Chapter Four

In Search of Gold Mountain: Chinese in the Americas

Yip Sang began a journey across the Pacific and up, down, and around the West Coast of the United States and Canada after his family's fortune was wiped out during the Taiping Rebellion in southern China. He arrived at the age of nineteen in San Francisco in 1864 hoping to strike it rich in California's gold fields. But, as his son explained, "the gold was all gone" by the time he arrived. He found work in a cigar factory in San Francisco. He also earned his living working as a dishwasher and cook. He even went to Montana as a cook for some cowboys. In 1881, he went north to Vancouver where he worked on the Canadian Pacific Railway for three years as a bookkeeper, timekeeper, paymaster, and Chinese superintendent for the supply company. During the construction of the western portion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, Sang supervised six to seven thousand workers. After the railway was completed in 1885, he returned to China for a three-year visit. There, he married four different wives before returning to Vancouver in 1888. He opened the Wing Sang Company, a Chinese import store that catered to the Chinese immigrant community in British Columbia. In addition to running this business, Yip Sang also became the Chinese Passenger Agent for the Canadian Pacific Railway Steamship Line. He later opened a business in Vancouver's Chinatown and became one of the city's most successful

merchants in the early 1900s. The Wing Sang building still stands in downtown Vancouver.[1]

John Lee Lum was another California gold rusher who engaged in an epic serial migration throughout the Americas in the second half of the nineteenth century. Born in 1842 in Sunwui county in Guangdong, Lum was struck with gold fever and left his home for the gold mines of California. He lived and worked there, made his way north to Canada to work on the trans-Pacific railway, headed south to Brazil, then to British Guiana before settling in Trinidad. He found work at the well-known Chinese firm of Kwong Lee & Co. before starting his own business in 1885. He became one of the most prominent Chinese businessman on the island within ten years selling cocoa, general foodstuff, hardware, liquor, and imports from Asia. By the 1900s, he was recognized as the head of the Chinese community in Trinidad.[2]

Yip Sang and John Lee Lum were just two of the several hundreds of thousands of Chinese who migrated to and throughout the Americas during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their trans-Pacific journeys and multiple migrations within the Americas reflected just how mobile Chinese immigrants were during this time. Chinese are by far the oldest and largest of all of the Asian migrations to the Americas. During the age of global mass migrations, they came in three overlapping movements

[1] "A Chinese Canadian Story: The Yip Sang Family," Vancouver Museum, < http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/205/301/ic/cdc/yipsang/index.html> (accessed August 19, 2010); Evelyn Huang, *Chinese Canadians: Voices from a Community* (Vancouver, BC: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 1992) 2.
[2] Look Lai, *The Chinese in the West Indies,* 299-300.

that extended throughout the Americas by the early twentieth century.[3] As discussed in the previous chapter, during the first migrations, Chinese indentured laborers traveled on "devil ships" as part of *la trata amarilla* to Cuba and Peru from 1847 to 1874. The second migrations included male gold seekers trying to strike it rich in the gold fields of California and British Columbia; laborers recruited to work on railroads, farms, and plantations in the Hawaiian Islands, U.S. and Canadian West, northern Mexico, and Peru; shopkeepers and businessmen who ran everything from small Chinese corner shops to multinational houses of commerce. They were overwhelmingly young and male. Chinese women were not totally absent from this migration, but they came in much fewer numbers. The last migrations occurred during the years of Chinese exclusion, when Chinese migration was drastically curtailed to the United States due to discriminatory immigration laws and shifted instead towards Canada, Mexico, and Latin America.

Throughout this era of mass migration, Chinese crossed and re-crossed the Pacific Oceans multiple times over the years. Like Yip Sang and John Lee Lum, some also migrated and remigrated throughout the Americas in search of opportunity or because they were driven out by discriminatory laws. Their constant movement around the region laid the groundwork for the development of transnational networks and borderlands communities that facilitated the further movement of goods and peoples

[3] McKeown, "Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas," 315-317. Wang Gungwu, *China and the Chinese Overseas* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1991) 6; Lopez, "Migrants Between Empires and Nations," 13.

across borders.[4] At the same time, Chinese forged identities as immigrant minorities in the Americas and patriotic Chinese overseas ready to assist their motherland. By the early twentieth century, Chinese immigrants were part of transnational worlds that crossed oceans and borders even as they put down roots in their new homes.

Coming to the Americas

The news that gold had been discovered at John Sutter's mill in Northern California took some time to reach Canton in 1848. But once it did, it spread like fire. "Good many Americans speak of California," wrote one man in Canton to his brother. "Oh! Very rich country! I hear good many Americans and Europeans go there. Oh! They find gold very quickly, so I hear…I think I shall go to California next summer." Along with the rest of the world, the Chinese rushed into California in 1849. There were 325 Chinese "forty-niners" in California's gold country. 1,000 more reached San Francisco by 1850, and as many as 30,000 Chinese migrated to San Francisco in 1852.[5]

Most Chinese miners worked independently. Some organized themselves into small companies. They extracted gold by shoveling sand from the stream into a pan or rocker and then washing away the sand and dirt to reveal gold. Only some found gold, often by panning the claims abandoned by white miners. Others supported themselves by opening up restaurants and laundries in mining country.[6]

---

[4] McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks,* 61, 68.
[5] Oh! Very rich country," cited in Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore,* 34. Gold rush statistics from Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others,* 141 and McKeown, "Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas," 317.
[6] Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore,* 82-83.

From California, the Chinese gold rush migration easily spilled over into Canada. Chinese migration to Canada began, for example, when Chang Tsoo and Ah Hong left the California gold fields to try their luck in the Cariboo gold rush in British Columbia in 1858. News of the discovery of gold on the Fraser River spread quickly and drew thousands of Chinese in California up north to British Columbia. At the same time, others crossed over to Canadian territory from Oregon, Montana, Idaho, and Washington. By the 1860s, there were six or seven thousand Chinese in British Columbia, many of whom had fled the depleted mines in California and the growing anti-Chinese sentiment in that state.[7]

With gold on their minds, Chinese began migrating to North America en masse. The same international forces that had opened up South China to *la trata amarilla* to Cuba and Peru also propelled the mass migrations of Chinese heading abroad voluntarily in the early twentieth century. The Qing Empire faltered even more from internal strife, economic instability, foreign encroachment, and unequal treaties. Attempts to restore order faltered, and Chinese peasants bore the brunt of the economic, social, and political pressure. The 1911 Chinese Revolution ended the Chinese empire, but it did not bring the needed economic, social, and political stability. Warlords emerged as the dominant power brokers throughout the country. Foreign imperialism continued to hinder China's economy, the rivalry between Sun Yat-Sen's Guomindang (Nationalist)

[7] Daniels, "Chinese and Japanese in North America," 174; Peter Ward, *White Canada,* xxvi; Anthony B. Chan, *Gold Mountain: The Chinese in the New World*, vol. 15 (Vancouver, New Star Books, 1983); Harry Con, Ronald J. Con, Graham Johnson, Edgar Wickberg, William E. Willmott, *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1982) 13-14.

party and the followers of Mao Zedong's Communist party split the country, and banditry became a rampant problem. By 1938, Japan had taken control of north and east China, and China once again suffered further economic, social, and political instability that would last long after the end of World War Two and the Communist Chinese Revolution in 1949. By the 1940s, Chinese worked and lived abroad in every continent on earth.[8]

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century Chinese migrants were mostly from the Pearl River Delta region in China's Guangdong province. Migration often began by one adventurous soul crossing the Pacific to seek his fortune. He set in motion a transnational pattern of migration that often extended generations. Fathers sent for their sons, brothers, nephews, and cousins, who, in turn, sent for their sons, brothers, nephews, and cousins. News about jobs, living conditions, changing laws, and politics were sent across the Pacific Ocean to facilitate the process of migration. Once the initial stream of emigrants had begun to go abroad, chain migration networks fell easily into place. Newer emigrants more often than not traveled to where they already had relatives or fellow villagers, and they created a chain that encouraged more emigrants from the same home locales to seek out the same destinations. For example, before 1965, more than 60 percent of the Chinese in the United States traced their roots to the eight districts of Namhoi [Nanhai], Punyu [Panyu], Shuntak [Shunte], Sunwui [Hsinhui], Sunning [Hsinning], which was renamed T'oishan [T'aishan], Hoiping [K'aip'ing], Yanping [Enp'ing], and Heungshan [Hsiangshan] in the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong province.

[8] On the global dispersal of Chinese, see Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil,* 16.

The Chinese in Latin America came mostly from the Chungshan, Toisan, Sunwui, Shuntak, and Namhoi districts. The majority of Chinese to Cuba, Peru, and Panama came from the Toisan, Sunwui, and Chungshan districts.[9]

Through these chain migrations or migrant "grooves," Chinese spread throughout the Americas. Most Chinese wanted to go to *Gam Saan,* Gold Mountain, as they called the United States. But once migration across the Pacific had begun, Chinese found a number of possible countries that were equally desirable destinations. As S. Wells Williams, a nineteenth-century American missionary and diplomat in China explained, all destinations in the Americas – from Canada to Peru – came to be known as "Gold Mountain." Moreover, migrants spread out throughout the Americas. A Chinese laundryman living in Chicago, for example, could have relatives in Minneapolis, Duluth, Mexico, and Cuba.[10]

Hong Kong: A City Built on Chinese Migration

[9] [Cantonese spelling first followed by Mandarin] Thomas W. Chinn, Him Mark Lai, and Philip C. Choy, eds., *A History of Chinese in California: A Syllabus,* (San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1969) 2; Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil,* 17. The Chinese in Jamaica were the only group of Chinese in Latin America who did not come from the Canton Delta but from the central region of Guangdong. Chang, "The Chinese in Latin America," 42-3.

