# The Chinese in America 1820-1973

by

William L. Tung

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## A Chronology & Fact Book

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# The Chinese in America

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# FOREWORD

As one of Oceana's Ethnic Chronology Series, this book follows the series format by treating the history of the Chinese in the United States in three parts: (1) chronology, (2) documents, and (3) bibliography. The changing status of the Chinese in this country during different periods, classification of documents, and selection of bibliographical materials are explained at the beginning of each category. A brief review of the subject is presented in the Introduction.

Limited by prescribed space and specified format, the present work is designed not as an exhaustive study for experts but as a convenient guide for students and general public who are interested in this topic. For further references, readers are advised to consult the official and unofficial sources listed in the bibliography.

In preparing this book, I have obtained useful information from prior publications on the Chinese in the United States, particularly several recent ones by S. W. Kung, Betty Lee Sung, and Cheng-tsu Wu, to whom I wish to express my gratitude. For many valuable suggestions and comments, I deeply appreicate the generosity of Professor Raymond L. Carol of St. John's University, New York; Professor Ronald M. Schneider and Mrs. Roslyn Kaplan, my colleagues at Queens College of The City University of New York; and, last but not least, my wife Portia. I am, however, solely responsible for the facts and views presented herein.

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# INTRODUCTION

The status of the Chinese in the United States has undergone drastic changes since the pioneer days. They were initially welcomed to meet the demand for cheap labor in the middle of the nineteenth century, but did not receive fair treatment legally or otherwise. During and after World War II, both Congress and the executive branch adopted a more enlightened view toward immigration and naturalization and gradually extended to the Chinese the basic principle of equality before the law. Although Chinese-Americans (Americans of Chinese descent) have not yet been appointed to cabinet or corresponding posts, opportunities in elective offices and non-political fields have now been opened to them despite some remaining prejudices.

It is difficult to ascertain the exact year when the first Chinese came to the United States. Certain historians described the presence of Chinese shipbuilders in lower California as early as 1571, Chinese laborers in the Far West in 1788, and one Chinese living in New York in 1807. Some informal sources went so far as to state the advent of the Chinese in North America and other regions of the Western Hemisphere even before the colonial days. Nontheless, the American Immigration Commission recorded 1820 as the year that the first Chinese came to the United States.

American information on the Celestial Empire immediately after the War of Independence derived essentially from European literature. The founding fathers of the Republic, including Washington, Franklin, Adams, Jefferson, Hamilton, and Madison had only vague knowledge about China and the Chinese. The first American traders reached China on August 28, 1784, when the Empress of China anchored at Whampoa, the harbor of Canton. The merchants were later followed by missionaries in the 1830's. But no official relationships were established between the two countries until the conclusion of the Treaty of Wanghia on July 3, 1844, by which Americans in China had long enjoyed a privileged status as the nationals of Great Britain and several Western powers through the application of the most-favored-nation clause. They were exempt from local jurisdiction under the terms of extraterritoriality, which was, however, not reciprocally provided for the Chinese government over its nationals in the respective countries.

The Chinese imperial code originally forbade expatriation, and violators were severely punished. Even after the official revocation of this law in the 1860's, Manchu emperors never encouraged emigration. Bound by national pride and social tradition, the Chinese gentry class generally frowned upon the idea of leaving the fatherland. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that Chinese from Kwangtung province began to come to California in large numbers, working in gold mines, on farms and railways. Their endurance and industriousness created a favorable impres-

sion upon their employers, but stirred up jealousy and enmity among white laborers, who frequently resorted to physical violence against Chinese lives and property. Reluctant to enter into full-fledged relations with foreign nations, China did not accredit permanent envoys to Washington and other capitals until 1878. Lack of diplomatic protection left the Chinese immigrants virtually helpless.

After the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, the Chinese became unwanted. First, the state legislature of California passed a series of discriminatory laws and regulations against them. Then, beginning in 1882, Congress enacted several exclusion acts completely closing the door to Chinese laborers. It is indeed an irony of history that this land of immigrants should have imposed the harshest laws against the late comers. At the peak of legislative and administrative restrictions, even Columbus would have had difficulty entering the country.

In certain respects, early Chinese immigrants -- particularly the indentured, contract laborers, or coolies -- did not portray a good image of their country and people. Their strange attire, aloofness, and illiteracy generated suspicion and contempt among many Americans. But these poor sojourners were peaceful and contented earning enough money to maintain themselves and their families. Judging by their small number, the malicious slogan "yellow peril" was entirely without foundation. While comparatively underprivileged, they should by no means have been classified as an "inferior race," as arrogantly declared by some white people, whose ignorance of the history and civilization of others was responsible for assuming a sense of superiority just as the Manchu court once mistakenly took a disdainful attitude toward the early Western traders.

