



Pacific Ties

In addition to dealing with the challenges of land borders, the three North American nation-states—the United States, Canada, and Mexico—also met the Pacific World on their west coasts. The Pacific was at once an attraction and a challenge to these nations and their majority populations. From Columbus on, it lured European explorers of North America with the prospect of a lucrative trade route from western Europe to Asia, especially India and China. The Spanish Empire linked Mexico with East Asia, by way of the Spanish Philippines. By the 1600s, Latin American silver and corn penetrated deep into the Chinese interior, with Chinese luxury items to be found in wealthy households in Spanish America. People from China lived in Mexico as early as the 1630s.

The prospects for continental dominion from sea to sea helped fan the flames of U.S. expansionism, and the struggle for attractive ports pitted Americans and their government against British, Spanish, and Mexican authorities. The cultural and economic impulses that drove U.S. expansionism in North America lead to military interventions and ultimately to the conquest and acquisition of territory in East Asia and the Pacific. A U.S. fleet entered Tokyo Bay to force Japan to open to American trade in 1853, just five years after the end of the U.S.-Mexico War. By 1900, the United States had begun active trade and missionizing in China, acquired the Philippines upon defeating Spain in the 1898 Spanish-American war, and overthrown Hawaii's monarchy and annexed the archipelago.

East Asia and North America, then, had become tightly linked. Among those who were most aware of this were the residents of southern Chinese provinces, who had long had mercantile and shipping ties with Southeast Asia and much of the Pacific basin. From the 1840s to the end of the century, several million residents of southern China moved to Hawaii, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Africa, the Philippines, and the Americas in search of work and trading opportunities. Several hundred thousand came to Canada and the United States, where they played critical roles in railroad construction and agricultural labor. The overwhelming preponderance of the migrants were men, and most hoped to earn enough money to return home with greater economic independence. Although they were a small proportion of the North American population, they were highly concentrated in the West, at one point constituting around 10 percent of the population of California and 30 percent of Idaho. Japanese and Filipino migrants would come to the west coasts of

Canada and the United States (and, to a lesser extent, Mexico) later in the century and in smaller numbers.

Majority populations treated Asians in North America with great hostility and brutality. They demeaned them as drudges and opium fiends, subjected them to mob violence and job discrimination, and banned them from marrying people of other backgrounds. White racial self-conception in much of the western United States and Canada centered on profound contrasts with Asians. By the early twentieth century, a large set of laws restricted the ability of Asian migrants to live in certain places, own property, or become citizens. Similar resentments toward Asians rose to the fore in Northwestern Mexico in the early twentieth century, resulting in parallel laws and practices.

This chapter explores the ways that regulating Asian migration shaped the international borders in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although conflict and controversies over migration since the 1950s have centered on Latin Americans entering the United States, Asian migration was foundational in prompting the development of laws, bureaucracies, and practices aimed at border enforcement. And although contemporary immigration debates would seem to highlight the economic and racial differences between Americans and Canadians on the one hand, and Mexicans on the other, from the vantage of Asian migration, North America's three nations seemed more alike than different. Prompted by white laborers in the West, the U.S. and Canadian governments implemented restrictions against migration from China and Japan, the first measures aimed explicitly at banning the entry of specific racial groups. Those migrants who subverted the regulations became, from the perspective of the U.S. government, the first "illegal aliens." And the lives of all Asians and Asian Americans were deeply marked by this illegality, just as all Latinos have been impacted by immigration enforcement more recently. The term *wetback*, which later in the twentieth century would come to be used as a derogatory term for Mexican migrants in the United States, was first applied to people from China after the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act severely curtailed their entry into the United States. Americans living in the Northeast sometimes called French Canadian immigrants the "Chinese of the eastern states." Chinese migrants were the first targets of U.S. immigration enforcement, decades before the 1924 founding of the United States Border Patrol. Just as the United States expelled many Mexicans (and Mexican Americans) during the 1930s, so, too, did the Mexican state of Sonora expel most of its Chinese-descent population in the same years, as Mexican nationalists condemned Chinese in terms very similar to those Canadians and Americans had used decades before.

In short, we cannot understand the modern borders of North America and their enforcement without understanding the historical ties between North America and Asia.

DOCUMENTS

The 1882 passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act marked the first specific exclusion of a national group in U.S. history. The law, whose text we present as Document 1, banned the entry of Chinese laborers into the United States. Its detailed provisions for identity certificates would later be expanded into the modern system of passports and green cards, and its provisions for the careful inspection and identification of immigrants would come to be standard practice with all border crossers.

Mexico and Canada saw similar anti-Chinese movements, whose adherents believed that the Chinese could never become part of their nations. In Document 2, the Sonora Legislature bans marriages between Mexican women and Chinese men, even if the men became Mexican citizens (as many did). In Document 3, a British Columbian labor leader condemns Asian laborers in ways that similarly permanently place them outside the boundaries of the nation and the working class on whose behalf he spoke. And he downplays the significance of the Canada-U.S. boundary, asserting that the white workers of both countries share the same interests and are representatives of the same civilization.

Chinese migration and efforts to halt it were a leading public issue in the late nineteenth century. In Document 4, Julian Ralph, a journalist writing for a popular news magazine, describes the illicit entry of Chinese into the United States from British Columbia. The ambivalence of the Canadian government about Chinese exclusion, the ability of would-be immigrants to forge documents and assume false identities, and the landscape of the border all worked together to allow for extensive Chinese entry into the United States in the early years of exclusion.

Document 5 is an excerpt from the memoirs of Clifford Perkins, who worked for the U.S. federal government as a "Chinese Inspector" in Arizona starting in 1910. Writing decades later, Perkins recalled both the challenges of identifying and capturing Chinese migrants banned from entry and his relationships with Chinese who were allowed to live in the country. He presents himself as at once sympathetic to the migrants and intent upon doing his job of enforcing Chinese exclusion. Intentionally or not, his writings offer a glimpse of the Chinese community in the United States that endured despite social hostility and legal harassment.

The final two documents are cartoons from mass circulation magazines in the late nineteenth century. Famed artist Frederick Remington, best known for his depiction of nineteenth-century cowboys and Indians, drew the image reproduced in Document 6. It captures the dangers of border crossing. Is it sympathetic toward its subject or more stereotypical in its portrayal? How does it compare to images in circulation today about the suffering of migrants? Document 7, entitled "And Still They Come!" depicts Chinese migrants entering the United States by way of British Columbia and Mexico behind the back of a guileless American eagle.

1. The United States Government Passes Chinese Exclusion, 1882

An Act to execute certain treaty stipulations relating to Chinese.

Whereas in the opinion of the Government of the United States the coming of Chinese laborers to this country endangers the good order of certain localities

An act to execute certain treaty stipulations relating to the Chinese, May 6, 1882; Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789-1996; General Records of the United States Government; Record Group 11; National Archives.

within the territory thereof: Therefore, *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled*, That from and after the expiration of ninety days next after the passage of this act, and until the expiration of ten years next after the passage of this act, the coming of Chinese laborers to the United States be, and the same is hereby, suspended; and during such suspension it shall not be lawful for any Chinese laborer to come, or having so come after the expiration of said ninety days to remain within the United States.

SEC. 2. That the master of any vessel who shall knowingly bring within the United States on such vessel, and land or permit to be landed, any Chinese laborer, from any foreign port or place, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and on conviction thereof shall be punished by a fine of not more than five hundred dollars for each and every such Chinese laborer so brought, and maybe also imprisoned for a term not exceeding one year.

SEC. 3. That the two foregoing sections shall not apply to Chinese laborers who were in the United States on the seventeenth day of November, eighteen hundred and eighty, or who shall have come into the same before the expiration of ninety days next after the passage of this act, and who shall produce to such master before going on board such vessel, and shall produce to the collector of the port in the United States at which such vessel shall arrive, the evidence hereinafter in this act required of his being one of the laborers in this section mentioned; nor shall the two foregoing sections apply to the case of any master whose vessel, being bound to a port not within the United States, shall come within the jurisdiction of the United States by reason of being in distress or in stress of weather, or touching at any port of the United States on its voyage to any foreign port or place: Provided, That all Chinese laborers brought on such vessel shall depart with the vessel on leaving port.

SEC. 4. That for the purpose of properly identifying Chinese laborers who were in the United States on the seventeenth day of November eighteen hundred and eighty, or who shall have come into the same before the expiration of ninety days next after the passage of this act, and in order to furnish them with the proper evidence of their right to go from and come to the United States of their free will and accord, as provided by the treaty between the United States and China dated November seventeenth, eighteen hundred and eighty, the collector of customs of the district from which any such Chinese laborer shall depart from the United States shall, in person or by deputy, go on board each vessel having on board any such Chinese laborers and cleared or about to sail from his district for a foreign port, and on such vessel make a list of all such Chinese laborers, which shall be entered in registry-books to be kept for that purpose, in which shall be stated the name, age, occupation, last place of residence, physical marks of peculiarities, and all facts necessary for the identification of each of such Chinese laborers, which books shall be safely kept in the custom-house.; and every such Chinese laborer so departing from the United States shall be entitled to, and shall receive, free of any charge or cost upon application therefor, from the collector or his deputy, at the time such list is taken, a certificate, signed by the collector or his deputy and attested by his seal of office, in such form as the Secretary of the

Treasury shall prescribe, which certificate shall contain a statement of the name, age, occupation, last place of residence, persona description, and facts of identification of the Chinese laborer to whom the certificate is issued, corresponding with the said list and registry in all particulars. In case any Chinese laborer after having received such certificate shall leave such vessel before her departure he shall deliver his certificate to the master of the vessel, and if such Chinese laborer shall fail to return to such vessel before her departure from port the certificate shall be delivered by the master to the collector of customs for cancellation. The certificate herein provided for shall entitle the Chinese laborer to whom the same is issued to return to and re-enter the United States upon producing and delivering the same to the collector of customs of the district at which such Chinese laborer shall seek to re-enter; and upon delivery of such certificate by such Chinese laborer to the collector of customs at the time of re-entry in the United States said collector shall cause the same to be filed in the custom-house anti duly canceled.

