

One Hundred and Seven Chinese (1943)

Gilbert Woo

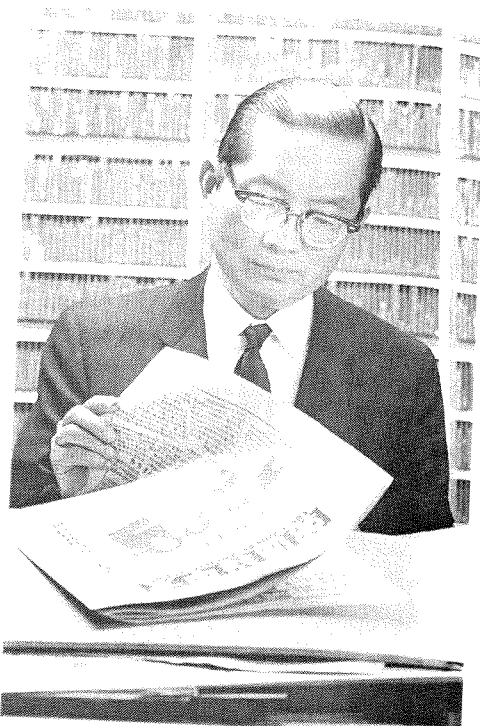
At the time that Gilbert Woo¹ wrote the following satire on repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Acts, Congress was in the midst of debating the issue. The Citizens' Committee to Repeal Chinese Exclusion, which consisted of China scholars, writers, and church leaders, lobbied heavily for the Magnuson bill. If passed, the bill would repeal the fifteen Chinese exclusion acts passed between 1882 and 1913, establish an annual quota for Chinese immigration, and grant naturalization rights to Chinese in the United States. On the surface, the legislation appeared to be dealing racial discrimination a blow, but Gilbert Woo, a liberal journalist at the Chinese Times newspaper,² saw it for what it was—a token gesture and an insult to Chinese Americans.

In the following article, which appeared in his newspaper column "Qizhi" or "I Wish to Inform You,"³ Woo pokes fun at the debate over the small quota as well as at the arguments that labor unions and veterans' organizations were raising over potential job competition and the threat of interracial marriages should Congress pass the bill. But given the international situation—with China as a wartime ally to the United States—Congress decided to vote for repeal, and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed the bill into law on December 17, 1943, technically ending 62 years of Chinese exclusion.

1. Gilbert Woo (1911–1979) was one of the most widely read columnists in the Chinese American press. He was born in Taishan District, Guangdong Province, and immigrated to the United States in 1932. In his forty-year career as a journalist, he consistently advocated for equal rights in American society, social reforms in the Chinese American community, and prosperity in China.

2. Founded by the Chinese-American Citizens' Alliance in 1924, the *Chinese Times* is a daily Chinese-language newspaper that claims to speak for American citizens of Chinese descent.

3. Gilbert Woo began writing the column on March 9, 1943. The title, "Qizhi," comes from the formal phrase commonly used at the beginning of a Chinese letter, "I wish to inform you." The column ran in the *Chinese Times* for over a year, covering a wide range of topics such as housing issues, the internment of Japanese Americans, and developments in China.



Gilbert Woo reading
the *Chinese Pacific
Weekly*. (Courtesy
of Lucy Huang)

Should the Chinese Exclusion Act be repealed, then 107 Chinese¹ will enter the United States every year. As a result, the attention of all those who oppose the repeal seems to be focused on these 107 individuals.

These 107 individuals—ah, you can truly be proud of yourselves. In number there are not enough of you to make up a full set of mahjong tiles; yet in power you can scoop up the moon's reflection in the water.²

Do you know that an American boxer claims he can take on 100 men? So actually, they can summon a boxer and he alone can beat you black and blue in the face. And yet, believe it or not, just hearing about you strikes terror into the hearts of millions of Americans.

There used to be a Sergeant York in the United States, who, single-handedly, captured over 100 German soldiers.³ So actually, an army sergeant alone is enough to tie all of you up. And yet, believe it or not, just mentioning you causes millions of Americans to lose sleep and appetite.

1. The annual allotment for Chinese immigration was later fixed at 105.

2. Meaning, "to achieve the impossible."

3. Sergeant Alvin Cullum York served in Europe during World War I.

An American robber with one single machine gun can hold off 5,000 policemen. So actually, the head of a gang of robbers alone can mow you down like so much wheat. And yet, believe it or not, just speaking about you sets millions of Americans trembling.

Actually, one single streetcar is enough to take you to Seal Rocks.⁷ One single apartment building is enough to hold all of you and you will not even have to fight over the bathroom. Five pounds of coffee is enough to give you insomnia all night. Five *jin*⁸ of *wujiapi*⁹ is enough to make you so drunk you cannot tell left from right. One porky pig is enough to give you the runs. You are not supermen, nor are you celestial beings. And yet they fear you more than the government troops feared the 108 bandit-heroes of Liangshanpo.¹⁰ Come to think of it, we might as well petition Congress and request special permission to increase the number by one to make it 108 individuals. But, on second thought, since Wu Song killed his sister-in-law, he would not fit in here.¹¹ We had best leave him in China.

They say that once the 107 of you manly fellows arrive, you will compete with the tens of millions of Americans for bread and thus drive down the living standards of the United States and cheapen the labor force. Do you really have such power? Or can this be some trick concocted by your Mr. Zhiduoxing?¹²

They say that once the 107 of you manly fellows arrive, you will introduce the problem of yellow and white marriages to this country. Now I am really confused. Are not your ranks filled with people like Lu Zhishen?¹³

Ah, you 107 manly fellows! I cannot help but prostrate myself in admiration. And when you finally arrive, we will be at the dockside to welcome you, loudly exclaiming, "Long live Liangshanpo!"

As historians and political analysts have correctly pointed out, the Chinese exclusion laws were repealed in 1943 as a goodwill gesture to China and to counter Japanese propaganda in Asia. The repeal did little to rectify the exclusion of Chinese immigrants, as the token annual quota of 105 was applied to Chinese people from any part of the world. As for Gilbert Woo, outspoken articles like this one would eventually cost him

7. A cluster of rocks off the coast of San Francisco where sea lions like to gather.

8. A Chinese measurement, one *jin* is equivalent to half a kilogram.

9. Potent Chinese liquor.

10. The headquarters of a group of 108 outlaws who battled corrupt officials, as immortalized in the eighteenth-century Chinese adventure novel *Shuihu Zhuan* (*The Water Margin*), first translated as *All Men Are Brothers* by Pearl S. Buck.

11. Wu Song, one of the bandit-heroes, killed his adulterous sister-in-law to avenge the murder of his brother.

12. Zhiduoxing is the nickname for the resourceful Wu Yong, the mastermind strategist among the bandit-heroes.

13. Another member of the bandit-heroes of Liangshanpo. Lu Zhishen was a monk and therefore a man who must remain celibate.

his job at the Chinese Times. He went on to write for the Kuo Min Yat Po (Chinese Nationalist Daily) before establishing his own newspaper, the Chinese Pacific Weekly, in 1946. He remained Chinatown's liberal voice and conscience until he died in 1979 at the age of sixty-eight.

SOURCE: *Chinese Times*, September 7, 1943; reprinted in *Hu Jinguan wenji* [Selected works of Gilbert Woo] (Hong Kong: Xiangjiang Chuban Youxian Gongsi, 1991), pp. 37-38. Translator: Ellen Yeung.

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