[10] Frederick Williams quote from *The Life and letters of Samuel Wells Williams, LL.D., Missionary, Diplomatist, Sinologue* (New York, 1889), cited in Stewart, *Chinese Bondage in Peru,* 15; Chinese laundryman example from McKeown, "Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas," 321-324 and *Chinese Migrant Networks,* 80, 84-86. Lisa Mar also explains that Chinese Canadians "kept open minds about their ultimate destination…By the early twentieth century, Chinese Canadians had approached Canada, China, and the United States as a single field of opportunity." Mar, *Brokering Belonging,* 9.

Like the Chinese who migrated as part of the coolie trade to Cuba and Peru, these new Chinese migrants flocked to Hong Kong, which, as historian Adam McKeown has described, was a city built largely on migration. A multinational network of Chinese and white labor recruiters brought Chinese from Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta across the Pacific to fill labor shortages on Hawaiian and Caribbean plantations and mines and railways in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.[11]

A number of international businesses catered to the business of Chinese migration. Trans-Pacific steamship agents sold tickets for passage aboard a growing number of modern vessels to San Francisco, Victoria, and Callao. Letter offices, banks, and *gam saan jong*, or "Gold Mountain" firms moved people, information, money, and goods from China to locations around the world. Prospective immigrants could buy tickets, have health exams, arrange documentation, and fill out consular forms all at their local *gam saan jong*. The firms also provided emigrants with a place to stay in Hong Kong while they awaited their paperwork to be processed. Emigrants could even purchase the essential items needed for the long journey at their *gam saan jong*, such as comforters, food, trunks, and toiletries.[12]

Hong Kong's migration economy catered to both the movement of Chinese indentured laborers and the migration of Chinese going abroad as free laborers,

[11] McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks,* 76-77. Madeline Hsu cites the example of Chinese labor recruiter Wei Laoying to demonstrate the web of migration emanating from Hong Kong. Wei sent workers from Hong Kong, Macau, and the Pearl River Delta to build railroads for American and English companies in Mexico in 1891. Another recruiter representing a British firm found over one thousand Chinese to travel from Hong Kong to British Columbia in 1884. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold,* 32.
[12] McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks,* 76-77.

merchants, students, and families heading to the United States, Europe, or South America. Oftentimes, the distinction between free and unfree labor migration overlapped with each other and became was blurred. The same shady characters recruited both free and unfree laborers with promises of great riches that would never materialize on the other side of the Pacific Ocean, though coolie brokers often resorted to coercion and kidnapping when the art of persuasion failed.

Coolie and labor brokers were also deliberately vague about the types of work and the exact locations that Chinese were headed to. Some who signed labor contracts to work in Cuba mistakenly believed they were heading for "Gold Mountain," or the United States. The four hundred Chinese migrants on board the *Robert Browne* heading out of Amoy on March 21, 1852, for example, believed they were heading to San Francisco and the promise of gold. Instead, they were destined for Peru where they were to work as coolies on the guano islands. When this news was revealed on board the ship, the Chinese on board the *Robert Browne* were furious. Mistreated and misled by the ship's captain, the Chinese on board the ship organized a mutiny. The captain, two officers, and four crew-members were all killed.[13]

As late as 1909, labor recruiters still routinely misled Chinese migrants bound for other destinations into thinking that they were headed for the United States. V.J. McLoughlin, a labor recruiter representing a U.S. company hiring laborers for railroad construction and agricultural work in Mexico, printed up flyers that promised work on

[13] Lopez, "Migrants Between Empires and Nations," 36. The case of the *Robert Browne* is cited in Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican,* 23.

"plantations and pastures" in locations that were easily "reached by rail from San Francisco." No mention of Mexico appeared in the flyers.[14]

After the coolie trade was abolished, most of the extreme methods of procuring Chinese labor ended. But the large-scale business of Chinese migration remained strong in Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta. Because so many Chinese desired to emigrate abroad but did not have the money to do so, a "credit-ticket" system evolved to allow prospective migrants to borrow money for the trans-Pacific voyage and promise to pay back the cost of the ship's ticket, with credit. While distinct from the coolie trade, debt repayment in the credit-ticket system often took decades and was similarly characterized by exploitation. For example, Chung Kun Ai's grandfather ran a very successful money lending business that catered to migrants and made a fortune this way. "One condition of his loan of $60 was that each borrower was to pay back $120 as soon as he was able to do so," Chun recalled. Such charges were exorbitant, but Chung's grandfather had many takers. "Grandfather must have helped 70 young men from our village and nearby villages to migrate to North and South America and also Australia."[15]

Like the seventy men who borrowed money from Chung Kun Ai's grandfather, there were many Chinese who viewed migration abroad as the only means available to improve their economic and social standing in an increasingly unstable homeland. Lee Chi Yet, orphaned at a young age in Poon Lung Cheng, Toisan, was "kill[ing] himself for

---

[14] Julian Lim, "*Chinos* and *Paisanos:* Chinese Mexican Relations in the Borderlands," *Pacific Historical Review* 79:1 (February, 2010) 50-85, p. 62-63.
[15] The credit-ticket system is explained in McKeown, "Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas," 317 and Chan, *Asian Americans,* 30. Chung Kun Ai's interview is from Chung Kun Ai, *My Seventy-Nine Years in Hawaii* (Hong Kong, 1960) 16.

nothing" as a farmer in the early 1900s. People were starving to death around him, and the situation in his village was desperate. He emigrated to the United States in 1917. More than eighty years later, he explained his decision: "What the hell kind of life I have? I suffer! My eye just looking for a way to get out. I got to look for a way to go. I want to live, so I come to the United States."[16]

Conditions were equally bad in Jeong Foo Louie's village of Kung Yick, Toisan, which sent forty percent of all of its inhabitants to the United States in the early twentieth-century. Like the villages of Lee Chi Yet and Jeong Foo Louie, other villages in Guangdong province, and especially in the Pearl River Delta region, were filled with talk about coming to the United States. Most of the young men in the countryside tried to leave by the time they were working age, and in some villages as many as eighty percent of the men were overseas with the remaining village population relying on them for income.[17]

Chinese Migrants

The Chinese who did cross the Pacific were overwhelmingly young, male laborers who came from the farming and laboring classes. Due to worsening conditions in the Pearl River Delta, over time, an increasing number of non-laborer Chinese chose to

[16] Interview with Wallace Lee by author, Buffalo, New York, February 20, 1990.
[17] Jeong Foo Louie's assessment is found in Judy Yung, Genny Lim, Him Mark Lai, "Summary of Interview with Jeong Foo Louie," HOC-DOI, (History of Chinese Detained on Island) Project, San Francisco, (1976), Asian American Studies Library, UC Berkeley. The culture of migration in Guangdong is explained in Bret de Bary Nee and Victor Nee, *Longtime Californ': A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown,* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) 16.

immigrate to the United States as well. By the 1920s, village storekeepers, Hong Kong merchants, office clerks, politicians, school teachers, students, seamen, and others all sought better fortunes abroad.[18]

Chinese women immigrated to the Americas, but in much smaller numbers. Several factors discouraged Chinese female migration throughout the Americas, though the exact gender ratios in each locale varied. Labor recruiters wanted a mobile male labor force and discouraged the migration of women and families. The migrants themselves viewed migration abroad as a temporary condition. Like many European immigrants during the same time, Chinese desired to make money abroad so that they could return home as rich men to buy land and build fancy *Gam Saan* houses. In this way, the family's wealth and status would be secured for future generations.

Another reason why fewer Chinese women migrated abroad to the Americas had to do with patriarchal Chinese cultural values that discouraged and even forbade "decent" Chinese women from traveling abroad. Then there were the practical reasons. It was expensive to buy steamship tickets crossing the ocean. What kind of jobs would these women hold in order to pay back the money borrowed for the ticket? Plus, conditions in the Americas were tough. California's Sierra mountains, Mexico's plantations, and Panama's undeveloped frontier were no places for Chinese women, it was believed. And even if they wanted to come, various immigration laws were skewed against Chinese women.

[18] Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman,* 107.

In the United States, for example, the 1875 Page Act barred Asian women suspected of prostitution as well as Asian laborers brought to the United States involuntarily. The immigration of Chinese women was further curtailed with the passage of the Exclusion Act of 1882. Women were not expressly prohibited from entering the United States in the law, but it greatly curtailed their ability to immigrate to the United States. All of the exempt categories listed in the exclusion laws – merchants, students, teachers, diplomats, and travelers – were professional categories that were held almost exclusively by men in nineteenth century China. Therefore, until the early twentieth century when more Chinese women began to pursue higher education and become students, there were no provisions in the laws which allowed Chinese women to immigrate to the United States by virtue of their own status. Over time, the easing of cultural restrictions on Chinese female emigration and the desire for the economic security in the United States also prompted more Chinese women to migrate abroad as the wives of Chinese merchants and U.S. citizens.[19]

Migration rates of Chinese women to the Americas varied according to distinct laws and characteristics of the receiving country. There were proportionately more Chinese women in Hawaii, for example, because their migration was generally encouraged and because they tended to stay and raise children in Hawaii. In 1900, Chinese women were 5 percent of the total Chinese population in the United States, whereas they made up 13 percent of the Chinese population in Hawaii. Chinese who

[19] Sucheng Chan, "Exclusion of Chinese Women," in Sucheng Chan, ed., *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991) 125, 95, 97; Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1995) 55-63.

arrived in Panama from elsewhere in the Americas were more likely to bring their families with them than those who arrived directly from China. In Canada, head taxes on Chinese immigrants kept the number of women low, and the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 put an end to almost all Chinese immigration. In 1911, Chinese women made up only four percent of the total Chinese population in Canada.[20]

As a rule, the Latin American countries that encouraged Chinese immigration during both the coolie trade and free migration periods did so with the aim of the Chinese staying temporarily as laborers, rather than as permanent settlers. The majority of Chinese immigrants also intended to work temporarily in Latin America rather than settling permanently and thus rarely brought their wives with them. In Mexico, Chinese women were eight percent of the Chinese population in 1926, during the height of Chinese settlement in Mexico. Chinese women were only 1.1 percent of the total Chinese population of almost 7,000 in Lima, Peru in 1908. In 1931, there were only 202 Chinese women in Cuba compared to 24,445 men (.8 percent). In Jamaica, the sex ratio was almost an equal 1.7:1 in 1943 due to the different attitudes by the British colonial government. After 1900, most Latin American countries adopted restrictions against

[20] Hawaiian statistics from McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks,* 31, 36. Panamanian statistics from Siu, *Memories of a Future Home,* 43. Canadian statistics from Pan, *Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas,* 235. In 1921, Chinese women were 6% of the total population in Canada. The 1923 Immigration Act prevented the immigration of anyone from China. Only 15 Chinese immigrants were allowed into Canada between 1923 and 1947, when this law was finally revoked.