SEC. 5. That any Chinese laborer mentioned in section four of this act being in the United States, and desiring to depart from the United States by land, shall have the right to demand and receive, free of charge or cost, a certificate of identification similar to that provided for in section four of this act to be issued to such Chinese laborers as may desire to leave the United States by water; and it is hereby made the duty of the collector of customs of the district next adjoining the foreign country to which said Chinese laborer desires to go to issue such certificate, free of charge or cost, upon application by such Chinese laborer, and to enter the same upon registry-books to be kept by him for the purpose, as provided for in section four of this act.

SEC. 6 That in order to the faithful execution of articles one and two of the treaty in this act before mentioned, every Chinese person other than a laborer who may be entitled by said treaty and this act to come within the United States, and who shall be about to come to the United States, shall be identified as so entitled by the Chinese Government in each case, such identity to be evidenced by a certificate issued under the authority of said government, which certificate shall be in the English language or (if not in the English language) accompanied by a translation into English, stating such right to come, and which certificate shall state the name, title or official rank, if any, the age, height, and all physical peculiarities, former and present occupation or profession, and place of residence in China of the person to whom the certificate is issued and that such person is entitled, conformably to the treaty in this act mentioned to come within the United States. Such certificate shall be prima-facie evidence of the fact set forth therein, and shall be produced to the collector of customs, or his deputy, of the port in the district in the United States at which the person named therein shall arrive.

SEC. 7. That any person who shall knowingly and falsely alter or substitute any name for the name written in such certificate or forge any such certificate, or knowingly utter any forged or fraudulent certificate, or falsely personate any person named in any such certificate, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor; and upon conviction thereof shall be fined in a sum not exceeding one thousand dollars, and imprisoned in a penitentiary for a term of not more than five years.

SEC. 8. That the master of any vessel arriving in the United States from any foreign port or place shall, at the same time he delivers a manifest of the cargo, and if there be no cargo, then at the time of making a report of the entry of the vessel pursuant to law, in addition to the other matter required to be reported, and before landing, or permitting to land, any Chinese passengers, deliver and report to the collector of customs of the district in which such vessels shall have arrived a separate list of all Chinese passengers taken on board his vessel at any foreign port or place, and all such passengers on board the vessel at that time. Such list shall show the names of such passengers (and if accredited officers of the Chinese Government traveling on the business of that government, or their servants, with a note of such facts), and the names and other particulars, as shown by their respective certificates; and such list shall be sworn to by the master in the manner required by law in relation to the manifest of the cargo. Any willful refusal or neglect of any such master to comply with the provisions of this section shall incur the same penalties and forfeiture as are provided for a refusal or neglect to report and deliver a manifest of the cargo.

SEC. 9. That before any Chinese passengers are landed from any such line vessel, the collector, or his deputy, shall proceed to examine such passenger, comparing the certificate with the list and with the passengers; and no passenger shall be allowed to land in the United States from such vessel in violation of law.

SEC. 10. That every vessel whose master shall knowingly violate any of the provisions of this act shall be deemed forfeited to the United States, and shall be liable to seizure and condemnation in any district of the United States into which such vessel may enter or in which she may be found.

SEC. 11. That any person who shall knowingly bring into or cause to be brought into the United States by land, or who shall knowingly aid or abet the same, or aid or abet the landing in the United States from any vessel of any Chinese person not lawfully entitled to enter the United States, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and shall, on conviction thereof, be fined in a sum not exceeding one thousand dollars, and imprisoned for a term not exceeding one year.

SEC. 12. That no Chinese person shall be permitted to enter the United States by land without producing to the proper officer of customs the certificate in this act required of Chinese persons seeking to land from a vessel. And any Chinese person found unlawfully within the United States shall be caused to be removed therefrom to the country from whence he came, by direction of the President of the United States, and at the cost of the United States, after being brought before some justice, judge, or commissioner of a court of the United States and found to be one not lawfully entitled to be or remain in the United States.

SEC. 13. That this act shall not apply to diplomatic and other officers of the Chinese Government traveling upon the business of that government, whose credentials shall be taken as equivalent to the certificate in this act mentioned, and shall exempt them and their body and house-hold servants from the provisions of this act as to other Chinese persons.

SEC. 14. That hereafter no State court or court of the United States shall admit Chinese to citizenship; and all laws in conflict with this act are hereby repealed.

SEC. 15. That the words "Chinese laborers," wherever used in this act shall be construed to mean both skilled and unskilled laborers and Chinese employed in mining.

Approved, May 6, 1882.

2. Sonora Legislative Bans Mexican Chinese Marriage, 1923

ALEJO BAY, Constitutional Governor of the Free and Sovereign State of Sonora, to its inhabitants makes known:

That the Honorable State Congress, has passed the following Law 31 PROHIBITING MARRIAGE AMONG MEXICAN WOMEN AND CHINESE INDIVIDUALS.

ARTICLE 1—Marriages between Mexican women and individuals of the Chinese race are prohibited, even if said individuals obtain a Mexican naturalization certificate.

ARTICLE 2—Marriages or illicit unions between Chinese men and Mexican women shall be punished by a fine of \$100.00 to \$500.00, depending upon the case, and shall be applied by local authorities in the place in which the infraction is committed.

—State Congress, Hermosillo, Sonora. December 13, 1923.

3. British Columbia Labor Leader Warns of Dangers of Asian Migration, 1907

Fraternal Delegate M.A. Beach, representing the Vancouver, British Columbia, Trades and Labor Council, read his report at this time, which was received with great pleasure by the Convention, and was ordered made a part of the proceedings, as follows:

Mr. Chairman and Delegates to the State Federation of Labor:

I assure you it is a very great pleasure for me to be able to meet with you on this most important occasion. While I am sent here from a foreign country, I feel quite at home here, in your beautiful city, as I have had the pleasure of being here and surrounding country on various occasions, in fact have spent a number of years on this side of the imaginary boundary line. I say, Mr. President, imaginary line, because I suppose from a national standpoint or a political standpoint we are divided, but from a wage-earners' standpoint we are not divided, we must not be divided. We are working for a common cause, the bettering of conditions for the wage-earner; what is good for you is good for me, and what is good for me is good for

José Ángel Espinoza, *El Ejemplo de Sonora* (Mexico City: n.p., 1932), 35. Translation by Julia María Schiavone Camacho.

Proceedings of the Washington State Federation of Labor Held at Bellingham, Washington, January 2-3-4-5, 1907 (Seattle: Washington State Federation of Labor, 1907), 27-28.

you; and, Mr. President and Brother Delegates, while I bring you greeting from a foreign land, I do so as a brother, as one of you, and not as a stranger ...

We in British Columbia have existing conditions which are very dangerous to the welfare of the white wage-earner of this country, namely the influx of cheap coolie labor, the Japanese, Chinese, Hindoo and Dukhoboos. We have succeeded in a measure in getting the ears of a capitalistic government to listen to our cries when we got the head tax on the Chinese increased from \$50 to \$500, which has made a very noticeable difference in the influx of Chinese, but we shall not rest until we get total prohibition of the yellow evil.

4. Journalist Julian Ralph Describes Human Smuggling in the Pacific Northwest, 1891

Our Exclusion Act bears date October, 1888.... Bearing the date of this act in mind, and understanding that there is only one steamship line to Canada from Asia, the extent of the smuggling (of new-comers) must be apparent in the number of Mongolians which that line of ships has brought from their country. The whole number is 4008, with and without certificates, in the period between 1887 (a year before our Exclusion Act) and the month of July, 1890. Of this 4000, some were returning on certificates and some were new immigrants. It is generally understood that 99 in 100 of these latter go to British Columbia in tending to smuggle themselves over our border. In all, since '87, these number 1910. The steamers of the Canadian Pacific Line arrive at intervals of about three weeks, and bring from 100 to 150 Chinamen at a time. One came while I was in Victoria. It carried 125 Mongols, 74 with certificates and 51 without. Several of those who carried certificates had obtained them improperly—nearly a dozen, as I remember the case—and were detained on the ship. Three weeks before that another steamer arrived with 140 Chinamen, 94 without certificates and 46 with those documents. Out of the 46 were 18 accused of having obtained their papers fraudulently, and 15 confessed their guilt. The other three were stubborn and stolid, and were released.

Every Chinaman who leaves Canada takes a certificate which shall serve as his passport when he returns. He may take out a certificate when he does not mean to leave the country. He may take one when he is merely going to smuggle himself over our border, and never means to go back to the Dominion. Or he may take a certificate when he has made all the money he needs, and is on his way to China to end his days there, after years of that luxurious idleness which the average laborer counts upon obtaining in China from the judicious investment of \$2000—the coolie's plum. Of course it is fair to presume that in many cases the certificates are demanded by men who mean to return. At all events, these certificates, which are passports to Canada, and indirectly to the United States, have a money value. They are sold in China. They can be purchased openly to-day in the streets of Hong-Kong, like ducks or chopsticks. There

they possess a fluctuating value, and have been known to fetch as high as \$65. Sometimes they are let go at a less price than the \$50 they are expected to save in the avoidance of the poll-tax, the fluctuations being governed by the demand at the time of the departure of a vessel, because only so many uncertified Chinese laborers may take passage on the steamers under the Canadian law—one to every fifty tons of the ship's burthen. Of those who carry certificates and of those not of the laboring class as many as choose may come.

