issue affecting the internal affairs of the kingdom. And as the Hawaiian Islands grew more closely involved with the United States economically, politically, and socially, the debate over Chinese immigration in Hawai'i became entangled with a larger transpacific discussion as well. Portrayals of Chinese as unassimilable, disease-ridden, cheap workers in Hawai'i traveled over from the continental U.S. with the arrival of new white settlers and visitors, Hawaiians returning from the states, and newspaper reports from both sides of the Pacific.

Transplanted missionaries from the United States were an especially dominant force in shaping public opinion about Chinese immigration in Hawai'i. Henry Whitney, son of missionaries and the editor of *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser* newspaper, organized the first meetings against Chinese immigration in 1869. Mormon missionary Walter Murray Gibson succeeded Whitney in both the editorship of the *Advertiser* and the leadership of the anti-Chinese campaign in the 1880s. Under Whitney and Gibson, the *Advertiser*, an influential English-language newspaper with a primarily white readership, explicitly connected the growing population of Chinese in the Hawaiian Islands to the "Chinese problem" in the continental U.S.

and elsewhere. "The Chinese generally are not desirable acquisitions to any country to which they emigrate," the *Advertiser* declared.³⁴

By 1882, when the U.S. Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, the anti-Chinese movement in Hawai'i had also fully matured. The establishment of the anti-Chinese Workingman's Union in Hawai'i in 1883 was likely modeled after the anti-Chinese Workingmen's Party organized in California in 1877. In 1881, King David Kalakaua and his cabinet (including the anti-Chinese leader Walter Gibson) sought to model the kingdom's immigration agreement with China after a recently negotiated treaty between China and the United States. By 1892, Chinese immigration was virtually prohibited, and Chinese were barred from engaging in any nonagricultural work to prevent them from competing with Hawaiians and whites in business enterprises. At the same time, Chinese and other Asians were explicitly disfranchised. The 1887 Bayonet Constitution forced upon King Kalakaua by the planter elite granted the privilege of voting only to male residents of Hawaiian, American, or European birth.³⁵

On January 14, 1893, white business leaders forced the abdication of Queen Lili'uokalani, formed the provisional Republic of Hawai'i, and asked that Hawai'i be annexed to the United States. Annexation was fiercely debated, but both the pro- and anti-annexation forces also fixed their arguments on Asian immigrants, who in 1890 constituted 32 percent of the total Hawaiian population.³⁶ Former U.S. minister to Hawai'i John Stevens argued that the "American and Christian Caucasian people" needed to acquire the Hawaiian lands as soon as possible to prevent the islands "from being submerged and overrun by Asiatics."³⁷ When Hawai'i was formally annexed to the United States on July 7, 1898, Chinese exclusion was automatically extended to the islands. The final treaty also prohibited the emigration of Chinese residents in Hawai'i to any part of the continental U.S., a concession to labor organizations in the United States.³⁸

Hawai'i was not the only new U.S. possession in 1898. Military campaigns in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines brought all of these territories under U.S. control. And the newly colonized peoples, including Chinese immigrants in these lands, became subject to U.S. policies. In the Philippines, U.S. military and diplomatic officials promoted Chinese exclusion as an integral part of U.S. colonization of the islands, one that focused

on the "benevolent assimilation" of the Philippines. U.S. politicians argued, for example, that Filipinos lacked the capacity to compete with Chinese. The latter's exclusion from the Philippines was therefore a policy that would benefit the Filipinos and assist them in their development under American protection. With the support of organized labor in the United States, Chinese exclusion became established policy in the Philippines in 1902.³⁹

In Cuba, restrictive anti-Chinese immigration legislation, similar to the U.S. Chinese exclusion laws, was imposed during the U.S. occupation from 1899 to 1902 and again from 1906 to 1909. On May 15, 1902, Military Governor Leonard Wood issued Order No. 155 banning Chinese laborers from entering Cuba. Diplomats, merchants, students, and Chinese workers who had resided in Cuba since 1899 were exempt. After independence in 1902, Order No. 155 was confirmed by Presidential Decree No. 237.⁴⁰ The ban on Chinese laborers remained in force until the need for laborers made necessary the liberalization of some of the old restrictions. The exclusion laws were suspended for five years from 1917 to 1921 to respond to wartime labor shortages, but after 1921, the law was enforced again, and in 1926 new prohibitions were enacted that refused admission to all Chinese except for consular officials.⁴¹

In all three cases, the United States also took the unusual step of prohibiting the free movement of certain peoples *within* the empire, as Chinese immigrants already in Hawai'i, Cuba, and the Philippines were prohibited from entering the continental United States. In this way, the Chinese exclusion laws became a central aspect of U.S. imperialism.