Chinese immigration, which made it even more difficult for Chinese women to migrate.[21]

Some of the first Chinese women to come to the United States came as prostitutes who had been kidnapped, lured, or purchased and imported as indentured or enslaved laborers. One woman testified in 1892 that she had been kidnapped and brought to the United States through deception. "I was deceived by the promise I was going to marry a rich and good husband," she told investigators. When she arrived in San Francisco, she was sold for four hundred dollars to a slave dealer. "He [then] sold me for seventeen hundred dollars. I have been a brothel slave ever since." Some prostitutes became concubines or mistresses to wealthy Chinese men. Most were sold to parlor houses in Chinatown that catered to well-to-do Chinese and white men or to alley cribs, small, sparsely furnished shacks where they were forced to entice customers until they were sold again or died from venereal disease.[22]

Over the years, as Chinese men decided to stay in the Americas, an increasing number of women came. In the United States, 9.7 percent of Chinese entering the country were female in 1910. In 1920, they were 20 percent, and by 1930, the percentage of women immigrants entering the country had risen to 30 percent. They came as the wives or daughters of *gam saan haak* (Gold Mountain men), hoping to enjoy the economic security that life in the Americas was supposed to bring. Wong Lan Fong's experience was not uncommon. A lack of steady work plagued her family

[21] On Latin America, including Cuba and Jamaica, see Chang, "The Chinese in Latin America," 73-4. Mexican statistics from Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico,* 67. The Peruvian statistics are from McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks,* 47.
[22] Yung, *Unbound Feet,* 26-29.

following the 1911 revolution in China, and they were forced to move around Canton in search of work and to sell the family possessions. "I remember moving every couple of years," Wong Lan Fong reflected. "The house would become smaller and not so nice. We would have to sell things . . . my father always said that this was the last thing he would sell, because he hated it, but he always had to do it again." After Wong Lan Fong's mother fell ill and died, her father and new stepmother urged her to look for a *Gum Saan haak*, a Gold Mountain man, to marry so that she could go to the United States. It was the only way to secure her economic future, they explained. In 1926, she married Lee Chi Yet and came to the United States a year later.[23]

At Work

When they arrived in the late nineteenth century, Chinese immigrants worked in the rapidly expanding mining, railroad, lumber, fishing, and agricultural industries in the American and Canadian West. Industrialization and the expansion of American capitalism drove an incessant need for labor. A massive labor force was particularly needed in developing western states to build transportation iand to exploit natural resources. In 1877, San Francisco minister Otis Gibson reported that the demand for Chinese labor was constant. Chinese immigrant laborers quickly became "indispensable" as miners and railroad and farm laborers. They were hired again and again for jobs that

[23] Statistics from "Immigrants Admitted" and "Summary of Chinese Seeking Admission to the U.S." in *AR-CGI,* (1890, 1897-1932); H. Chen, "Chinese Immigration," 181, 201, 206. Wong Lan Fong's experience from File 26002/1-9, Chinese Arrival Files, San Francisco; Interview with Mary Lee, February 20, 1990.

were believed to be too dirty, dangerous, or degrading for white men and were paid on a separate and lower wage scale than whites.[24]

Chinese were heavily recruited to harvest sugar cane on the Hawaiian Islands, where sugar was "king" during the nineteenth century. Over 300,000 Asians entered the islands between 1850 and 1920. The Chinese came first, recruited by planters in the Royal Hawaiian Agricultural Society. Two thousand came between 1852 and 1875, and by 1890, Chinese were almost nineteen percent of the total population (16,752). An estimated 46,000 Chinese arrived at the Honolulu Custom House from 1852 to 1899. They called the islands *Tan Heung Shan,* or fragrant sandalwood mountains. Sugar planters were satisfied with the Chinese. The Royal Hawaiian Agricultural Society president praised the Chinese for being "prompt at the call of the bell, steady in their work, and quick to learn." Planters believed that they made up a superior working force compared to the native Hawaiian.[25]

But the Chinese were not content to stay on the plantations. The vast majority left the plantations after their contracts expired. Of the over 8,000 Chinese working on sugar plantations at the end of 1897, over half had left by 1902. They became farmers and grew rice, coffee, bananas, and taro or raised livestock for sale. Many found

[24] Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore,* 28.
[25] On sugar plantation economy and Chinese immigration, see Lydon, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in the Hawaiian Kingdom*, 18; Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom,* v. 3, 153; Glick, *Sojourners and Settlers,* 3, 21. Quote from Royal Hawaiian Agricultural Society cited in Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore,* 24.

opportunities in the towns and in the city of Honolulu. Chinese sought their fortunes elsewhere.[26]

On the U.S. mainland, Western railroad companies were the largest employers of Chinese laborers. In 1865, the first Chinese were hired by the Central Pacific Railroad (CPR) as track layers on the great transcontinental railroad heading east from Sacramento. Company president Leland Stanford praised the Chinese as "quiet, peaceable, industrious, economical – ready and apt to learn all the different kinds of work" to build the railroad. There was great pressure to complete the railroad on time. As the CPR worked eastward, the Union Pacific Railroad worked westward, beginning construction from Omaha, Nebraska to Promontory Point, Utah, where the two railroads would meet and finally link the country by rail from east to west. CPR agents sent for more Chinese laborers from China and paid their passage over to the United States. By 1867, 12,000 Chinese were working on the CPR. They represented 90 percent of the workforce.[27]

The Chinese performed all types of jobs to build the railroad. They cleared trees, blasted rocks with explosives picks, and shovels, drove hoses, shoveled and carried away debris, and laid tracks. The rugged mountains of the Sierra Nevada "swarmed with Celestials, shoveling, shoveling, carting, drilling and blasting rocks and earth," described one observer. The work was incredibly difficult and dangerous. Many Chinese died during the winter of 1866 when snowstorms covered construction workers and trapped them under snowdrifts. Others lost their lives in explosions while trying to dynamite

[26] Glick, *Sojourners and Settlers,* 46.
[27] Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore,* 84-85.

tunnels through the mountains. In 1867, 5,000 Chinese went on strike demanding higher pay and fewer hours. "Eight hours a day good for white men, all the same good for Chinamen," they declared. Charles Crocker responded by cutting off the miners' food supply. Isolated and starving in their work camps in the mountains, the strikers surrendered.[28] When the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads met at Promontory Point on May 10, 1869 to lay the last spike to link the transcontinental railroad, the Chinese workers who had made it possible were noticeably absent in official photographs commemorating the occasion.

With the end of their railroad jobs, thousands of Chinese laborers drifted into San Francisco, where they worked in factories making boots, shoes, textile, and cigars. By the end of the nineteenth century, Chinese immigrants had turned marshland in California's Central Valley into some of the most productive and fertile farmland in the country. In 1880, Chinese made up 86 percent of the agricultural labor force in Sacramento County, 85 percent in Yuba County, and 67 percent in Solano County. By the early twentieth century, the Chinese had been pushed out or left agriculture and manufacturing and entered domestic work or started small businesses such as laundries, restaurants, and stores.[29]

Working-class Chinese women also filled important niches in the rural and urban economies in which Chinese lived. They worked alongside their husbands in Chinese-owned restaurants, shops, and laundries. By World War I, Chinese women dominated

[28] Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore,* 85-86.
[29] Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore,* 87-89, 91. Agricultural labor force statistics from Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil*, 51-78. On Chinese being pushed out of agriculture, see Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman*, 85.

the garment industry in San Francisco sewing clothes. Working in Chinatown sweatshops that contracted work from white manufacturers, these garment workers were paid substandard wages and had no union representation. Juggling their dual responsibilities as homemakers and wage earners, Chinese women were indispensable partners in their families' struggles for economic survival in the United States.[30]

Remigrating within the Americas

Once in the United States, Chinese laborers were easily recruited to remigrate elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere wherever they were needed. Canadian railroad bosses recruited Chinese labor from both China and from the ranks of Central Pacific Railroad workers from the United States. The Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR) hired 17,000 Chinese to work build the transcontinental railroad through the Canadian Rockies beginning in 1875. Some of these laborers came directly from Asia on the CPR steamship line. Others came from the United States. CPR labor recruiter, Andrew "Boss" Onderdonk, had supervised the construction of San Francisco's seawall and ferry boats, the Northern Pacific railroad in Oregon, and the Southern Pacific in California as an engineer. He knew the value of Chinese labor well, and recruited Chinese workers from California, Washington, and Oregon. In 1880 and 1881 alone, he brought 1500 experienced Chinese workers from the United States.[31]

[30] Yung, *Unbound Feet,* 86-92.
[31] Ward, *White Canada Forever,* 171; Con, *From China to Canada*, 21; Roy, *A White Man's Province,* 50; A. Chan, *Gold Mountain,* 58-9, 63; Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor,* 53.