It is to guard against trickery with the certificates that the customs officials at Victoria and Vancouver have all that they can manage. "When a Chinaman enters the office of the collector to apply for a certificate, several men are called in—the interpreter and a clerk or two. The Chinaman gives his name, age, place of birth, and other particulars of value in identifying him. He is asked to step upon the platform of a measuring machine, such as is in use in our army and elsewhere—an upright pole marked off into feet and inches, and fitted with a sliding rod that gives the man's height when it rests upon his head. All this the Chinaman perfectly comprehends; but what he does not know is the description of himself that the men around him are going to write down in the big government book after he has gone, a description which takes in his general appearance, the peculiarities of his features and limbs and shape, with notes of every scar or pit or mark upon his hands, neck, face, and head.

And yet, in spite of these precautions, Chinamen who go away from Canada looking at least forty years of age, return appearing to be only twenty-four; and others who measure five feet and nine inches when they depart, come back in a few months several inches shorter or taller than when they sailed for China. They are new-comers, with the certificates of other men, of course. The silent scanning of the features of applicants for certificates does not pass unnoticed by these shrewd and intelligent people. The manner in which they endeavor to make themselves appear like the persons whose certificates they carry shows this. They frequently go as far as to disfigure themselves for life in order to save the \$50, and to bear out what they judge must be written in the customs book against the numerals that mark each of the certificates—which, by-the-way, contain no word of the descriptions of the men who take them out. While I was in Victoria one of these tricksters arrived with a great scar burned in his forehead, a cut disfiguring one cheek, and a deep pit burned in his neck. When questioned, and proven to be a fraudulent fellow, he confessed that he had never been to Canada before.

The men who sell the certificates accompany the sales with descriptions of themselves, and with a great amount of the information they acquired of the localities they were familiar with. As to the general facts about Caucasian life, there are plenty of men in China and on the ships to post the immigrants fully.

Yet, petty as the smuggling is, it is worth while to have measured it, and it will be equally well to understand why it is possible, and how it is carried on. Whoever would understand it must know that the entire northern boundary of our nation, from the Lake of the Woods to the Pacific coast, is a gigantic wilderness. The prairie, the plains of the western provinces, and the thick-clustered mountains of British Columbia are repeated in our Minnesota, North Dakota,

Montana, Idaho, and Washington. Geologically and naturally there is no difference between the countries; the boundary line is an arbitrary mark. At intervals of a mile apart this otherwise intangible division is established by means of surveyors' "monuments," that are imbedded in the earth, and stand slightly above it, each marked "B. A." on one side and "U.S.A." on the other. There are few settlements on the line—almost none—and the whole region is practically known to men only as they cross it by the watercourses in canoes, or the far-apart trails of the great grass plateaus, and of the valleys between the mountains. There is no part of it over which a Chinaman may not pass into our country without fear of hinderance; there are scarcely any parts of it where he may not walk boldly across it at high noon. Indeed, the same is measurably the case all along our northern boundary—even upon the St. Lawrence north of our State, where smuggling has always been a means of livelihood whenever varying tariffs made it remunerative.

The lawless practice does go on from one end of the border to the other. Chinamen at work in the forests beside the Columbia steal in by the Kootenay trail; others cross the St. Lawrence, others the plains and prairie, others the Great Lakes. But, all combined, this defiance of our laws is so inconsiderable as to be unworthy of serious attention. What it might become if the Chinese really "swarmed" in Canada, and the waters of Washington State were closed against the invaders is quite another matter.

For it is in those waters that nearly all the smuggling goes on at present. Let those who are unfamiliar with that region glance at the map. They will see that the northwest corner of the State of Washington is torn off, and the space that is left is filled with water dotted with an archipelago. The island of Vancouver fits partially into the gaping corner as if it had been torn out by some gigantic convulsion. The tatters and débris of the rent form the archipelago. Our national interest centred in that corner long ago when that portion of the boundary was in dispute, and the tension of a war feeling was only relieved when a foreign arbitrator settled the boundary, and gave us the island of San Juan, the most important in the group. The city of Victoria confines nearly all the population on that corner of Vancouver Island; the city of Vancouver is the main settlement on the British Columbia shore; and on our borders are such little places as Whatcom, New Dungeness, and Port Angeles, in the State of Washington. Port Townsend, on Puget Sound, is the principal American town near by, and the headquarters of the scanty force of customs officials who are supposed to guard against the smuggling, and who are entitled to the presumption that they are doing their best in this direction. Victoria has only 20,000 population, Vancouver fewer still, and the islands only here and there a house. Deer abound upon these islands, which are heavily timbered, and the waterways between them feel the keels of but few vessels—of none at all, except the smallest craft, outside the main channels. It would be hard to imagine a more difficult region to police, or a fairer field for smugglers. Old London itself has scarcely a greater tangle of crooked and confusing thoroughfares than this archipelago possesses, and these waterways are so narrow and sheltered that mere oarsmen can safely and easily travel many of them. It is a smugglers' paradise.

5. Clifford Perkins Describes Work as "Chinese Inspector" in Arizona, 1978

Tucson's commercial and professional establishments were operated primarily by Anglos, as were the firms catering to the expanding winter tourist trade and to the growing list of sanitariums built for health seekers. The restaurants and laundries, on the other hand, were operated almost entirely by Chinese brought into the country originally as laborers. Forbidden by law to own property or engage in commerce, their search for work had carried them away from the west coast. They were industrious and maintained gardens well past any area close enough to town to be considered by most citizens as desirable, and they provided most of the local residents with their fresh vegetables, chickens and eggs. Horse drawn, flat roofed wagons, with scales and brass scoops dangling from the tops, carried fresh produce, poultry and eggs to housewives every day.

These "Orientals" and their colony became a major focus of my activities a few days after my arrival [in 1910].

Chinese inspectors and Immigrant inspectors, working with Customs line riders, made it increasingly difficult for Chinese to get into the country via busy ports and populated areas, and as a result smuggling activities shifted to the sparsely inhabited sections of southern New Mexico, Arizona and California. By the time I joined the Service, few Chinese were coming in east of El Paso. Some continued to enter through gulf and west coast ports, but by far the greatest numbers were entering in the vicinity of towns on or near the Mexican border and, for a while, through Canada. This border phase of law enforcement, carried on by a comparatively small number of inspectors working twelve to fifteen hours a day, seven days a week, continued until about 1917, when the Service was faced with new problems arising from the passage of the Literacy Act.

After 1893 every Chinese alien was required to carry identification, including a photograph. Such procedures invariably led to forgeries and duplications. Photography in 1893 was rather rudimentary, and many pictures on certificates of residence faded with time. Also, most of the Chinese who were required to register were adults, since the immigrants up to that point had consisted almost entirely of males over twenty-one years of age. Eighteen to twenty years later, it was almost impossible to be sure the photograph on a certificate of residence was of the person presenting it. Copies of the originals, with photographs, were supposed to have been filed in the office of the U.S. collector of internal revenue of the district where the application was made, but records were sketchy. Additionally, the forms varied from one locality to another, so the fact that one document did not look exactly like another meant very little.

It was important to prove that a suspect picked up coming into the United States after a trip to China had actually been out of the country and was here illegally. Of course when he was apprehended at Tucson, Phoenix, or some other point near the border and was suspected of having just reentered the

country from Mexico, he was thoroughly searched and his clothing was examined. In some cases identifying marks were found, but the Chinese soon learned to remove all such markings. Strangely enough, it was sometimes possible to trap them by making a casual comment to them in Spanish. This they might answer unthinkingly, though they would not respond to questions put to them in English. This was not *prima facie* evidence, but it often served as a lever to cause a suspect to confess where he had been.

For a time the Service hired Mexicans in Nogales, Sonora, to photograph Chinese on their arrival by train from the south and, if possible, to take pictures of new arrivals living in Nogales. Such pictures were supplied to the Tucson and other border Immigration offices, where they were filed by approximate age, shape of face, and body type. This reference material was often useful in establishing the fact that apprehended Chinese had been in Mexico as recently as a few weeks or months previously.

We also arranged to have pictures taken in Tucson of persons suspected of illegal entry from Mexico and sent to ports and agents on the border for referral to residents and officials in or near Mexico. In a number of instances we were able to secure witnesses who could swear in court that the alien had been in Mexico on a certain date. Bringing witnesses in from Mexico to testify in court had to be discontinued after a couple of years, however; they got to making a good thing of it since they received money to cover their expenses up and back. Their credibility suffered when one witness identified our Chinese interpreter, maintained in the office full-time by the Service, as a man he had seen getting off a train in Mexico.

With only ten inspectors to cover Tucson and the surrounding countryside for forty or fifty miles, we were on duty twelve to fifteen hours a shift, seven days a week, alternating from days to nights and back every two weeks. My room was close enough to the depot so when a passenger train was due I could clean up a little before putting on my uniform without wasting too much time, but there was many a day when one more change of clothing would have finished me with the Service. Sometimes, in addition to inspecting two or three passenger trains, we opened as many as three hundred freight cars on a shift, regular loaded freights usually having from fifty to sixty cars and empties as many as seventy.

Chinese attempting to reach inland cities undetected hid in every conceivable place on trains: in box cars loaded with freight, under the tenders of the locomotives, in the space above the entryway in the old passenger cars, in staterooms rented for them by accomplices, and even in the four-foot-wide ice vents across each end of the insulated Pacific Fruit Express refrigerated cars, iced or not. We also had to check the passenger cars in the depot for travelling Chinese, making a record of their names, where they had boarded, their destinations, and any documents they carried. The information was then verified with the conductors to be sure it was correct insofar as they knew it. They were familiar with our work and told us right away whenever they had seen a Chinese board the train at a small station, especially if it had been on the side of the car away from the platform or under other circumstances that might indicate he was being put aboard by smugglers.