Outside the United States and its territories, debates over Chinese immigration also resulted in similar actions and policies, often influenced by what was happening in the United States. In Canada, for example, Chinese were just a fraction of the more than 3.5 million immigrants who entered the country from 1885 to 1914 (in 1901, there were 17,312 Chinese in Canada), but as in the United States, they were greeted with racial animosity disproportionate to their numbers. Calls to keep British Columbia a "white man's province" and to rally around a "white Canada forever" fueled the movement to restrict Chinese, and later, Japanese and South Asian immigration.⁴² U.S. actions and perspectives were instrumental in shaping the

anti-Chinese movement in British Columbia. Anti-Asian organizations, modeled after ones in the United States, adopted slogans like "The Chinese Must Go!" and called for the exclusion of all Asian immigrants.⁴³

Beginning in the 1870s and 1880s, the Canadian government considered solutions to the Chinese "problem" and strategically studied U.S. methods and tactics. Due to British relations with China, an all-out exclusion of Chinese immigrants was not feasible for Canada. Thus, instead of the United States' explicit policy of exclusion, Canadian commissioners suggested a head tax policy that would permit entry to every Chinese, provided that he or she paid the landing fee. The federal government waited until construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway was mostly completed (with Chinese labor) and then yielded to the demands of British Columbians to restrict Chinese immigration in 1885 by imposing a \$50 head tax on laborers. In 1900, Canada raised its head tax to \$100. Three years later, the tax was raised again to \$500.⁴⁴

For some years, the Chinese head taxes were effective. But one unintended consequence was that the lower immigration rates turned Chinese laborers into a scarce and increasingly valuable commodity in British Columbia. Chinese immigrant wages doubled and, in some cases, tripled. By 1908–1909, the \$500 head tax was no longer useful as a deterrent to Chinese immigration, although it proved to be an effective source of revenue for the Canadian government. From 1885 to 1923, Chinese immigrants paid \$22.5 million to the Canadian government for the privilege of entering and leaving the country.⁴⁵ No other group was required to pay these taxes.

In 1923, Canada transformed its regulation of Chinese immigration altogether. Closely modeled on U.S. Chinese exclusion laws, the 1923 Exclusion Act abolished the head tax system and instead prohibited all people of Chinese origin or descent from entering the country. Consular officials, children born in Canada, merchants, and students were the only exemptions. The act also required every person of Chinese origin in Canada, regardless of citizenship, to register with the Canadian government and obtain a certification of registration as in the United States. For the Chinese in Canada, the act was a major setback. July 1, 1923, the day that the law was passed, became known by Chinese Canadians as "Humiliation Day."⁴⁶



16. Canadian Chinese Immigration Certificate #88103: Jung Bak Hun, January 3, 1919.

As the U.S. and Canada cracked down on Chinese immigration, Chinese immigrants headed to Mexico. By 1910 Chinese lived and worked in almost every state and territory in the country. They made up the second largest number of foreigners (around 24,000) residing in Mexico in 1926.⁴⁷ The rise of the *antichinistas* (anti-Chinese activists) followed.

By the early twentieth century, Mexican newspapers were describing the Chinese as "savages," "uncivilized," and "lazy." Chinese immigration itself was described in catastrophic terms: "*onda amarilla*," "*peste amarilla*," "*invasión mongólica*" ("yellow wave," the "yellow plague," the "Mongol invasion").⁴⁸ An organized anti-Chinese movement developed in the northern state of Sonora, where *antichinistas* focused on the unfair economic competition that Chinese immigrants allegedly posed to Mexicans. Although the Chinese population was never large, they dominated local commerce in groceries, dry goods, and general merchandise in border towns such as Nogales and Agua Prieta, where American companies were busy establishing

mines and building railroads. Sonorans, who already felt disadvantaged by the large presence of U.S. capital in the region, greatly resented the Chinese-owned businesses.⁴⁹ The *chino* was “impossible to compete with,” charged anti-Chinese leader José Angel Espinoza.⁵⁰

Antichinista attacks on interracial marriages between Chinese men and Mexican women added another layer to the anti-Chinese rhetoric. Chinese men were described as lecherous, Mexican women who married Chinese men were labeled traitors to their race, and Chinese Mexican children were denigrated as “freaks of nature.” Race, economics, masculinity, and sexual power were all bound together in these attacks.⁵¹