In 1864, Chinese workers from the United States were also recruited to work as railroad laborers in Mexico. By the early twentieth century, wealthy Chinese merchants from San Francisco and Los Angeles were working with Mexican and American business interests to bring Chinese laborers from the United States and directly from China to Mexico to serve as agricultural contract laborers for haciendos and ranchos in the fertile Mexicali Valley. The Mexican government also became directly involved in the recruitment of Chinese labor from the United States. Ramón Corral, who led the negotiations towards the successful treaty of amity and commerce between China and Mexico, took charge of the venture. The Chinese Six Companies in San Francisco were responsible for finding and recruiting Chinese laborers in South China and putting them on Mexico-bound ships. Mexican officials received payment for each Chinese laborer who made it to Mexico. Once the Chinese laborers arrived in Mazatlán, Manzanillo, and Salina Cruz, representatives from Chinese organizations met them, taught them basic Spanish, introduced them to Mexican culture, and sent them to their various destinations and jobs. California-based Chinese merchants also assisted some newcomers in establishing small businesses by extending them credit. [32]

In Latin America, similar methods of trans-Pacific and hemispheric labor recruitment was in practice. U.S. companies like the United Fruit Company in Panama

[32] On 1864 arrival of Chinese in Mexico, see Craib, "Chinese Immigrants," 6.On Chinese workers in Mexicali valley, see Curtis, "Mexicali's Chinatown," 335. The role of the Mexican government in Chinese labor recruitment is from Hu-DeHart, "Coolies, Shopkeepers, and Pioneers," 102. The role of the Chinese Six Companies in labor recruitment is from Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico,* 27-28, 42-43;

also recruited Chinese laborers directly from China and from elsewhere in the Americas. Some remigrated from Peru, Cuba, Jamaica, Central America, and the United States.[33]

Migration During the Age of Exclusion

The third era of Chinese migration occurred during the age of Chinese exclusion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries after the U.S. had imposed restrictions on Chinese immigration. In response, Chinese migrated and remigrated elsewhere, notably to Canada and Mexico, but also to Cuba, Peru, and the Caribbean.

In 1882, the United States Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act prohibiting the entry of Chinese laborers into the United States and allowing only select "exempt" classes of Chinese to enter the country. It was the first time in U.S. history that the federal government had enacted such broad restrictions on immigration based on race and class. The passage of the law transformed Chinese migration to the United States and to the Americas. Chinese migration during this age of exclusion was characterized by the rise of increasing immigration regulation, "illegal" immigration, and redirected migrations beyond the United States.

The Chinese in the United States referred to the Chinese Exclusion Laws as a "hundred cruel laws" that were "more ferocious than tigers." "Why do they not legislate against Swedes, Germans, Italians, Turks and others?" asked Yung Hen, a poultry dealer in San Francisco. There are no strings on those people…For some reason, you people

[33] Siu, *Memories of a Future Home,* 17.

persist in pestering the Chinamen."[34] The exclusion laws affected every aspect of Chinese migration to the United States. They determined who would be able to immigrate, they shaped immigration strategies, and they influenced the content and form of Chinese activism during the exclusion era. Although the Chinese exclusion laws severely curtailed Chinese immigration into the United States, it was not successful in completely preventing Chinese immigrants from entering the country. Indeed, worsening conditions in China combined with employment opportunities in the United States encouraged thousands of Chinese to immigrate despite the exclusion laws. From 1882 to 1943, an estimated 303,000 Chinese successfully gained admission into the United States, a figure that is greater than the 258,000 Chinese who were admitted during the pre-exclusion era from 1849 to 1882. Chinese men most often applied for admission as returning laborers, merchants, U.S. citizens, or the sons of merchants and U.S. citizens. Chinese women applied as either the wives or daughters of Chinese merchants or U.S. citizens.[35] Chinese migrants to the U.S. beat the exclusion odds by

[34] Rhyme No. 6 and No. 11, in Hom, *Songs of Gold Mountain*, 79, 84. Yung Hen quotes from *San Francisco Morning Call,* Sept. 14, 1892, 8.

[35] Pre-exclusion era statistics taken from Yung, *Unbound Feet*, 22. The figure for the exclusion era includes immigrants only from 1882–91 and immigrants and returning citizens from 1894–1940. Statistics for 1892 not available. *AR-CGI,* 1898–1943; Chen, "Chinese Immigration into the United States," 181; Liu, "A Comparative Demographic Study," 223; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the U.S. 1789–1945,* 35. From 1910 to 1924, U.S. citizens made up 41 percent of the total number of Chinese men admitted into the country; returning laborers and returning merchants were 15 percent each; merchant sons were 11 percent; new merchants were less than 1 percent. From 1910 to 1924, wives of U.S. citizens made up 30 percent of the total number of Chinese women admitted into the country; merchant wives were 28 percent; U.S. citizens were 18 percent; merchant daughters were 6 percent; students were 5 percent; and returning laborers were 2 percent. Lee, *At America's Gates,* 115, 98.

relying upon Chinese migration networks and strategies as well as new American tools of immigration lawyers, courts, and the judicial system.

To counteract the restrictions in the exclusion laws and the government's strict enforcement practices, many Chinese learned to evade or circumvent the laws as well. "We didn't want to come in illegally, but we were forced to because of the immigration laws. They particularly picked on the Chinese. If we told the truth, it didn't work. So we had to take the crooked path." The most common strategy that immigrants used was to falsely claim membership in one of the classes that were exempt from the exclusion laws, such as Chinese merchants or native-born citizens of the United States. Identification papers for children, known as "paper sons," of exempt-class Chinese were useful, because the immigration service often lacked reliable documentary evidence verifying births and marriages occurring either in the United States or in China. "The trick is this," explained Mr. Yuen, an immigrant who arrived as a paper son. "You tell the immigration office, 'I have been in China three years, I have three sons, these are their birthdays, the names and so forth.' Few years later, if you do have your own [sons,] then you bring them over here, if not, then you could sell these papers, you know. There's always a lot of buyers ready to buy. You try to sell to your own village, or a similar last name." [36]

The majority of Exclusion-era Chinese entered the United States through the Angel Island Immigration Station. As immigration officials attempted to distinguish false

[36] "Crooked path" is from Interview #24, Angel Island Oral History Project. Mr. Yuen interview is cited in Lai, Lim, and Yung, *Island,* 45; Interview with Mr. Yuen, Angel Island Interviews, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

claims for admission from real ones, long and detailed interrogations – sometimes involving multiple sessions and hundreds of questions – became commonplace. These intensive interrogations led to lengthy detentions. While immigrants from eighty different countries were processed through Angel Island, Chinese made up seventy percent of all immigrant detainees and their average stay was for two to three weeks, the longest of all the immigrant groups coming through Angel Island.[37]

The poems carved into the walls of the detention barracks at the Angel Island Immigration Station reflect Chinese migrants' frustration, anger, and sadness of having to endure such discrimination.

I clasped my hands in parting with my brothers and classmates.
Because of the mouth, I hastened to cross the American ocean.
How was I to know that the western barbarians had lost their hearts and reason?
With a hundred kinds of oppressive laws, they mistreat us Chinese.[38]

The Chinese in America protested against the exclusion policies in the courts, petitions to U.S. government officials, and by daring to continue immigrating to the United States with fraudulent papers and documents.[39] But increasingly, they also stopped trying to enter the United States altogether and went instead to Canada, Mexico, and Latin America.

---

[37] Lee and Yung, *Angel Island,* 70. These figures are based on a study of 29,000 passengers listed in the ledgers of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company (PMSC) for 1913-1918. See Barde and Bobonis, "Detention at Angel Island," 113-116; Lai, "Island," 98; W. Chen, "Chinese Under Both Exclusion and Immigration Laws," 403.
[38] Lai, Lim, Yung, *Island,* 162.
[39] McClain, *In Search of Equality;* Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers,* E. Lee, *At America's Gates*.

Canada

Following the passage of the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act, Canadian newspapers predicted that an influx of Chinese would soon appear north of the forty-ninth parallel. They proved to be correct. Fifty-seven hundred Chinese arrived in Canada during the first half of 1882. After the United States passed the so-called Scott Act (1888), which nullified the U.S. return permits of an estimated 20,000 Chinese laborers, another 773 Chinese immigrated to Canada. In 1891, the Chinese population in Canada was over nine thousand, an increase of 108% from ten years earlier. Over 5,400 more Chinese arrived following the 1892 U.S. passage of the Geary Act, which extended the exclusion of Chinese laborers into the U.S. for another ten years and required them to register with the federal government.[40]

As chapter ten explores, many Chinese entering Canada had their sights set on entering the United States and surreptitiously crossed the unguarded border using a variety of disguises and strategies. At the same time, Canadian government investigators interviewing Chinese migrants in the country found that with the U.S. closed to Chinese, Canada emerged as the preferred alternative destination. One interviewee told officials that he had been in the U.S., returned to China, and then chose to remigrate to Canada because the climate seemed more conducive to his grocery store business. Others coming directly from China had relatives in the U.S. who had

[40] 1882 statistics from Roy, *White Man's Province,* 1990, 51. Statistics following the 1888 law and from the 1891 Canadian census from Pan, *Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas,* 235. Statistics after 1892 from Canadian Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration, "Report," 271, as cited in Zhang, "Dragon in the Land," 238; U.S. Congress, House, Select Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Investigation of Chinese Immigration,* 51st Cong., 2nd sess., H. Doc. 4048, serial 2890, p. 1.

advised them to go to Canada, where they thought there were more opportunities and less restrictions.[41]

Chinese migration to Canada continued even after the country imposed head taxes on all Chinese entering the country. The Chinese were the only group singled out for restrictions in this way. In 1885, the head tax was fifty dollars. In 1900, it was raised to one hundred dollars, and three years later, it was raised once again to five hundred dollars. Many Chinese Canadians felt bitterly resentful about the taxes. Sam Eng explained: "The Japanese people didn't pay any head tax…They don't make the English people pay the tax…so why should the Chinese people pay tax? It's not fair." For many, however, the tax was considered a necessary price to pay. "You are paying the tax to be allowed to come here and get yourself a life, a living, not only for yourself. Also for your family," Eng reasoned. In fact, the head taxes had an unintended result of increasing the wages of those Chinese who remained in the country, and new migration continued. By 1901, there were 17,312 Chinese in Canada, and the population grew by around ten thousand each decade. By 1931, there were 46,519 Chinese living in Canada.[42] As in the United States, they mostly worked in laundries, restaurants, domestic service, and small trade.