Entering the United States by wagon or on foot through that country was a hazardous, lonely proposition, and must have been a bewildering experience to

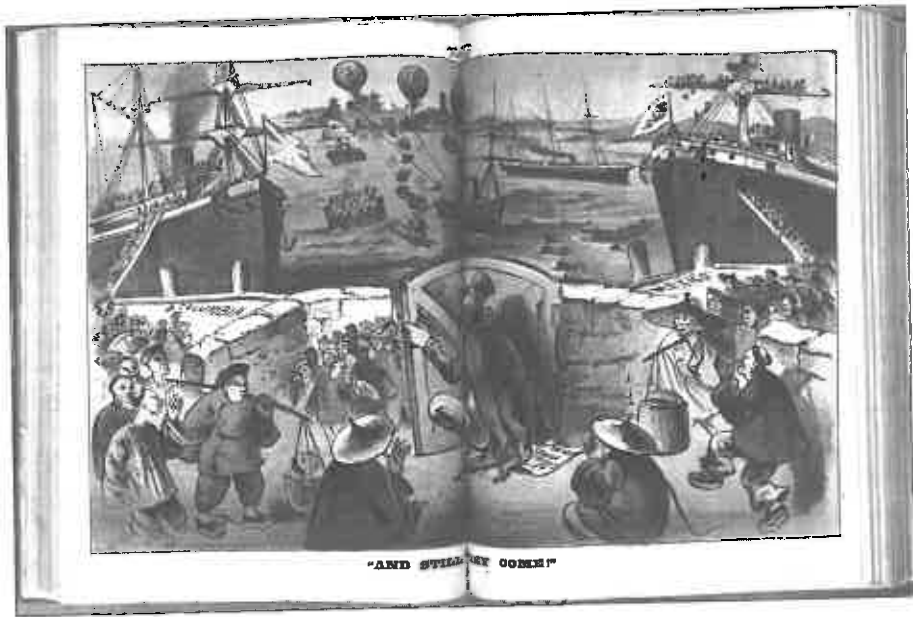
the majority of Chinese who made the attempt. They had made a long and no doubt miserable ocean voyage; they had to learn a new language, become proficient at unaccustomed work in a foreign land, adapt to different customs, clothing and surroundings. About the time things became familiar, the aliens would be put aboard a mechanical conveyance they probably had never seen before. It would carry them north through uninhabited, barren and sometimes mountainous country and leave them in a sun-baked town of drab adobe buildings.

Nobody wanted them; few people made any attempt to understand them; and detection would make futile all of the effort and money expended. Mexican railroad section hands seldom would help them because they did not want anyone around who might get them in trouble; the native Indians seemed to resent their passage through the harsh land; and uniformed officials who knew the country were sent out on horseback with guns to catch them. It was little wonder so few of the Chinese we apprehended gave us trouble and so many appeared to be almost glad they were going to be sent back to China. Often it was hard not to feel sorry for some of them, even though enforcing immigration laws was our job. They had come so far, and their wants were so few in a land of so much opportunity. I did not know it then, but there would be many times when I would be caught between the natural inclination to help another human being and my responsibilities as an officer, and guided by the conviction that it is far easier not to take the first wrong step than the second.

6. Frederick Remington Depicts Suffering of Chinese Migrant, 1891



7. Cartoonist Points to Chinese Use of Canadian and Mexican Borders to Enter the United States, 1880



ESSAYS

Chinese exclusion led to the first patrolling of North American borders to halt the entry of an entire category of people. In the first essay, Patrick Ettinger of California State University-Sacramento shows just what a difficult task this was. Chinese and other migrants were able to draw on a number of advantages, including the physical and social geographies of both border regions, to elude understaffed federal agencies and to enter the United States illicitly. Professional smuggling rings, a detailed knowledge of the loopholes in American law, and heavy local cross-border traffic expedited their crossings. Ettinger concludes that early border enforcement efforts enjoyed limited success at best. These were landscapes beyond the control of governments.

"And Still They Come," *Wasp*, Dec. 4, 1880.

Chinese exclusion, however, did have an enormous impact on Chinese living in the United States. In the second essay, University of Minnesota History Professor Erika Lee takes her readers into the daily lives of these people, arguing that they led a "shadowed existence" because of immigration law and its enforcement. Chinese immigrants were virtually the only residents of the country to face deportation, and they—along with American-born citizens of Chinese descent—were subjected to harassment, extortion, raids that disrupted normal business and social life, and outright physical violence. The federal government may not have been powerful enough to effectively patrol American borders, but its efforts haunted the lives of all Chinese-descent people in the country.

The Limits of Early U.S. Border Enforcement

PATRICK ETTINGER

In January 1929, William Whalen and G. C. Wilmoth, United States Immigration Service supervisors employed on the U.S.-Mexico border, traveled north to Washington, D.C., to a conference addressing the problems of the Immigration Service. Drawing on his experience supervising south Texas ports of entry on the border, Whalen contributed an hour-long address, "Mexican Border Problems." He spoke in an exasperated but bemused manner of the resourcefulness of migrants attempting to circumvent U.S. immigration laws along the U.S.-Mexico border in south Texas. Wilmoth gave a similar talk about border crossings in West Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. Together, their speeches detailed the host of ruses, disguises, deceptions, and tricks that northward immigrants, predominantly Mexican, used to make their way past U.S. immigration inspectors on the border. Migrants and smugglers, Whalen confessed with a mix of admiration and chagrin, had demonstrated such ingenuity that "[w]e sometimes wonder what they will spring on us next."

Their 1929 conference reports no doubt reflected well the experiences of the dozens of immigration inspectors working along the southern U.S. border—and perhaps too the sentiments of many of the newly commissioned Border Patrol agents who worked in the vast expanses between formal ports of entry. For historians, they provide a glimpse of the everyday shuffle of life on the international boundary line joining the United States and Mexico in the 1920s. But they also offer insight into the complex history of undocumented immigration, in particular the persistent difficulty of effectively enforcing immigration laws on land boundaries. For Whalen, Wilmoth, and their Immigration Service colleagues on the Canadian and Mexican border were not *initiating* a system of

Patrick Ettinger, "We sometimes wonder what they will spring on us next': Immigrants and Border Enforcement in the American West, 1882-1930," *Western Historical Quarterly* 37 (Summer 2006): 159-181.

border inspections in the late 1920s. Rather, their 1929 status reports came on the heels of a forty-five year, multi-million dollar effort on the part of the federal government to establish and enforce immigration regulations on the nation's international borders. In detailing the difficulties attendant to the enforcement of the national boundary and highlighting the continued permeability of the border, their reports nicely conveyed the state of the American border control regime. They also relate the enigmatic nature of the "official" border as it stood in the late 1920s. Border inspection stations were both highly visible, commanding features of the borderlands and, for many a determined migrant, almost insignificant.

This article looks closely at evolving patterns of illicit border crossing on the Canadian and Mexican borders at the turn of the twentieth century, providing a snapshot of the concomitant rise of unsanctioned immigration and border-crossing controls. In terms of border enforcement, remarkable transformations occurred along the American sides of both borders in this era. But amidst dramatic change came stubborn continuities as well. Border-crossing patterns changed, but practices of illicit entry survived, practices that had profound implications for the history of the twentieth-century American West.

Whether focusing on borders through either the prism of the Chinese or Mexican experience, much scholarship emphasizes the successful imposition of state power at the international boundaries. That is, the authors accentuate the power of the state to put in place bureaucratic fortifications to govern border crossings. Without a doubt, that is part of the story, for both the Canadian and Mexican borders did change dramatically between 1882 and 1929 in terms of the rigor of immigration controls. They went from being virtually unguarded in the 1880s to heavily controlled by 1924. By the end of the 1920s, highly visible immigration inspection and patrol forces had been put in place on the nation's borders, and they enjoyed some considerable successes in enforcing immigration laws.

From another perspective, however, continuity, rather than change, seems the more important story. Borders are part of the visible apparatus by which states attempt to effect state power, but the extent to which state borders can "impose their jurisdiction on 'the people'" is contested. One common feature in the construction of modern borders, wrote Michiel Baud and William Van Schendel, authors of a comparative study of international borderlands, has been "the efforts of people to use, manipulate, or avoid the resulting border restrictions." In late-nineteenth-century American West, migrants and smugglers took on this role. Faced with new restrictions on border crossings, they created methods of illicit entry that kept these borders open—and border officials such as William Whalen at their wit's end. In effect, the period saw the simultaneous "drawing" and "erasing" of the official border, its gradual articulation and elaboration in the midst of consistently successful efforts to undermine it.

Efforts to "draw" or fortify American land borders in the 1880s and beyond began in the political imagination. In fact, they were the incidental consequence of complex and competing political efforts, begun in earnest in the 1870s, to have the federal government define and filter out those deemed to be the wrong

sort of immigrant aliens. Proponents of placing restrictions on immigration achieved two initial successes in 1882, with the passage that year of two seminal pieces of restrictive legislation. Responding to anti-Chinese agitation in the West, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in the spring of 1882, which instituted a ten-year suspension on the immigration of Chinese laborers. Months later, faced with warnings about the dangers of pauper and convict immigration from Europe, Congress approved a general Immigration Act that prohibited the landing of "any convict, lunatic, idiot, or any person unable to take care of himself or herself without becoming a public charge" and provided for the onboard inspection of all arriving immigrants. Both pieces of legislation ultimately would introduce changes to the Canadian and Mexican borderlands, but the ban on Chinese immigration had an immediate effect.