Anti-Chinese sentiment especially flourished after the Mexican Revolution of 1911 tried to destroy all aspects of President Porfirio Díaz’s reign, including its support of U.S. trade and its policies that encouraged Chinese immigration. Intense xenophobia based on a revolutionary *indigenista* nationalism resulted.⁵² Anti-Chinese leader José María Arana’s fiery speeches, for example, pitted the “evils and vices of the Chinese” against the progress and national regeneration of the Mexican nation.⁵³ José Angel Espinoza similarly identified the campaign against the Chinese as a movement “*por la patria y por la raza*” (for the fatherland and for the race). To drive the Chinese out of Mexico was “the moral duty of all true Mexican nationalists,” he proclaimed.⁵⁴ The cover of Espinoza’s 1932 book, *El Ejemplo de Sonora* (*The Example of Sonora*), boldly illustrated this message: a Mexican politician kicks a Chinese immigrant—greedily holding on to a bag of gold and a brick of opium—out of Sonora while holding a newly passed anti-Chinese law in his hand. A worker stands behind him to make sure that the will of the people is carried out while the sun looks on approvingly and heralds the victory.

Although leaders called for immigration restriction laws to limit or stop Chinese immigration to Mexico, violence was the most common response. There was an anti-Chinese riot in Mazatlán in 1886, and several unprovoked attacks on Chinese occurred in Mexico City that same year. Then came the massacre of Chinese in Torreón on May 5, 1911. The “two-day orgy of unbelievable brutality” resulted in the deaths of 303 Chinese (out of an estimated 600 to 700) and \$850,000 worth of property damage to Chinese businesses and homes.⁵⁵



17. The cover of *El Ejemplo de Sonora* by José Angel Espinoza, 1932.

In the heart of the anti-Chinese movement in the state of Sonora, citizens turned to local laws and regulations that restricted where Chinese could live, how they conducted their businesses, and who they could love. In 1922, for example, the Sonoran legislature passed a law (similar to the U.S.’s Geary Act) requiring the registration and identification of all Chinese in the state. The next year, another law mandated the segregation of Chinese through the creation of residential ethnic barrios and prohibited interracial marriages between Mexican females and all Chinese males, including those who were naturalized Mexican citizens. In 1931, the legislature went after

Chinese businesses by requiring that 80 percent of all employees in foreign-owned businesses be Mexican.⁵⁶

The federal government soon acted. In 1908, a new immigration law, inspired by U.S. policies, was passed to regulate immigration and to create the Mexican Immigration Service.⁵⁷ In 1927, the treaty between Mexico and China was canceled, and in July of that year, another race-based immigration law was passed, restricting the immigration of blacks, British Indians, Syrians, Lebanese, Armenians, Palestinians, Arabs, Turks, and Chinese.⁵⁸

By the 1930s, the so-called Chinese problem throughout North and South America had largely been resolved. In addition to the restrictions put in place in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, most countries in Latin America had restricted Chinese immigration in one way or another, varying from total exclusion to various regulations that limited the number of Chinese immigrants allowed in each year.⁵⁹ The campaign to restrict Chinese immigration begun in the United States ended up having far-reaching consequences for the regulation of immigration around the world. By the early twentieth century, a “restrictive international migration regime” was in place. Comprehensive immigration reform would not occur in the United States until 1965.⁶⁰ The Chinese in America would live with the consequences of the exclusion laws for generations. And as other Asian immigrants followed in their footsteps, so did new anti-Asian laws that separated them from the rest of America as well.

5

Japanese Immigrants and the “Yellow Peril”

In 1893, Inota Tawa pleaded with his parents to let him leave their village and seek his fortune in the United States. He had heard fantastic stories of how a simple day laborer like him could earn up to \$2 a day, or almost a thousand yen in one year. This was as much as what a governor in Japan earned. “By all means,” he begged his parents, “let me go to America.”¹ Tawa’s parents reluctantly gave in. Tawa sailed for the United States and landed in Portland, Oregon. He was one of 380,000 Japanese to immigrate to Hawai‘i and the continental U.S. between 1885 and 1924.²

Japanese immigrants, or *issei*, were the second largest group of Asian immigrants to come to the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They left Japan as part of a mass movement of Japanese around the world, and overlapped with the Chinese who remained in the United States as well as the new Chinese immigrants who continued to come during the exclusion era.

Like other Asian immigrants in the United States, most of the early Japanese immigrants were young, male *dekasegi* (sojourners) who intended to return to their homeland. Over time, however, they settled down, called for their families to join them, and built strong ethnic communities. They tried to become American while also maintaining strong connections to Japan.

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Introduction

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Asian immigrants practiced a variety of faiths including Sikhism, Hinduism, and Islam. The Indian subcontinent, under the colonial rule of Great Britain from 1612 to 1947, included all of the present-day countries of South Asia (not just India). I thus use “South Asia” or “British India,” unless a more specific label such as “Punjabi” or “Madrasi” was used in the original source. “India” and “Indian” are used in reference to nationalist activism related to that nation-state inside and outside the Indian subcontinent during the early twentieth century. On this terminology, see Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 31; Joan M. Jensen, *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 101; and Nazli Kibria, “Not Asian, Black, or White? Reflections on South Asian American Racial Identity,” in *Asian American Studies: A Reader*, ed. Min Song and Jean Wu (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 247–54.