A new generation of Chinese began to enter Canada before World War I. While earlier migrants had largely been young men coming as laborers, after 1911, there were many more women, as well as students and merchants. Vancouver replaced Victoria as

[41] King, "Report to Enquire into the Methods," 72-3.
[42] Sam Eng quotes from Huang, *Chinese Canadians,* 16. Statistics from Pan, *Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas,* 235.

the largest and most dynamic Chinese community in the country. Families were formed, and with them, schools, churches, and organizations.[43]

Mexico

With the United States closed to Chinese laborers, Chinese also began to look to Mexico. It offered the promise of employment for both laborers and merchants, especially in the rapidly developing frontier regions where U.S. investment was located. The Chinese called Mexico "Da Lusong," or "Big Luzon," a reference to the Philippines, which was called "Xiao Lusong," or "Little Luzon." Most importantly, it was a convenient back door into the United States. As chapter ten discusses, Chinese immigrants pioneered a multinational migration network that brought thousands of undocumented Chinese into the United States every year until World War I when transpacific steamship traffic was interrupted.[44]

The Chinese also came as a result of Mexican government policies under General Porfirio Díaz that encouraged economic growth based on foreign investment. Díaz and his *cientifico* cabinet advisors had hoped to develop the country through foreign investment and immigration, preferably from Europe. But large-scale immigration from

[43] Huang, *Chinese Canadians,* 4.
[44] On Chinese migration redirected to Mexico, see Hu-DeHart, "Coolies, Shopkeepers, and Pioneers," 92, 97 and "Racism and Anti-Chinese Persecution in Sonora, Mexico, 1876-1932." *Amerasia* 9:2 (1982) 3. James Curtis argues that "the Chinese might not have been attracted to the Mexicali Valley in the first place or settled in it permanently...if [the Chinese Exclusion Act] had not been enacted." James R. Curtis, "Mexicali's Chinatown," *Geographical Review* 84:3, 335. Available from: Science Reference Center, Ipswich, MA. Accessed April 10, 2012. On Mexico as "Da Lusong," see Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico,* 12.

Europe never materialized due to the lack of well-paying jobs and available land. Extensive negotiations between China and Mexico began after 1880 under the direction of Mexican finance minister Matías Romero, who praised Chinese immigration as a solution for the labor shortages plaguing certain parts of the country.[45]

After the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in the United States, Romero approached the Chinese minister in Washington, DC with a proposal to bring Chinese immigrants to Mexico. In 1884, a Mexican commercial agent was stationed in Hong Kong, and the Mexican government organized the Mexican Pacific Navigation Company, which gained the right to transport goods and immigrants between Mexico and Asian ports. In 1899, the Treaty of Amity and Commerce between China and Mexico gave Chinese freedom to live and work in Mexico. [46]

Together, the U.S.'s Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Canadian head taxes, and the 1899 Treaty between China and Mexico shifted Chinese migration away from the United States and Canada and towards Mexico and other Latin American countries. American, Japanese, and Chinese steamship companies routinely brought Chinese merchants and laborers to Mexican ports along the Pacific such as Salina Cruz, Mazatlán, Manzanillo, and Guaymas. A smaller number entered along the Gulf of Mexico at Progreso, Tampico, and Veracruz. Chinese also continued to land in San Francisco and then travel south to Southern California and Arizona to cross the border to Northern

[45] On Diaz policies and foreign investment, see Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico,* 25-26; Evelyn Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society: The Chinese in Northern Mexico, 1875-1932," *The Journal of Arizona History* (1980) 277; Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican,* 13-15.
[46] Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico,* 26-27; K. Cott, K, "Mexican Diplomacy and the Chinese Issue, 1876-1910," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 67:1 (1987) 63-85.

Mexico. About 5,000 Chinese contract laborers entered Mexico between 1891 and 1900, mostly from the United States but also directly from China. More than 60,000 Chinese immigrants came to Mexico during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, though many eventually remigrated across the border into the United States. They comprised the second largest number of foreigners who resided in Mexico in 1926. The Chinese population was its largest in 1927, when 24,218 Chinese (22,446 men and 1,772 women) were recorded by Mexican census takers.[47]

Both Chinese laborers and merchants found plentiful economic opportunities in Mexico by following the trail of U.S. capital streaming into the country. When U.S. companies mined copper and built railroads, Chinese immigrants were close behind. Chinese entrepreneurs were often the first shopkeepers in the remote villages of Sonora or in the new settlements that sprang up along railroad construction and mines and soon monopolized the small commercial sector in these areas. Chinese-run grocery stores, shops, restaurants, and shoe manufacturers dotted the neighborhoods of Sonora, Chihuahua, and Baja California and provided essential goods and services to large and small Mexican cities and towns throughout the country.[48]

---

[47] On the effect of the 1899 Treaty and the establishment of trans-Pacific steamship travel to Mexico, see Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico,* 27, 51. Statistics from Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society," 283; Leo Jacques, "The Anti-Chinese Campaign in Sonora, Mexico, 1900-1930 (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 1974) xi; Hu-DeHart, "Coolies, Shopkeepers, and Pioneers," 94, 99; Chang, "The Chinese in Latin America," 27, 70; Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico,* 172-175.

[48] Chang, "The Chinese in Latin America," 27, 57-9; Hu-DeHart, "Coolies, Shopkeepers, Pioneers," 91, 97. Chinese in Panama followed a similar pattern. Chinese commerce spread alongside American expansion in that country. Sizable Chinese communities grew in Panama City, Colon, and Bocas del Toro, where the U.S. presence was large. Siu, *Memories of a Future Home,* 39.

By 1910, Chinese immigrants were in almost every state and territory of Mexico. The great majority of Chinese in Mexico settled in the northern states of Sonora, Baja California, and Chihuahua. They established themselves in broad range of occupations. Over a third were engaged in commerce. Another third worked as truck farmers, small manufacturers, agricultural laborers, fishermen, laundrymen, and sales clerks, among other occupations. The remaining Chinese immigrants were students, minor children, stay-at-home wives and daughters, and domestic servants. In Mexicali, they helped develop cotton plantations or ran most of the retail businesses in the area. The Chinese in the Yucatan helped develop the henequen plantations for the world market in twine. In Tamaulipas, the Chinese worked in the petroleum industry and in the railroads.[49]

Latin America and the Caribbean

Migration also continued to Latin America and the Caribbean, where Chinese laborers and merchants engaged in a wide range of retail businesses, including groceries, import businesses, small shops, agriculture, and industries. As it had redirected Chinese immigration away from the United States and towards Canada and

[49] They were concentrated in northwestern Mexico, but they were also settled in the southern and eastern states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Veraruz, Tabasco, Campeche, and Yucatán. On distribution of Chinese throughout Mexico, see Humberto Monteón González, *Chinos y antichinos en México : documentos para su estudio* (Guadalajara : Gobierno de Jalisco, Secretaría General, Unidad Editorial, 1988), 23, note 41; Chang, "The Chinese of Latin America," 56; Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico,* 47. Sonora had the largest Chinese population in Mexico in 1910, but they were proportionally greater in Baja California Norte, according to Julian Lim. They made up an estimated 12 percent of the general population in 1921 and 14 percent in 1927. Julian Lim, "*Chinos* and *Paisanos:* Chinese Mexican Relations in the Borderlands," *Pacific Historical Review* 79:1 (February, 2010) 50-85, p. 61. On breakdown of Chinese labor patterns, see Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico,* 101; Hu-DeHart, "Coolies, Shopkeepers, and Pioneers," 98.

Mexico, the U.S.'s Chinese Exclusion Act also led to increased Chinese immigration to Latin America. Cuba and Peru were major destinations for both new immigrants to the Americas as well as to *californianos,* Chinese remigrating from San Francisco who had been forced out of the country by the growing violent anti-Chinese movement.[50]

Cuba's *la colonia china* was a thriving community at the end of the nineteenth century. It was made up of new Chinese immigrants who entered the country after World War I and ex-coolies. Chinese participated in the struggles for Cuban independence against Spain both on and off the battlefield. And while restrictions on Chinese immigration were put into place under the U.S. occupations from 1899 to 1902 and 1906 to 1907, it was re-started during World War I. Between 1917 and 1921, 12,537 Chinese – mostly from China's Pearl River Delta – entered Cuba and served as an integral labor source during Cuba's sugar boom. By the 1920s, Havana's *barrio chino* was bustling and was one of the best-known Chinatowns in the Americas. Restaurants, laundries, bakeries, bodegas, shoe and watch repair shops, schools, and cultural associations lined the six major blocks of the neighborhood. By 1950, the 23,000 Chinese in Cuba was the largest Chinese population in Latin America.[51]

---

[50] A. J. Duffield, *Peru in the Guano Age: Being a Short Account of a Recent Visit to the Guano Deposits with Some Reflections on the Money They Have Produced and the Uses to which It has Been Applied* (London: Richard Bently and Son, 1877) 48-50, as cited in Benjamin Narvaez, "Chinese Coolies in Cuba and Peru," 425. See also Stewart, *Chinese Bondage in Peru,* 128 and 226.