The surreptitious passage of Chinese immigrants into the U.S. across the western reaches of the Canadian border in the 1880s marked the beginning of unsanctioned immigration into the United States. That an illicit cross-border traffic in Chinese laborers would first develop on the Washington Territory-British Columbia frontier is not surprising. Chinese had lived and worked in British Columbia in substantial numbers since at least 1858, when Chinese from California and China joined the thousands of miners entering the region during the Fraser River gold rush. The Chinese population in British Columbia swelled in the early 1880s when recruitment of Chinese labor for construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway brought an additional 15,000 Chinese from the United States and China. After the Chinese Exclusion Act closed the door to the U.S., those who desired entry to the U.S. began to do so surreptitiously. In so doing, they availed themselves of natural advantages found in the physical and cultural geography of the Canadian-American borderlands.

According to contemporary accounts, border crossings followed close on the heels of exclusion. An October 1883 newspaper report from San Francisco warned that it was "a fact well known to the residents of British Columbia that at the present time Chinamen are crossing the [United States] border in batches of 20 or 30" by means of Puget Sound. Although newspaper accounts of the volume of smuggling ought to be treated skeptically, a fair amount of smuggling was, without a doubt, going on. One border official testifying to a congressional committee in 1890 placed the figure at 2,500 annually, although an investigative article published on the subject the following year suggested that only 1,500 Chinese entered by way of Canada each year. Opium smuggling syndicates based on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, apparently organized much of this human trafficking across Puget Sound. Labor contractors with ties to Chinese merchants across the West Coast used the extant opium smuggling network to orchestrate the entry of Chinese workers after 1882.

The remote, sometimes rugged terrain of the northwestern border enhanced smuggling efforts. The physical geography of Puget Sound, with hundreds of sparsely populated small islands situated amid narrow channels, made it a smugglers' paradise. "It would be hard to imagine a more difficult region to police, or a fairer field for smugglers," wrote journalist Julian Ralph. "Old London itself has scarcely a greater tangle of crooked and confusing thoroughfares than this

archipelago possesses, and these waterways are so narrow and sheltered that mere oarsmen can safely and easily travel many of them." Smugglers adopted myriad routes across the Sound, sometimes sailing directly south across the Straits of Juan de Fuca to Port Angeles on the Olympic Peninsula, at other times crossing the twelve miles of bay to San Juan Island, or carrying the Chinese past the customs headquarters at Port Townsend and directly into the Seattle area. Perhaps two-thirds of the Chinese entry in Washington territory occurred on Puget Sound.

Chinese also slipped across the border on the eastern side of the Cascade mountains. The wooded, remote region of north central Washington territory provided an equally ideal crossing point. Sparsely populated, the area had only a few American customs officers patrolling it in the 1880s, and they principally focused on monitoring cattle crossings in the river valleys. Such open expanses invited defiance of the border. Chinese came down the Columbia River into the United States "in boats and on horseback and on foot," but since that waterway provided a natural point for customs officers to conduct inspections, many stopped at a point just north of the American border. From there, they headed westward to the wagon roads and trails that crossed the border near the Kettle River and Rock Creek. On the one hundred miles of international border between Kettle River and the Cascade Mountains, one customs inspector noted in 1890, "there is no difficulty for them in getting across. It is not necessary for them to take a trail to get across.... It is open country to the Cascade Mountains, and Chinese coming across avoid[ed] the trail as much as they [could]" because they knew inspectors patrolled it. Thanks to the enormous length of the border, another American observer wrote, "there is no part of it over which a Chinaman may not pass into our country without fear of hindrance; there are scarcely any parts of it where he may not walk boldly across it at high noon."

The cultural geography of the region facilitated illicit entry as well. Numerous Chinese enclaves lay scattered inside U.S. territory. Fresh across the border, Chinese workers typically gravitated toward the nearest ethnic Chinese community, whether in Seattle or in a rural mining camp. There, they could intermingle with local residents and become virtually invisible to customs authorities. Once "they get into the Chinese camp and mix with the balance of the Chinese," one inspector reported, "it is very difficult to tell who the recently arrived Chinese are." As a result, frustrated inspectors along the northern border could only watch as the small Chinese communities in Seattle and regional mining camps slowly swelled with new arrivals from across the border.

A substantial Chinese presence in British Columbia had made smuggling through Washington in the 1880s an unsurprising development, but the emergence of Chinese smuggling routes through Mexico was more unexpected. The Chinese population in Mexico did not reach significant proportions until after 1900. But entry of Chinese started to attract notice in press and in Congress by the mid-1880s. California and Arizona, by virtue of their proximity to the Pacific Ocean, were favored routes. Initially, Chinese smuggling rings based in Hong Kong and San Francisco devised a plan to land U.S.-bound Chinese workers at the small Mexican fishing village of Ensenada, located sixty miles south of San Diego. Chinese immigrants would sail from Hong Kong to San Francisco

and, without landing in the U.S., transfer to Mexican steamers heading for Mexican Pacific coast cities. When the Mexican steamer first touched Mexican soil, the Chinese would disembark and make their way north, either by boat or wagon, into the U.S. by way of Southern California.

When a shipload of eighty Chinese on the steamboat *New Berne* disembarked in Ensenada on 3 April 1890, the U.S. consul in Ensenada took notice and immediately telegraphed customs authorities in San Diego. Within a matter of days, customs authorities in San Diego intercepted thirteen Chinese crossing the border near Tijuana and another ten trying to enter San Diego harbor aboard a small vessel captained by a Portuguese fisherman.

Foiled by the American officials, smugglers modified their plans, opting for the more circuitous route of sending Chinese workers to the mainland Mexican port of Guaymas and thence to the Arizona border by rail. When the *New Berne* sailed again from San Francisco on the 25th of April, laden now with fifty Chinese, the San Francisco customs collectors sent along two undercover officials. When fifteen Chinese disembarked at Ensenada on the 28th of April, the customs officials wired San Diego to warn authorities. They then continued on board as the steamer headed toward Mazatlan and Guaymas with the balance of the Chinese passengers. The Chinese disembarked at Guaymas and "every one of them took passage by railway to points within 35 or 40 or 50 miles from the border of the United States." The undercover inspectors stayed in Mexico another six weeks, tracking the movements of the Chinese and eventually coordinating with customs authorities in Arizona to intercept various small groups as they tried to enter the U.S. near Tombstone and Nogales.

The roundabout, dangerous, and expensive routes that they took spoke volumes about Chinese migrants' desire to enter the United States as well as their smugglers' tenacity in pursuing that objective. They also reveal the ways in which the terrain and cultural geography of the southwestern border conspired against American efforts to prevent illicit entries. In testimony before congressional hearings on Chinese smuggling in 1891, customs authorities familiar with the Mexican border time and again emphasized the difficulties attendant upon watching the border. The solitary officer assigned to the customs house at Tombstone, Arizona, found "the border [there] is so large and so long and so rough that he [could not] do his work." In the mountainous and isolated terrain just east of San Diego, Chinese might safely cross any of the more than 150 remote trails and passes. The tranquility of the San Diego coast also offered opportunities for small boats to land Chinese migrants in area inlets and bays. Rural, remote, and mostly uninhabited, the southwest border invited subversion of the national border. In the course of a typical year, "more Chinamen came across and were never captured and never seen" than were captured.

Chinese migrants coming across the Mexican border in the 1880s and 1890s enjoyed the same advantage that crossers through Canada exploited: the presence of ethnic Chinese communities situated on both sides of the border. The Treasury Department's 1890 reports to Congress on smuggling routes through Ensenada and Guaymas included a "Map of Chinese Underground Railway." The crude map detailed the Baja California villages—Real de Castillo, Burro Valley,

Yalecites, and Carisco—through which Chinese immigrants passed as they moved north from Ensenada. Ethnic Chinese who lived and worked in these and other Baja towns, American officials believed, conspired in efforts to pass them across the American border. Chinese immigrants who made it to the American side of the border found substantial Chinese communities there as well. In the borderland cities of El Paso, Tucson, and San Diego, Chinese communities stood ready to receive and support, at least temporarily, smuggled immigrants. Tucson had a Chinese population approaching seven hundred in 1890, while nearly one thousand Chinese worked in San Diego county during the same period. Members of the San Diego Chinese community worked principally as house servants, orchard hands, and fishermen, but, according to one Chinese resident at the time, earning a little extra money by assisting smugglers could be lucrative as well.

The fact that only a skeletal force of customs officers existed to patrol these vast spaces presented one seminal problem. Not surprisingly, border officials called to testify before Congress on Chinese smuggling in the West quickly introduced what would become a familiar refrain of American border authorities: provide funding for more manpower.

Alongside their appeals for greater numbers of inspectors, customs authorities also suggested that certain technological innovations might improve their ability to perform their work. One inspector suggested that Congress adopt the Mexican practice of equipping its customs inspectors with horses so that they could better patrol the line. The San Diego collector of customs testified that only with the addition of a steamship would his force have adequate means to guard the San Diego coastline.

In their efforts to craft a more effective border, officials also spent a fair amount of time arguing for changes in the Chinese exclusion laws. Under the terms of the current law, Chinese detected entering the country illegally had to be deported to the "country from whence they came." Most federal courts had interpreted this provision strictly, insisting that Chinese apprehended on either the Canadian or Mexican borders could only lawfully be deported back across those borders. But Treasury Department officials wished to send illegal entrants directly back to China instead. Deportation to the contiguous countries was, of course, largely ineffectual; deported Chinese simply continued to attempt entry until they succeeded.

This phenomenon highlighted a centrally important third advantage that the contiguous borders afforded Chinese immigrants seeking entry into the U.S.: the convenience of a nearby staging area that offered opportunities for multiple efforts at illegal entry. At a maritime port such as San Francisco, customs officials returned rejected migrants to the ship on which they sailed, presumably for the long voyage back to China. In contrast, the land border importantly circumscribed the power of American officials over the Chinese. Chinese workers detained along the Canadian or Mexican border were set back only a matter of yards.

By 1890, many officials imagined the best solution to the Chinese smuggling problem would be to export U.S. immigration policy to its neighbors.