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- 6 Donna Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).
- 7 Sometimes these processes are called “migration” and the people involved are called “migrants.” I use “immigration” and “immigrants” to refer to processes and individuals that seem to involve voluntary and permanent or long-term residence in another country, and “migration” and “migrants” to better capture multidirectional movements and the peoples who made them. Together, both terms capture the complexity of human movement across time and space. On similarly broad definitions of migration, see Donna R. Gabaccia and Dirk Hoerder, eds., *Connecting Seas and Connected Ocean Rims: Indian, Atlantic, and Pacific Oceans and China Seas Migrations from the 1830s to the 1930s* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2011), 1–11; Gabaccia, “Do We Still Need Immigration History?”, Madeline Y. Hsu, “Transnationalism and Asian American Studies as a Migration-Centered Project,” *Journal of Asian American Studies*, Transnational and Asian American Studies 11, no. 2 (2008): 185–97; and Philip Q. Yang, “A Theory of Asian Immigration to the United States,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 13, no. 1 (2010): 1–34.
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- 12 Derald Wing Sue et al., “Racial Microaggressions and the Asian American Experience,” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 13, no. 1 (2007): 72.
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 - 16 Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882–1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 6–7.
 - 17 Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 5–6; Mia Tuan, *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites?: The Asian Ethnic Experience Today* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Edward J. W. Park and John S. W. Park, *Probationary Americans: Contemporary Immigration Policies and the Shaping of Asian American Communities* (New York: Routledge, 2005); and Vijay Prashad, *Uncle Swami: South Asians in America Today* (New York: New Press, 2012), ix–x, 11–12.
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Chapter 1: Los Chinos in New Spain and Asians in Early America

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 - 9 Phillips and Phillips, *The Worlds of Christopher Columbus*, 20, 47–49, 83.
 - 10 Christopher Columbus, *The Log of Christopher Columbus*, trans. Robert H. Fuson (Camden, ME: International Marine Publishing Company, 1987); Phillips and Phillips, *The Worlds of Christopher Columbus*, 205, 12.
 - 11 New Spain's territory included what is the Bay Islands (until 1643), the Cayman Islands (until 1670), Central America (as far as the southern border of Costa Rica), Cuba, Florida, Hispaniola (including Haiti until 1697), Jamaica (until 1655), the Mariana Islands, Mexico, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Trinidada (until 1797), and nearly all of the Southwest United States (including all or parts of the modern-day U.S. states of California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Florida), but the northern boundary of New Spain remained undefined until the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819. In 1821, Spain lost the continental territories when it recognized the independence of Mexico. However, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Spanish East Indies (including the Mariana Islands and the Philippines) remained under Spanish rule until the Spanish-American War (1898).
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- 38 Seijas, "The Portuguese Slave Trade," 24–25; Schurz, *The Manila Galleon*, 272.
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Chapter 2: Coolies

- 1 The term "coolie" has various origins. In Hindi, *koli* referred to a race in India; in Tamil, *kuli* meant wages or hire; in Turkic *kuli* related to slaves. Although "coolie" has also been connected to the Chinese term *k'u-li*, or "bitter labor" or "bitter strength," historians agree that the Hindi term was probably adopted by foreigners, especially the British, to refer to Chinese and South Asian menial laborers in European treaty ports. "Culi," the Spanish equivalent, was likely adopted from its English equivalent. "Coolie" has also been used as a pejorative term to castigate foreign indentured laborers and their lowly positions in colonial societies. In some places, it took on racial overtones. In the West Indies, for example, Indians—regardless of their profession or generation in the country—were called "coolies." Although some have sought to reclaim

- the word as a way of identifying with their indentured laborer origins, today the word is still used in denigrating ways to describe cheap laborers in the U.S. and abroad. I use "coolie" here as the historical term used to refer to Asian indentured laborers and as a term that marks both their colonial origins and their unequal status in the Americas. On various definitions and usage of the term "coolie," see Robert L. Irick, *Ch'ing Policy Toward the Coolie Trade, 1847–1878* (Taipei: Chinese Materials Center, 1982), 2–7; Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830–1920* (London: Hansib, 1993), 41–43; Lisa Yun, *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves in Cuba* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), xix; and Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), xix–xxi.
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Chapter 3: Chinese Immigrants in Search of Gold Mountain

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Chapter 4: “The Chinese Must Go!”: The Anti-Chinese Movement

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Chapter 5: Japanese Immigrants and the “Yellow Peril”

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