[51] On late 19th century Chinese community in Cuba, see Lopez, "Migrants Between Empires and Nations," 59; 76-78, 110. On Cuba's *barrio chino,* see Chang, "The Chinese in Latin America," 63; Lopez, "Migrants Between Empires and Nations," 76-78, 110, 216-218; 224-236, 271-274. Latin American statistics from Pan, *Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas,* 255.

Because of the abuses of the coolie system, Peru had a bad reputation amongst prospective Chinese migrants. There was also no direct steamship service between Hong Kong and Callao until 1904. As a result, only few hundred Chinese immigrated to Peru each year around 1900. In the early twentieth century, Chinese migration to the country fluctuated between highs and lows. As many as three thousand Chinese arrived each year in Callao between the peak years of 1905 to 1909. But restrictions on Chinese immigration in 1909 slowed immigration considerably.[52]

In 1940, there were only 10,915 Chinese in the country. The Chinese congregated in the coastal provinces of Peru, or in Lima, which after Havana, had the largest Chinese population in Latin America in 1950. The majority were small merchants engaged in retail businesses selling vegetables, pork, and charcoal. They came to dominate the grocery trade in Lima. But the Chinese also opened up bakeries and small restaurants, used-furniture stores, small factories, and hotels. Chinese mule drivers, peddlers, and traders made their way to remote villages on the western slopes of the Andes and in the Amazon rubber camps.[53]

The Chinese also invested heavily in agriculture. During World War I, Chinese businessmen in Peru developed that country's cotton plantation industry. During the 1930s, they controlled about one-seventh of Peru's total cotton production. But it was in commerce that most Chinese Peruvians were employed. The 1940 country census found that 70 percent of Chinese immigrants engaged in commerce. Some businesses

[52] McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks,* 45; Chang, "The Chinese in Latin America," 24-26; Bradley, *Trans-Pacific Relations,* 58.
[53] Chang, "The Chinese in Latin America," 52-55, 79; McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks,* 53-4, 140.

were small. Others, like the Wing On Chong Company, had long roots and extensive international ties. Established in 1872, it had headquarters in Hong Kong and branches in Peru, Cuba, and Brail by the early twentieth century.[54]

By the late nineteenth century, Chinese were also widely settled throughout the Caribbean islands. Chinese laborers who had survived their periods of indenture struck out on their own. In Trinidad, Chinese mixed into the local creole culture. They married black women, became Christian, and educated their children in western schools. New migrants mostly went to Jamaica and Trinidad, with immigration peaking between 1920 and 1933. The Chinese population grew from 2,111 in 1911 to 6,879 in 1943 in those locations. Many of the newcomers arrived in the islands circuitously, having lived in other areas throughout the Americas, including Canada and Latin America before remigrating to the Caribbean. Chinese migrants recruited to Jamaica in 1884 crossed the entire North American continent in an epic journey that brought them by boat from Hong Kong to Vancouver, by train to Nova Scotia, and then by boat again to Jamaica. Once in Jamaica and Trinidad, Chinese settled in the capital cities, like Kingston. Their economic impact in Jamaica was strong. In the mid-twentieth century, they virtually controlled the grocery business, food imports, soft-drink bottling, and bakeries.[55]

---

[54] On cotton industry, see Chang, "The Chinese in Latin America," 62, 110-114. statistics from Bernard Wong, "A Comparative Study of the Assimilation of the Chinese in New York City and Lima, Peru," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20:3 (Jul., 1978) 335-358, p. 352. Wing On Chong Company description from McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks,* 140.

[55] On creole culture, see Christine Ho, "'Hold the Chow Mein, Gimme Soca': Creolization of the Chinese in Guyana, Trinidad, and Jamaica," *Amerasia* 15:2 (1989) 3-25, pgs. 8-12. Extended journey to Jamaica described in McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks,* 85.

Intermarriage was common among the Chinese in Latin America. Many Chinese laborers in Peru, for example, entered into common-law relationships with local women as early as the nineteenth century.[56] In Mexico, an estimated seventy percent of Chinese men were married to Mexican women, including *mestizas*, white, and native. Intermarried Chinese merchants in Mexico acculturated into local life at much higher levels than the Chinese in the United States, which had strict antimiscegenation laws. They became Mexicanized by learning Spanish, becoming naturalized citizens, forming social, familial, and economic ties with Mexicans, and becoming parts of families and communities.[57] Caribbean Chinese were largely engaged in small-scale retail as "middlemen" between the black and white societies of the islands. Chinese married to locals (blacks and coloured) created a mixed Creole Chinese community. In Jamaica, intermarriages between Chinese immigrants and black Jamaican women were common

---

Chinese occupations in Jamaica described in Chang, "The Chinese in Latin America," 30-31, 82-86 and Pan, *Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas,* 250.

[56] This pattern of assimilation differed from the Chinese elite merchant class, who tried to assimilate into elite Peruvian society by downplaying their ethnic Chinese connections and trying to equate themselves with other foreign merchant elites from North America and Europe. McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks,* 141.

[57] Robert Chao Romero estimates that thirty-five percent of married Chinese males living in Chihuahua City in 1930 were married to Mexican women. Many others engaged in extramarital relationships and free unions with Mexican women, sometimes resulting in children. Romero explains the higher rates of acculturation in Mexico due to the absence of the antimiscegenation laws in Mexico as well as the ability of Chinese to become naturalized Mexican citizens. On intermarriage between Chinese and Mexicans, see Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico,* 2, 59-60, 71-74, 114-5; Julia Schiavone Camacho, "Traversing Boundaries: Chinese, Mexicans, and Chinese Mexicans in the Formation of Gender, Race, and Nation in the Twentieth-Century U.S.-Mexican Borderlands," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Texas, El Paso, 2006) 43-46, 77-83, 84-97.

as were the *Chino Cubano* families in Cuba. These mixed race families were often well integrated into local economies and cultures.[58]

Transnational Migrant Networks and Borderland Communities

By the early twentieth century, Chinese migrants had settled in almost every country in the Americas. Amongst all of the Asian migrant groups, they were the most widely distributed throughout the region. Chinese migrations across the Pacific and within the Americas created enduring transnational communities and networks that allowed people, information, and goods to travel from home villages in China, through central migration and commercial hubs, and on to their own migrant communities in the Americas. Chinese migrants in the Americans sent money, news, goods, and advice in letters and packages to families across the Pacific. But they also helped create organizations and networks that allowed them stay connected to their homeland and with other Chinese communities in the Americas.[59]

As the Chinese migrated throughout the Americas, they formed fraternal organizations, political parties, chambers of commerce, secret societies, *huiguan* (regional associations), labor organizations, and more. These organizations provided support and mutual aid that eased the transition into new host societies . They also

[58] On creole community in Caribbean, see Look Lai, "Introduction," *The Chinese of the West Indies,* 16. On Jamaican families, see Chang, "The Chinese in Latin America," 125-126, 129, 63. For *Chino Cubano* families, see Lopez, "Migrants Between Empires and Nations," 216-218, 224-236, 271-274.
[59] McKeown, "Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas," 321-324; *Chinese Migrant Networks,* 84-86.

helped migrants maintain familial, political, economic, and cultural connections in China and to other Chinese diasporic communities in the Americas.[60]

San Francisco-based Chinese mutual associations and businesses were the first to establish branches in other locales to serve migrating Chinese. The San Francisco-based Chinese Six Companies opened up branches in New York, Honolulu, Vancouver, Lima, Portland, and Seattle by the 1880s. Other organizations, like the Hong Shun Tang and the Chong Hoo Tong secret societies based in San Francisco, formed Canadian branches.[61]

San Francisco became a central commercial hub for Chinese in the Americas and played an important role in expanding businesses throughout the western hemisphere. The San Francisco-based Kwong Lee Company, which imported "all kinds of Chinese Goods, Rice, Sugar, Tea, Provisions" according branched out to British Columbia in 1858.[62] Established Chinese merchants from Hong Kong and San Francisco went to Lima, Trujillo, Sagua la Grande, and other cities in Peru to open up branches of their import businesses that sold luxuries to Peruvians and food items and medicines to Chinese Peruvians. Other remigrated *californianos* opened banks, theaters, newspapers, and other businesses. Wong On y Cía was the most successful of these transplanted

[60] McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks,* 80; L. Eve Armentrout Ma, "Chinatown Organizations and the Anti-Chinese Movement, 1882-1914," in Sucheng Chan, ed., *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991) 147-169.
[61] On Chinese Six Companies, see Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico,* 3; On Chong Hoo Tong, see Con, Johnson, Wickberg, Willmott, *From China to Canada,* 30, 36, 40.
[62] Con, Johnson, Wickberg, and Willmott, *From China to Canada*, 14.

businesses in Latin America. Established in 1879, the company grew to a worth of more than three million pesos with several branches in Cuba and in Lima.[63]

The U.S.-Mexico borderlands became another central location for multinational businesses serving the immigration, labor, and trade needs of the Chinese in the Americas. [64] Chinese borderland merchants lived and worked in the U.S.-Mexican border cities of Mexicali, Tijuana, and Ensenada and the American cities of Calexico and Nogales. They utilized special border-crossing permits issued by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service to purchase supplies in the U.S. and bring them back to their stores in Mexico. Their transnational networks of capital were crucial to the region's economy. Pablo Chee, a merchant in Calexico was a prime example of what Robert Chao Romero describes as a "Chinese borderlands magnate." Engaged in a wide variety of businesses, including cotton, liquor, hotels, groceries, merchandise stores, and restaurants, Chee estimated that the total value of his personal and business wealth was $125,000 in 1923.[65]