They pressed political leaders to support efforts to encourage the neighboring Republic of Mexico and Dominion of Canada to adopt bans on Chinese immigration. In May 1890, the U.S. House and Senate had, by concurrent resolution, asked President Grover Cleveland to negotiate treaties with Great Britain and Mexico to prevent the illegal entry of Chinese across American borders. Many border officials hoped that the two nations might be persuaded to ban Chinese labor immigration outright.

But officials crafting visions of a more effective border control regime did so at the precise moment that trans-border flows of U.S.-bound migrants became increasingly complex. An unprecedented infusion of federal personnel on the international borders coincided with confusing new migration patterns that increased the volume of surreptitious entry.

In the first place, in a dynamic that would become an axiomatic feature of immigration border enforcement in the twentieth century, a "solution" somewhere on the border simply created a "problem" elsewhere. As Chinese traffic waned on the northern border, it waxed on the southern. "Having been practically defeated at every turn along the Canadian frontier," the Bureau reported in 1906, "the Chinamen who desire to enter this country are now turning their attention more than ever to the opportunity afforded by the natural conditions existing along our southern frontier."

Looking at the remarkable successes of immigrants and smugglers in crossing the border in the opening decade of the twentieth century reveals a great deal about the inherent difficulties of border enforcement. Most authorities attributed the Chinese smuggling successes of the 1880s and 1890s to the existence of vast, virtually unpatrolled borders north and south. But the continued success of the Chinese and other foreign nationals in crossing the Mexican border even after the establishment of a port-of-entry inspection system and border patrols suggested that undocumented immigration might be a far more subtle, intractable problem. Coupled with the natural advantages the borderlands offered, the creative energy of individual migrants—and of the smugglers who marketed services to them—had the potential to keep the border functionally permeable.

For migrants, the Mexican border offered two attractions—an opportunity for both legal entry and, for those who failed, illicit entry. Most of the non-Mexican immigrants pressing at the southern border probably either knew or believed that they were excludable under American immigration law; they were therefore attracted by the notion that they might encounter less rigorous inspection on the remote Mexican border, where the routines of inspections had only recently been introduced. If efforts at legal entry failed, Mexican soil provided a safe staging area for illegal entry "a few miles to the right or to the left, of the particular Immigrant Station" from which they had been rejected. Migrants made use of both methods of entry during this time, but it is most startling to examine their efforts to enter the U. S. at official ports of entry. For while one can hardly be surprised at the ease with which they managed to cross the lightly patrolled border at points far away from official ports, it is a bit more surprising to discover how often they simply slipped under the noses of port-of-entry

inspectors. But from the debut of border inspections through the 1920s, thousands of excludable immigrants of various nationalities successfully passed into the United States, often uninspected, by deceiving American immigration authorities at Mexican ports of entry.

Often they did so under the tutelage of professional smugglers. The small towns on the Mexican side of the border became the natural marketplace for those peddling smuggling services to the northward-bound Italians, Greeks, Lebanese, Japanese, and Chinese. As they made their way north from the Mexican port cities of Vera Cruz and Guaymas, migrants got advice from fellow countrymen and Mexican railroad conductors about whom to contact for smuggling services on the border. Arriving at Nogales, Ciudad Juárez or Nuevo Laredo, migrants at once sought out the lodging houses, restaurants, or saloons recommended to them.

American authorities regarded the hotels and other enterprises, many run by ethnic Lebanese and Japanese, as little more than "schools for coaching immigrants as to what they should say during inspection at the border."

Whether on their own or under the guidance of smugglers, migrants undermined the new border controls by relying heavily on the art of deception, on appearing or posing, on the practice of making themselves invisible, inconspicuous, or misunderstood. The possibilities for "passing" as someone other than who one was were especially rich at land-border (as opposed to maritime) ports of entry. Immigrants traveling in steerage represented the preponderance of steamship passengers arriving at maritime ports of entry, and inspectors could expect to question almost everyone coming ashore. On the border, however, immigration inspectors in the 1900s discovered that most border-crossing individuals were non-immigrant locals. In an ordinary day's business at Laredo or El Paso or Nogales in the 1900s, individuals subject to inspection as immigrants might be the exception rather than the rule.

From the very first, then, immigration inspectors at these ports of entry did not ask every single individual crossing to demonstrate his or her right to pass. Instead, inspectors did then what they do now: they made preliminary judgments about the admissibility of border crossers largely on the basis of their physical appearance. And the criteria used to visually sort through the crowds were individual, highly subjective, and unevenly applied. Border crossers understood that determinations of their "legality" ultimately could be quite superficial and frequently hinged on perceptions of race. As a result, those with something to hide tried to meet inspectors' expectations about the proper appearance of an innocent crosser.

Ironically, given later developments in immigration control, appearing to be Mexican generally ensured an easy, unchallenged border crossing prior to 1917. An undercover immigration service inspector investigating Asian smuggling from Mexico in 1906 similarly reported the practice of Chinese disguising themselves as Mexicans. "[The Chinese] cut off their queues, exchange their blue jeans and felt slippers for Mexican apparel, and begin training in the Mexican language, at least to the extent of being able to say 'Yo Soy Mexican'"—words that could get them past the border.

Migrants and smugglers understood the ways in which federal immigration officials accommodated local, everyday patterns of border commerce, and they used that knowledge to their advantage. On any given day from Brownsville to San Diego, most of the border crossings might be local residents crossing for work, shopping, or to visit kin. It was a pattern to which immigration inspectors and customs inspectors had both become accustomed and which could, over time, lull them into a state of lower vigilance. Since border crossers were overwhelmingly local, inspectors discovered that their "real work" of conducting inspections of head-tax-paying aliens was episodic at best. Lax monitoring ensued.

Pretending to be a local Mexican—and thereby avoiding inspection—was but one of many strategies that "excludable aliens" used to gain entry at immigration ports of entry on the border during the 1900s. At least some of the Lebanese, European, and Japanese immigrants who feared exclusion nonetheless attempted to enter the United States legitimately. Rather than trying the dodge of appearing Mexican, they dutifully appeared for inspection at a designated port of entry. Yet manipulating appearances remained important in this instance as well.

Migrants routinely used other fraudulent documents to cross the border. The contiguous border created unique opportunities for trafficking in "head tax receipts," the official documents given to aliens after they had been inspected, paid their head tax, and been admitted into the United States as immigrants. After the closing of the border to Japanese migrants in 1907, an illicit trade in head tax receipts flourished. Those in the United States in possession of receipts reportedly "rented" them to aspiring Japanese immigrants on the Mexican side, who, assuming the identity of the people named on the receipt, presented themselves at the port of entry with the receipt as proof they had already been admitted into the United States. At the same time entrepreneurs in Ciudad Juárez had commissioned an El Paso printing company to produce documents that could be used in the production of forged Japanese passports.

Yet, for all the successes of immigrants in outwitting immigration inspectors manning American ports of entry, Bureau of Immigration inspectors clearly held their own at the ports of entry. After 1900, border immigration authorities annually barred thousands of immigrants from entering the U.S. from Mexico. As American officials became more familiar with the border setting and practices, their efficiency and effectiveness increased. The undercover investigations of 1906 and 1907 revealed the central port-of-entry strategies of borderland smugglers and resulted in a new insistence that immigration inspectors carefully scrutinize all border crossers, Mexicans included. At the same time, objections to an increase in Mexican labor migration were putting Mexican migrants under increased scrutiny as well. By 1910, the ports of entry themselves had acquired some meaning as a barrier to open immigration.

But even this "progress" in enforcing the border was chimerical. Already in the 1900s the largest portion of migrants entering from Mexico at this time avoided ports of entry entirely. Immigrants near El Paso in 1908 came "across the river practically at their pleasure without risk of being caught" because only

two inspectors watched the entire river front. In southern Arizona in the 1900s, it was still "a relatively simple matter for aliens to cross the line away from inhabited areas, shepherded by smugglers along river washes and through brush-covered areas." Near Laredo, Texas, a Mexican smuggler guided Greek and Lebanese clients south a few miles to where the Rio Grande was easily forded. Across the river waited the smuggler's brother, a hack driver from Laredo, who placed the migrants in a closed express wagon and took them into town. The newly fortified border could only be as strong as its weakest point, and it still largely consisted of weak points.

By the mid-1920s, officials had resigned themselves to creating a border that might serve as a deterrent, rather than barrier, to undocumented immigrants. "If we had the Army on the Canadian border and on the Mexican border, we couldn't stop them; if we had the Navy on the water-front we couldn't stop them," Secretary of Labor James Davis explained in 1927. "Not even a Chinese wall, nine thousand miles in length and built over rivers and deserts and mountains and along the seashores, would seem to permit a permanent solution." But the vision of the border as, at best, a deterrent to illicit entry (rather than a guarantee against it) seemed a bitter pill for many ardent restrictionists to handle in 1920, and dreams of somehow sealing the border against unwanted immigrants helped drive the creation of the Border Patrol in 1924. Still, by the late 1920s, border officials like William Whalen understood that promises of something beyond deterrence were impossible to keep and foolish to make. The goal of border enforcement, in the words of another federal official, was to "at least make attempts to cross the border dangerous and to hold illegal entry down to small proportions."