Lee Kwong Lun was another borderlands merchant whose migrations and ties spanned the Americas. He had migrated from his home village in Guangdong, China to Cuba during the late nineteenth century. During his stay in Cuba, Lee learned how to roll

---

[63] Chang, "The Chinese in Latin America," 52-55, 79; McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks,* 53-4, 140; Narvaez, "Chinese Coolies in Cuba and Peru," 425.
[64] As later chapters will discuss, the exclusion of Chinese immigrants from the United States and the rise in undocumented Chinese entry from Mexico, Canada, and other "back doors" expanded established transnational commercial networks and connected an even wider group of labor recruiters, immigration brokers, migrants, and others throughout the Americas. See E. Lee, *At America's Gates;* Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico*; Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican.*
[65] On border crossings and Pablo Chee, see Romero, *The in Mexico,* 114-140.

cigars and to speak Spanish. His next stop was the United States, where he settled in San Francisco as a merchant and started a family. He did not stay in San Francisco for long. He and his family next went south to Sonora, Mexico, where he ran a successful business bringing wholesale supplies from Chinese businesses in San Francisco to Chinese merchants in Mexico for ten years. His final sojourn was back across the border to Tuscon, Arizona.[66]

The U.S.-Mexico borderlands also made up a dynamic world where Chinese *fronterizos* (borderlanders) formed families, communities, and bonds with Mexicans, Americans, and other Chinese. According to historians Grace Pena Delgado and Julian Lim, Chinese immigrants were central to the region's economy and society. Chinese *fronterizos* were a diverse group. Some were Mexican citizens with Mexican-born wives and children. Some were transnational sojourners intending to return to China. But throughout the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, they forged strong economic, familial, and social ties with Mexicans. After years living and working in the borderlands, they helped build new borderland communities that drew upon trans-Pacific networks as well as local U.S.-Mexico borderlands cultures and hemispheric migrations. Eventually, they became changed into Chinese Mexicans.[67]

Manuel Lee Chew was one of these new Chinese Mexicans. He had left Canton, China in 1912 to escape the *miseria* (poverty) in his homeland. He eventually settled in the growing Chinese community of Mexicali in Baja California. Americans like Southern

[66] Lee Kwong Lun cited in Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico,* 13-14, 21, 131.
[67] Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican,* 6, 39, 42; Julian Lim, "*Chinos* and *Paisanos:* Chinese Mexican Relations in the Borderlands," *Pacific Historical Review* 79:1 (February, 2010) 50-85, p. 51, 54.

California businessmen and *Los Angeles times* publishers Harrison Gray Otis and Harry Chandler had invested in cotton plantations in the region. There was also the railroad industry, and Lee Chew got his start on a railway project financed by Otis and Chandler's Colorado River Land Company. He eventually settled in Mexicali, Mexico. In 1920, he married Flavia Mancilla Camacho, a native-born Mexican woman, had children, and raised a family. They were one of a growing number of Chinese Mexican couples in early twentieth century Mexico.[68]

Lee Sing, a Chinese merchant at the turn of the twentieth century, also personified the border-crossing Chinese Mexican. Sing had first migrated to Sonora from China but then crossed the border into the United States and was one of the first Chinese to settle in Tuscon. With connections to a prominent Jewish businessman, he established a thriving dry-goods business with his brother in Old Pueblo that sold beef jerky, beans, and whisky. He soon branched out and started to make and sell shoes in Nogales, Arizona. In 1899, he married a Mexican woman, sold most of his properties in Arizona, moved to Sonora to be with his wife, and became a Mexican citizen. Sing's family and commercial lives transcended the U.S.-Mexico border. His wife and three children were in Mexico, as were a number of new stores he established in Sonora. His brother and some jointly-held businesses were in Tucson. When he was detained by U.S.

[68] Manuel Lee Chew cited in Julian Lim, "*Chinos* and *Paisanos:* Chinese Mexican Relations in the Borderlands," *Pacific Historical Review* 79:1 (February, 2010) 50-85, pgs. 51, 58. Robert Chao Romero's research indicates that a significant number of Chinese men intermarried with Mexican women. In a sample of eighty married Chinese males residing in Chihuahua, Chihuahua in 1930, twenty-eight were married to Mexican women. Robert Chao Romero, *"El Destierro de los Chinos": Popular Perspectives of Chinese-Mexican Interracial Marriage in the Early Twentieth. Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2007) 113-144, pgs. 116-117.

border inspectors in 1893 during a routine trip across the border, Sing called on notable individuals from both sides of the border to testify on his behalf. D. A. Moreno, the president of the border city Santa Ana, Mexico, as well as Josiah E. Stone, the American consul at Nogales, Sonora verified his status as a merchant and his right to enter the United States.[69]

The world that these Chinese *fronterizos* formed relied on close relationships with a range of diverse peoples in the borderlands. Manuel Lee Mancilla, a Chinese Mexican born to a Chinese immigrant father and Mexican mother on a ranch in Mexicali in 1921, recalls growing up in a community in which Chinese and Mexicans lived and worked together. While there were definite tensions between Chinese and Mexicans, especially during the waves of xenophobic racism that targeted the Chinese during the Mexican revolutionary period and during the Great Depression of the 1930s, there were "also many Mexicans that got along with us," he told an interviewer. "In Cerro Prieto, we had Mexican friends, like Jesús María Rodríguez, who was my godfather." In the cotton fields around in the Mexicali valley, Chinese and Mexican farm laborers worked alongside each other every day. Chinese truck gardeners provided fresh produce to Mexican families. In the Arizona-Sonora borderlands, Chinese merchants relied on Mexican and Jewish suppliers as well as Chinese and Mexican customers. Lee Mancilla eventually married a Mexican woman, and their children became members of the second generation of Chinese Mexicans. The family opened up a restaurant in Tecate called La Paloma Oriental, where they served both Chinese and Mexican cuisine. The

[69] Lee Sing's experiences described in Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican,* 64.

restaurant aptly reflected their blending of the family's Chinese Mexican identities and roots that flourished in the borderlands.[70]

Chinese Americans and Chinese Canadians also shared a West Coast culture. People, businesses, newspapers, and families routinely crossed the U.S.-Canadian border, and both Chinese Americans and Chinese Canadians were connected by larger transpacific Chinese and transnational North American ties. Victoria was the transportation hub for all Chinese travelers leaving or returning to Canada, Seattle, or Portland. Its firmly-established Chinatown took up four blocks around Fisgard Strreet and provided many services to the Chinese community there with boot makers, barbers, doctors, butchers, restaurants, and stores.[71]

Chinese Homeland Politics

By the late nineteenth century, Chinese transnational networks began to extend to Chinese homeland politics.[72] As calls for reform and revolution brewed in China and as racial discrimination continued to prevent Chinese from fully integrating into their adopted countries of residence in the early twentieth century, Chinese became increasingly involved in the politics of their homeland. The West continued to dominate China through unequal treaties and territorial and extraterritorial concessions, and the

[70] On Chinese truck gardeners, see Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican,* 55-56, 44-45. Lee Mancilla's experiences cited in Julian Lim, "*Chinos* and *Paisanos:* Chinese Mexican Relations in the Borderlands," *Pacific Historical Review* 79:1 (February, 2010) 50-85, pgs. 55-56, 71, 83-84.
[71] Mar, *Brokering Belonging,* 5-6; A. Chan, *Gold Mountain,* 68, 72-3.
[72] On connections between migrant networks and homeland politics, see McKeown, "Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas," 322-323.

Manchu court was powerless to resist. A growing number of Chinese became frustrated and angry, and they began to advocate for reforms that ranged from modifying the traditional imperial system to a complete revolution to replace the empire with a republic. Banned from China because of their subversive views, reformers and revolutionaries went abroad to gain financial and political support for their causes. They found eager audiences.

Sun Yat-sen, a Chinese Christian who had attended school in Hawaii, was the recognized leader of two major political organizations active in the Chinese nationalist movement abroad. The Xingzhonghui, founded in Hawaii in 1894 with the assistance of the Chinese Hawaiian middle class, introduced the Chinese revolutionary movement to the Western Hemisphere. He toured North America and was so successful in collecting funds from the Chinese in Victoria and Vancouver that he was able to upgrade his cabin on the *Empress of India* steamer sailing out of Vancouver in 1897. In 1905, Sun formed the Tongmenghui in Japan, which brought several anti-Manchu groups together in one coalition and offered a more sophisticated and detailed revolutionary ideology based on nationalism, democracy, and people's livelihood.[73]

Another major Chinese nationalist organization had its roots in North America. In 1899, Kang Youwei, a scholar and former advisor to the Chinese emperor arrived in

[73] Him Mark Lai, "The Kuomintang in Chinese American Communities before World War II," in Sucheng Chan, ed., *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991) 170-212, pgs. 173-180. On Sun Yat-sen in Canada, see Anthony B. Chan, "The Myth of the Chinese Sojourner in Canada," in K. Victor Ujimoto and Gordon Hirabayashi, eds., *Visible Minorities and Multiculturalism: Asians in Canada* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1980) 33-42, p. 38.