The development of an American border control and screening regime at the turn of the twentieth century involved both change and continuity to the northern and southern borders of the West. In general, the Immigration Service made steady progress in its efforts to understand and counter the deceptive practices of excludable aliens trying to cross the borders. But for every smuggling scheme detected and stymied another two seemed to succeed; for every undocumented migrant apprehended, countless others escaped detection. In large part, continuities prevailed. We discover not simply the same cast of characters in 1882 and 1929—determined, economically driven migrants, organized smuggling rings, professional border guides or *coyotes*, and technology-obsessed federal enforcement officials—but also familiar themes and strategies: ingenuity, courage, subterfuge, pretense, and blending. Far from achieving any long-term diminution in illicit border crossings during this period, enforcement officials had in fact witnessed tremendous growth in smuggling and undocumented entry. Although perseverant and at times optimistic, immigration authorities rarely deceived themselves about the overall inadequacy of their activities. Efforts to fashion an effective system of control over cross-border migration along the boundaries of the United States were ultimately undermined by migrants too determined, a labor market too attractive, and a border too long.

The first three decades of American immigration restriction efforts on the Mexican border portended poorly for visions of tight border control. The

relative ease with which the Chinese used the lightly patrolled borders in the 1880s West to subvert the Chinese Exclusion Act—and the subsequent success of European, Japanese, and other barred immigrants in doing the same across an increasingly patrolled Mexican border in the 1890s and 1900s—demonstrated the degree to which enforcing these latest borders in the West would prove difficult, resource intensive, and intensely frustrating.

The Impact of Exclusion on the Chinese in America

ERIKA LEE

While detained in the barracks of the immigration station on Angel Island, Chinese immigrants dreamed of the day when they might finally be admitted into the United States. Passing through America's gates, however, did not mean freedom from the exclusion laws. The government's failure to prevent or deter illegal immigration resulted in an expansion of the exclusion laws into the nation's interiors and a vigorous policy of surveillance, arrest, and, finally, deportation. As part of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, deportation became a primary means of controlling and disciplining the Chinese community in America. This shadow of exclusion extended not only to legal and illegal Chinese immigrants but also to native-born Chinese American citizens, whose plight was inextricably connected to that of their immigrant brethren. Consequently, members of the Chinese community in America began to reevaluate both their place in the United States and their status as Americans. Deportation was the government's last chance to protect its citizens from allegedly dangerous aliens. Viewed as an essential feature of exclusion enforcement, American deportation policy further racialized Chinese immigration as a serious threat to national peace and security. As Commissioner-General of Immigration Frank Sargent remarked in 1903, "Any reasonable amount of success in the continuance of the exclusion policy [depends upon] the success of the expulsion [policies] as well." In other words, if one failed, the other might succeed.

The Chinese Exclusion Act provided the legal means for deporting Chinese. The act gave local and state police officers (listed as "peace officers") and U.S. marshals the authority to arrest any Chinese person suspected of being in the country unlawfully. After being brought before a justice, judge, or commissioner of a federal court in a deportation hearing, the person was either released if found innocent, or, if found guilty, returned to the "country from whence he came," at the expense of the U.S. government. The establishment of the deportation clause in the Chinese Exclusion Act was immensely significant. Just as they were the first to be excluded on the basis of their race and class, Chinese immigrants also became the first group to be classified as deportable. By the time the Chinese exclusion laws were repealed in 1943, Chinese were no longer an

Erika Lee, "The Shadow of Exclusion: The Impact of Exclusion on the Chinese in America," in *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003): 225-243. Copyright © 2003 by Erika Lee. Used by permission of the University of North Carolina Press. www.uncpress.unc.edu

anomaly, and the U.S. government had added many other classes of immigrants to the deportable list.

Amendments to the exclusion laws passed after 1882 refined the deportation policies relating to Chinese immigrants and established the system by which deportation would be accomplished. In 1888, the Scott Act reaffirmed the nation's legal right to deport Chinese found to be in the country unlawfully, but it did allow them to appeal the decision. The 1892 Geary Act expanded and centralized the system by which the government could identify and track Chinese immigrants. All laborers found without the certificate of residence that the Geary Act required were arrested and taken before a deportation hearing. Although exempt-class Chinese did not have to register, they were subject to harassment by immigration officials just the same. Moreover, since the Bureau of Immigration required them to leave their exempt-class (Section 6) certificates with the agency, Chinese merchants, students, teachers, and diplomats were often left without proof of lawful residence and, in the event of a raid, were vulnerable to arrest.

The Chinese community challenged both the registration and the deportation provisions of the 1892 Geary Act through the courts, and one case made it all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court in *Fong Yue Ting v. United States*. Some justices argued that the power to expel should not apply to lawful and long-term resident aliens. They contended that the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution offered constitutional protection to citizens and aliens alike. Thus, any expulsion of lawful residents would be in violation of constitutional guarantees of liberty and due process of the law. However, the majority of justices ruled that the power to exclude aliens and the power to expel them were within the rights of a sovereign government. After the 1893 Supreme Court ruling, the power of Congress to enact legislation expelling aliens, even long-term residents, from the United States remained unchallenged, and the government began to exercise this new power of the state vigorously and forcefully.

The initial intent of the country's deportation activities had been to catch, arrest, and deport those who failed to produce the necessary documentation proving their status as legal residents in the United States. By the 1900s, however, the deportation system expanded to include additional classes of Chinese not originally covered in the 1882 act, such as border crossers. Beginning in 1908, the immigration service also began to deport Chinese under the general immigration laws whenever possible, thereby bypassing the judicial hearings required under the exclusion laws. Chinese who failed to maintain the professional or exempt status under which they were admitted also became targets for deportation. Prior to the 1924 Immigration Act, the courts uniformly held that treaties between the United States and China exempted from deportation those Chinese whose status changed from exempt to laborer (that is, former merchants who had suffered business losses and were now laborers) unless their original entries were fraudulent. In practice, immigration officials ignored these judicial decisions and increased their efforts to find and deport Chinese who had lost their exempt status. In 1905, for example, the Bureau of Immigration authorized its agents to arrest a number of students who were found to be working in Chinese laundries

and restaurants. Moreover, beginning in 1909, all persons of Chinese descent, including U.S. citizens, were required to carry a certificate that identified them as having been legally admitted to the country. Chinese American citizens could work as laborers, but if exempt-class Chinese were caught performing manual labor, their certificates of identity were confiscated and they were liable for arrest and deportation.

By the early 1900s, deportation became an essential tool of control and security in the nation's interiors. In 1902, the number of Chinese arrested (1,128) was more than double the number in 1900 (539), and in 1904, a record 1,793 Chinese were arrested based on their suspected illegal residence. Court cases also supported the government's deportation policies. In *Li Sing v. U.S.* (1901), for example, the court ruled that aliens were not protected against unreasonable search or seizures, nor could they claim the right of trial by jury. Moreover, only white witnesses could testify on behalf of potential deportees.

In 1915, however, Bureau of Immigration guidelines expanded the parameters of what constituted an "illegal immigrant" as part of the government's efforts to crack down on Chinese who entered the country illegally from Mexico or Canada. Agency regulations of that year gave inspectors the right to examine "all Chinese persons in the United States not personally known to them" to determine if they were legally entitled to be and remain in the country. In essence, that meant that any Chinese immigrant whom an officer did not personally know could be suspected of having entered the country illegally. The regulations also allowed for the deportation of any wives and children of exempt-class Chinese who were found to be in the country illegally, even if this meant disrupting families.

The strictest deportation provisions were established in the 1924 Immigration Act, which further codified the requirement that Chinese immigrants maintain their exempt-class status in order to remain in the country. Although the number of arrests and deportations remained far lower after 1924 than during the government's intense crackdown in the early 1900s, the harsh new provisions served to punish not only Chinese who had entered illegally but also long-term residents and those who were ignorant of the changes in the law or innocently overstayed their visas. In 1940, sociologist Wen-hsien Chen pointed to the explicitly racist component of the country's deportation policies. Such expulsions, she charged, were "peculiar only to the Chinese.... Some with an established good reputation were held deportable, not because of undesirability but because they were Chinese and ineligible for citizenship."

As were all other aliens residing in the United States, Chinese were entitled to the safeguards of the Constitution and to the protection of the laws regarding their rights of person and property. But the deportation policies established by the exclusion laws, affirmed by the Supreme Court, and expedited by the Bureau of Immigration made the Chinese in America more vulnerable to infringements on their rights than other immigrant groups. Moreover, because the Chinese community had little political power, American politicians did little to ameliorate abuses against them, and there was little public outcry on their behalf.

Chinese immigrants and residents thus often lived a shadowed existence, constantly anxious about their immigration status, about harassment by immigration officials and others, and about their personal safety in general. All Chinese were required to produce on demand the documentation verifying their right to remain in the United States. If the officers were not satisfied with the proof or if the individual under question could not immediately produce the documentation, he or she could be arrested.

One of the most effective tools of the immigration service was the immigration raid. Instituted in the early twentieth century under Commissioner-General Frank Sargent, raids proved to be particularly useful means of catching and arresting a large number of suspected illegal immigrants at one time. No neighborhood, place of business, school, or church was beyond the government's reach. As the Chinese Chamber of Commerce complained, vegetable gardens, stores and other places of business, as well as private residences and homes, were "raided repeatedly, sometimes as often as once a month, even though the Immigration Inspectors generally fail[ed] to find contraband Chinese employed or concealed there." Moreover, the Chinese-American League of Justice in Los Angeles charged that immigration officials routinely acted with "the grossest insolence and most brutal conduct." Inspectors forcibly broke locks and crashed through doors, unlawfully searched through trunks and baggage, and physically abused and insulted the Chinese under their control.

Immigration officials were required to get the commissioner-general's approval before they conducted an immigration raid on suspected illegal Chinese, but apparently they did not need to provide much evidence to support their suspicions. For example, in 1903, the immigrant inspector in charge at New Orleans sought and received permission from Sargent to conduct a raid on the Chinese community in that city based on his belief that it was "not unreasonable to suppose that some Chinamen may have affected an unlawful entrance ... and are now hiding here."