North America preaching reform of the imperial system. Along with his student Liang Qichao, Kang and his followers formed the Baohuanghui, Chinese Empire Reform Association, in Victoria, British Columbia. With its focus on reform rather than on revolution, the *Baohuanghui* proved to be popular among most Chinese in the Americas. It had the support of the Zhigongtang, a secret society popular amongst Chinese laborers, as well as many middle-class Chinese leaders, such as Chinese American Ng Poon Chew and Chinese Canadian Yip On. At its peak, it published its own Chinese-language newspaper, the *Chinese World,* and it boasted five million members. The *Baohuanghui* soon eclipsed Sun Yat-sen's efforts in the Americas.[74]

Sun Yat-sen returned to the United States again and again and slowly built up followers as his revolutionary principles became clearer and attracted more support. In 1908, the *Liberty News (Chee Yow Shin Po),* the first Tongmenhui newspaper in the Western Hemisphere was established. Another newspaper, *Youth,* founded by American-born Chinese, preached Sun's revolutionary message beginning in 1909, and soon expanded its reach to Vancouver, Honolulu, Chicago, and many other cities in North America. Support for the reform movement among Chinese abroad began to wane as China continued its decline in the early twentieth century. Sun began traveling to Chinese communities all over the world as revolutionary activities in China increased. Support for the Tongenghui began to eclipse that of the reformist organization. By the

[74] Mar, *Brokering Belonging,* 6, 20; Lai, "The Kuomintang in Chinese American Communities," pgs. 174-175; Shehong Chen, "Republicanism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Capitalism in American Chinese Ideology," in Sucheng Chan, ed., *Chinese American Transnationalism: The Flow of People, Resources, and Ideas between China and America during the Exclusion Era,* 174-193, pgs. 176-178.

end of 1911, there were Tongmenghui branches in Mexico, Canada, Cuba, and Central and South America. After the successful overthrow of the Manchu empire in 1911, a Provisional Government of the Republic of China was established in 1912, with Sun Yat-sen as provisional president. The Tongmenghui formed a coalition with other political groups to become the Kuomintang, or Chinese Nationalist Party.[75]

Like other Asians in the Americas, Chinese immigrants' participation in homeland politics partly stemmed from their own weak status in the Americas. Many felt that the public's negative view of China as a backwards, corrupt, and stagnant nation led to discrimination against Chinese in the Americas. The humiliation they felt was thus two-fold. One anonymous poet detained in the immigration barracks at the Angel Island immigration station made this connection clear. He asked, "For what reason must I sit in jail? It is only because my country is weak and my family poor." Another detainee believed "If my country had contrived to make herself strong, this [banishing to Island] never would have happened." A strong China, Chinese in the Americas hoped, would lead to positive changes.[76]

In the United States, Ng Poon Chew and his newspaper, the *Chung Sai Yat Po* (Chinese Western Daily) had a three-fold mission. It hoped to "teach the Chinese to be at home in America" and to rally support from Chinese in America for both reform programs in China and civil rights in the United States. In its inaugural edition on the first

[75] Lai, "The Kuomintang in Chinese American Communities," 173-181.
[76] Poem cited in Lai, Lim, Yung, *Island,* 84*.* On relationship between a strong China and the status of Chinese in the United States, see Lai, "The Kuomintang in Chinese American Communities," 170-212; Lai, Lim, Yung, *Island,* 84-86; S. Chen, "Republicanism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Capitalism," 174-193; Yu, *To Save China, To Save Ourselves,* 81-83.

Chinese New Year's Day in 1900, the *Chung Sai Yat Po* declared that it would fight for "a modern strong Chinese nation and equal rights for Chinese both in immigrating to America and in settling there." As historian Shehong Chen observes, the *Chung Sai Yat Po* was "born with a diasporic vision and served…as a strong American Chinese community voice in the search for ways to modernize China."[77]

While Chinese nationalist organizations were focused on reform or revolution in China, they were also tied to events and networks in the Americas. Yip On, a Chinese merchant and immigration interpreter in Vancouver, was a key leader within the Chinese diaspora whose political career exemplifies these transnational and trans-Pacific connections. A fiery and gifted speaker, Yip was well-known political figure in Canada. He was a founding leader of the Chinese Empire Reform Association (CERA, or *Baohuanghui)* which supported Kang Youwei's reformist vision. He also saw very clearly the connections between building a stronger China to improve the conditions of Chinese abroad. In 1905 and 1906, he rallied the Chinese in the United States, Canada, Hong Kong, and China together to protest against U.S. discrimination of Chinese immigrants in 1905 and 1906. The result was a large-scale boycott of American goods.[78]

Such transnational connections between Chinese nationalism and Chinese in the Americas also had an economic component. The CERA had extensive commercial enterprises in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Panama, Southeast Asia, and Shanghai. These included land reclamation projects in Argentina and Brazil as well as a streetcar line in Torreon, Mexico. During and after the Chinese revolution of 1911,

[77] S. Chen, "Republicanism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Capitalism," p. 178.
[78] Mar, *Brokering Belonging,* 6, 20.

Chinese throughout the Americas cut their queues, pledged loyalty to the new republic, and raised funds for the revolutionary forces. The Chinese in Canada alone raised HK$155,000 for the Kuomintang in 1911 and another HK$150,000 in 1912 by mortgaging their clubhouses and society buildings in Victoria, Vancouver, and Toronto to buy bonds.[79]

Still frustrated about Chinese exclusion and the lack of opportunities in the United States, Chinese Americans saw a new future for themselves in the new China and supported the Kuomintang in great numbers.[80] In 1929, overseas Chinese made up more than one-quarter of the party's total membership. The new Republic of China faltered following the revolution of 1911. Internal political struggles between the Kuomintang and the government of warlord Yuan Shikai created an extremely unstable political environment. But Chinese communities abroad remained committed to a republican form of government and funneled funds and even a voluntary corps of soldiers from the United States and Canada to participate in a campaign to remove Yuan Shikai from

[79] McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks,* 88. On Baohuanghui-sponsored banking and investment programs, see S. Chen, "Republicanism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Capitalism," p. 177 and Mar, *Brokering Belonging,* 6, 20. On financial contributions after 1911, see Lai, "The Kuomintang in Chinese American Communities," p. 180; Anthony B. Chan, "The Myth of the Chinese Sojourner in Canada," in K. Victor Ujimoto and Gordon Hirabayashi, eds., *Visible Minorities and Multiculturalism: Asians in Canada* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1980) 33-42, p. 38.

[80] Adam McKeown notes that overseas Chinese involvement in Chinese nationalist politics "contributed greatly to a shift in the way that Chinese mnigrants conceived of themselves, their networks, and their home. Home was no longer just a village where the family altar was located…it was part of a much larger entity, a motherland, which… [linked strangers who] were inalienably linked to each other and to China by virtue of race, culture, history, and affection." "Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas," 323.

power. The Overseas Chinese Corpos Volunteers used its three airplanes to distribute anti-Yuan leaflets to Chinese citizens.[81]

When Japan started aggressively demanding special concessions and privileges upon China in 1915, Chinese nationalism began to focus on the growing threat from this country. Interparty struggles occurred within the Kuomintang under Chiang Kai-shek and with the growing Chinese Communist party in China. These divisions spread to Chinese communities abroad. But temporary alliances both in China and abroad were forged after Japan invaded Manchuria in September, 1931 and the Sino-Japanese war began in 1937. Chinese communities throughout the Americas organized to send money and supplies to aid China. In 1937, the Chinese Six Companies in San Francisco called a meeting of representatives from ninety-one community groups to form the Chinese War Relief Association (CWRA). It would go on to coordinate fund-raising efforts of three hundred Chinese communities throughout the United States, Mexico, and Central and South America. Over the next eight years, the CWRA spearheaded the raising of over $20 million through door-to-door solicitations, parades, war bond sales, and co-called "Rice Bowl" parties. [82]

For Chinese in the Americas, participating in China's war effort was an extension of the nationalist activities they had been engaging in for the past thirty years. But the crisis with Japan and the entry of the United States and Canada into the war as China's allies elevated these efforts to new levels. War-time projects provided overseas Chinese

[81] Lai, "The Kuomintang in Chinese American Communities," 194, 182; S. Chen, "Republicanism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Capitalism," 178-181.
[82] Lai, "The Kuomintang in Chinese American Communities," 183; Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet,* 227-228.

with an opportunity to support their homeland and improve their image and status in the Americas. As historian K. Scott Wong explains, Chinese American communities "both defended China and claimed America" by participating in the war effort.[83]

The Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance, formed in 1936 to represent the needs and concerns of Chinese laundrymen in New York City, adopted the slogan "to save China, to save ourselves," to describe the interrelated causes of the war effort in China and rights for Chinese Americans in the United States. The CHLA actively participated in anti-Japanese fundraisers, rallies, and parades. One newspaper reported in 1936 how laundryman George Kee had "turned out his pockets" for the Chinese war effort. "He had over one hundred dollars which he had intended to give a creditor," the article reported. But Kee decided that "the creditor could wait." Wu Hing, another Chinese in New York cabled a thousand dollars, "almost every cent of many years' saving" to a war fund. The CHLA placed five thousand relief-fund boxes in Chinese hand laundries all throughout New York City in late 1937. This campaign was so successful that just a few months later, the CHLA was able to purchase four ambulances to send to Yenan, headquarters of the Chinese Communist army in 1939. For these oppressed Chinese laundrymen, helping China resist Japan's invasion may have been the "single most important thing in their lives in the 1930s and 1940s," according to historian Renqiu Yu.[84]

---

[83] K. Scott Wong, *Americans First: Chinese Americans and the Second World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005) 70.
[84] Yu, *To Save China, to Save Ourselves,* 77-83, 100-102, 3.

Conclusion

By the early twentieth century, Chinese immigrants had migrated to almost every country in the Americas. They were a widely diverse group of men and women, elites and laborers, old-timers and newcomers. Their labor and commercial activities helped sustain the plantation and agricultural economies in Hawaii, Cuba, California, and Mexico. They built railroads in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico and ran corner stores in Panama, Mexico, and Peru. When the doors to one country closed, they migrated to new destinations or found ways of migrating around the barriers. They integrated into their adopted homelands while also maintaining strong transnational connections to their families, villages, to the Chinese empire and later, the republic. By the early twentieth century, the transnational worlds of the Chinese in the Americas were connected across oceans and borders even as exclusionary national movements sought to restrict them.