One of the best-known raids occurred in Boston on October 11, 1903. Prior to the raid, local police officers had informed the U.S. district attorney that they suspected that many Chinese residing in Boston were illegal immigrants. It was also rumored that members of a Chinese secret society were blackmailing Chinese residents into paying large sums of money in exchange for not reporting their illegal status to immigration authorities. Together with the police department and the district attorney, the Bureau of Immigration consented to rectify the "evil conditions" in Boston not by going after the blackmailers, but by deporting all Chinese who were in the country in violation of the law. Accordingly, on the evening of Sunday, October 11, 1903, a number of immigration agents from Boston, New York, and other cities, assisted by the local police, made a sudden and unexpected descent upon the Chinese quarter of Boston. As one witness reported, the police and immigration officials "fell upon their victims without giving a word of warning" and surrounded all of the area's private homes and clubs, as well as restaurants and other public places. No warrants for arrest were produced, and all Chinese residents who failed to show their identification papers were detained. The raid resulted in the arrest

of 234 Chinese. After they spent twelve hours in jail, 122 of them were found to be legal residents. In the end, only 45 Chinese were deported back to China.

The raid in Boston was not an isolated event. Smaller, less-publicized raids occurred on a regular basis over the next several years, causing sociologist Mary Coolidge to write that "all Chinese are treated as suspects, if not as criminals." The *Nation* reported that in the early 1900s, police and immigration officials swept into the Chinatowns of Cleveland, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, New York, and other cities, smashing down doors and arresting "thousands of peaceful Chinese waiters, laundrymen, merchants, and laborers." They jailed the offenders without warrant and left the broken homes and businesses unguarded and vulnerable to looting.

By the 1910s, vocal Chinese complaints made the rounds in Washington, D.C. In 1918, the Chinese Six Companies grew so infuriated by the mistreatment of Chinese residents that they sent a telegram to President Woodrow Wilson. "No matter how long their residence or how firm their right to remain, Chinese are being arrested, hunted, and terrorized," they charged. As a result, they continued, the Chinese population of the Pacific Coast was "fast decreasing." Despite such complaints, the government raids and harassment continued. In 1923, San Francisco's Chinese community complained that the Bureau of Immigration had instituted nothing less than a "veritable Reign of Terror" against them.

Immigration raids on Chinese communities became the public face of the government's efforts to control Chinese immigration within the nation's interiors. They also served to sanction the harassment of Chinese throughout the country by other law-enforcement officials and the general populace as well. Thus, Chinese residents found themselves constantly at risk of being questioned, detained, or physically or verbally assaulted. Aggressive government deportation policies had effectively brought Chinese exclusion into every corner of the country, making every place potentially dangerous for Chinese. Longtime Chicago resident and merchant Hong Sling experienced this harassment first hand in 1901. While on a train en route to Decatur, Illinois, Hong was pounced upon by a U.S. marshal. After the marshal declared that it was his intention to "arrest every Chinaman in this district," he demanded that Hong show proof of his right to be in the country. Hong complied, giving his name, place of residence, and a description of his business. He also provided other evidence of his status as a merchant, including a letter signed by Secretary of the Treasury Lyman Gage, who certified that he personally knew Hong to be a merchant. The marshal was not satisfied and searched Hong's baggage. Upon finding Hong's registration certificate, the officer let him go, but only after kicking and hitting Hong in front of a large crowd gathered around him.

Such abuses were apparently widespread. In 1905, Reverend Leighton Parks of New York City complained to the Department of Commerce and Labor that the Chinese residents of that city lived in "continual dread" of the Chinese inspectors, because they were blackmailed and subjected to other unjust treatment by them. By 1914, the Chinese Consulate felt it necessary to file a formal protest with the immigration service in Los Angeles against its unnecessary force in

apprehending Chinese. The immigration officials, the consul-general complained, "make a big show of force where absolutely none is necessary, and that in many cases, exceptionally high bonds have been asked in cases where the ordinary amount would have answered all purposes. In other words, they are making the matter one of *persecution* as well as prosecution." Those who were most vulnerable to persecution were, of course, Chinese who had entered the country under fraudulent purposes, lost their legal immigration status, or possessed no documentation whatsoever. San Francisco immigration agents, for instance, chased down Wong Bew in 1908 after learning that although he had been granted admission into the country as a Chinese merchant, he was actually working as a cook in a local hospital. When inspectors unexpectedly showed up at the hospital, Wong immediately fled the kitchen through a back alley but was eventually caught and brought in for questioning.

Similarly, a merchant, Wu Wah, and his wife, Ngoon Shee, found themselves hunted by immigration officials for five years beginning in 1932, because Wu had been forced to sell his Oakland, California, business in the wake of the economic depression. Although they had six children, all born in the United States as citizens, immigration officials issued a warrant for the arrest of both parents in 1932, charging the couple with violating the Immigration Act of 1924 and failing to maintain their exempt-class status. The two were apparently aware of the government's intentions and hurriedly left their home in Oakland just a few days before immigrant inspector E. C. Benson arrived with the arrest warrant. Benson attempted to track them down through the U.S. postal system and the California Department of Motor Vehicles. Meanwhile, Ngoon Shee and Wu Wah were forced into a life of hiding and secrecy, moving from place to place, but never staying in one location for very long. When immigrant inspectors finally caught the family in 1937, the couple hired attorney W. H. Wilkinson, a former law officer in the Bureau of Immigration, who argued that both legal precedent and the service's own regulations nullified the government's charges against the couple. Immigration officials in San Francisco had no choice but to cancel the arrest warrants for Ngoon Shee and Wu Wah. In October of 1937, their deportation cases were finally closed, five years after they had first been filed.

For illegal and undocumented immigrants, exploitation and extortion came from many quarters. Oppressive employers, corrupt government bureaucrats, other Chinese, suspicious Americans, and lawyers and con artists all preyed upon Chinese whose vulnerable legal status made them unable or unwilling to press charges. In 1895, Chinese immigrants in San Francisco complained through their attorney, Thomas D. Riordan, that two men, representing themselves as customs inspectors, were extorting money from Chinese immigrants. The two suspects continually entered Chinese stores without warrants and searched the premises for illegal immigrants and opium for the purpose of blackmailing the residents. The following year, other Chinese also complained of harassment by another officer who visited homes in Chinatown and charged the Chinese with being in the country illegally. If the family paid him enough money, he would

leave them alone. If not, he threatened to take the case to the immigration service....

In the 1930s, sociologist Paul Siu found that Chinese immigrants and Chinese American citizens suffered from a deep-rooted sense of insecurity, 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." This fear reinforced the process of social, political, and economic segregation of Chinese communities, resulting in a high rate of return migration and perpetuating the sojourning pattern. Unwelcome in the United States, plagued by a tenuous legal status, and prevented from becoming full-fledged citizens, many Chinese immigrants continued to view the United States as a sojourner would: a place in which to make money and then leave. As one Chicago laundryman interviewed by Paul Siu 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. We Chinese are not even allowed to become citizens. If we were allowed, that might be a different story. In that case, I think many of us Chinese would not think so much of going back to China. Many would get a woman and settle down here."

Many immigrants shared these views about the United States and their intentions to return to China. Indeed, in 1928, sociologist R. D. McKenzie identified return migration as the most significant effect of exclusion upon the Chinese immigrant community. He observed that "exclusion tends to expel the resident population of the race in question in addition to preventing newcomers from entering." While other immigrant groups came in large numbers at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the early twentieth centuries, more Chinese left the United States than came. From 1908 to 1923, 36,693 Chinese came to the United States, but 47,607 departed, or, for every 100 hundred Chinese who came in during that period, 130 departed. During the same period, the ratio of immigration to emigration was 100:5 for Jewish immigrants, 100:11 for Irish immigrants, and 100:33 for Japanese immigrants. The high rate of departures over arrivals suggests many Chinese chose to give up their immigrant status in the United States and return to China instead of staying and being subjected to harassment and discrimination. In addition, the number of new immigrants remained small during the same period. As a result, the census reports also indicate a rapid decrease in the Chinese resident population. While the exclusion laws may not have succeeded in closing all of the gates to Chinese immigration, the atmosphere they created drastically reduced the size of the Chinese community in America.

Another significant consequence of Chinese exclusion was its impact on native-born Chinese American citizens who were also the targets of discriminatory legislation and policies affecting their rights of travel and citizenship. They found that their status offered little protection from government harassment. Although the 1898 Supreme Court case *Wong Kim Ark* protected their birthright citizenship, this status was constantly attacked well into the twentieth century. In 1913 and 1923, politicians introduced bills in Congress designed to disfranchise citizens of Chinese ancestry. In addition, the 1922 Cable Act revoked the

citizenship of women who married "aliens ineligible for citizenship," a code phrase that applied to Asians only. 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. When Lon Thom, one of the first American-born Chinese in New York City's Chinatown, met and married Chinese student Wing Ark Chin in 1922, she was stripped of her citizenship. She remained in the country of her birth as a noncitizen for eighteen years. Only in 1940, when Congress amended some of the provisions of the Cable Act, did Lon Thom regain her American citizenship. Though American-born, she had to face a naturalization hearing and swear her allegiance to the United States just like an immigrant alien. The Immigration Act of 1924 also explicitly excluded "aliens ineligible to citizenship," which barred alien wives of citizens.

The impact of these immigration laws on Chinese American citizens was great. They were subjected to inconvenience and even harassment every time they reentered the country, tried to sponsor a relative, or even happened to be in Chinatown during an immigration raid.

Chinese American citizens were unable to escape the shadow of exclusion. Citizens interviewed in 1931 expressed a marked loss of admiration for the United States, as well as a frustrated sense of alienation. One explained, "I speak fluent English, and have the American mind. 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. They have so many restrictions against us." Another observed, "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." Like these two individuals, many other Chinese Americans believed they were citizens in name only, with few of the benefits accorded to citizens of other ethnic and racial backgrounds.

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