Although Sinophobia was initially caused by Chinese labor competition, American deep-rooted antipathy to color -- the Blacks and the Indians -- had also contributed prejudices against the first substantial group of non-white immigrants coming to the United States. Actually, the term "white" is a misnomer in its application to one's skin, because all peoples in the world are "colored" in the true sense of the word even though some of them, such as the Scandinavians, have comparatively lighter complexions. To many Caucasians, the assimilation of Chinese and other Asiatic races has been a cause of concern. Again, no race is unassimilable and the fundamental obstacle to the "Americanization" process is the discrimination by the majority against the minority. With the exception of the native Indians, all Americans are immigrants or their descendants. But to make America live up to its reputation as a "melting pot," different ethnic groups should be treated equally so as to work together harmoniously.

Ever since the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the image and status of the Chinese in the United States have been gradually improved. Americans first admired the Chinese in their heroic resistance against foreign invasion, and then a spirit of comradeship between the two peoples developed after Pearl Harbor. The conclusion of a new Sino-American treaty on reciprocal basis and the repeal of all Chinese exclusion laws by Congress

in 1943 have not only strengthened the state relationship but also enhanced the legal status and social prestige of the Chinese in the United States. After the shift in power on China's mainland and the liberalization of American immigration laws in recent years, more Chinese, including many intellectuals and businessmen, came to this country, not as temporary sojourners but to become American citizens through naturalization.

According to the 1970 census, the number of Chinese in the United States totaled 435,062. Among them are hundreds of scholars and scientists who have distinguished themselves in a variety of professions. Thus the activites of the Chinese in this country are much broader now than those of the early immigrants -- laborers, laundrymen, restaurant and small shop operators. The accomplishments of many Chinese-Americans may be found in Who's Who in America and other biographical publications; a few of them are briefly described in this book for illustration. Having made due contributions and shared equal responsibilities to this country, the Chinese are undoubtedly entitled to the same rights and privileges as Americans of other ethnic origins.

# PART I

# CHRONOLOGY

## PART I. CHRONOLOGY

A study of the Chinese in the United States is closely related to the history of their immigration, which may be classified into four periods:

Free immigration (1820-1882), when Chinese labor was much needed for the exploitation of natural resources and construction of railways;

Discriminatory restrictions (1882-1904), covering the period from the passing of the first exclusion act on May 2, 1882, up to the enactment of the 1904 act;

Absolute exclusion (1904-1943), beginning with the act of April 27, 1904, which extended all Chinese exclusion laws then in force indefinitely and applied to all insular possessions of the United States, until the repeal of all Chinese exclusion laws on December 17, 1943; and

Gradual liberalization (1943--), achieved by several congressional acts after the repeal of all Chinese exclusion laws in December 1943, particularly the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act.

The following chronology begins in 1820 and ends in 1973. With a few exceptions in the first period, all major events are consecutively described every year. Whenever necessary and possible, months and dates are also indicated.

## FREE IMMIGRATION (1820-1882)

1820 — The Immigration Commission reported the arrival of the first Chinese in the United States.

1821-1840 — According to the records of the Immigration Commission, ten more Chinese came to the United States during the two decades.

1844 — July 3. The United States established formal relationships with China by the conclusion of the Treaty of Peace, Amity, and Commerce, signed at Wanghia. Among the unilateral rights and privileges obtained by the United States was extraterritoriality or consular jurisdiction over American nationals in China. No such reciprocity was extended to China over her nationals in the United States. (See Document 15.)

1845 — December 31. The first Sino-American treaty of 1844 came into effect by an exchange of ratifications at Canton.

1847 — The first group of Chinese students arrived in the United States to receive higher education: Yung Wing, Wong Hsing, and Wong Foon. Their trip was sponsored by the Reverend Samuel Robbins Brown, principal of the Morrison School at Macao. Because of ill health, however, Wong Hsing soon left for China. Both Yung and Wong Foon studied at the Monson Academy in Monson, Massachusetts. Yung eventually became a prominent scholar and educator, and also the first Chinese who obtained American citizenship through naturalization. He went back and forth between China and the United States, and brought many Chinese students to study in American institutions. Perhaps no American or Chinese had contributed more to Sino-American cultural exchange than Yung in the early years.

1848 — Gold was discovered at John Sutter's Sawmill, north of San Francisco. A group of Chinese laborers, two men and one woman, arrived in California. The men went to work in the mines, while the woman was employed at the home of Charles Gillespie, an American missionary from Hongkong coming back to the United States with them on board the Bard Eagle.

1849 — The number of Chinese laborers in California reached fifty-four.

Yung Wing and Wong Foon graduated from Monson Academy in Monson, Massachusetts. Then Wong left the United States for Scotland and enrolled at the University of Edinburgh; Yung registered at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

1850 The number of Chinese in California totaled four thousand by the end of the year. Their rapid influx was largely due to the demand for cheap labor in this new state. Natural calamity and horrors of war during the period of the Taiping Revolution (1850-1864) made many Chinese flee from Kwangtung province to Hongkong and Macao, where they were contracted by coolie traders and shipped to the west coast of the United States and other countries, particularly Cuba and Peru. Their industriousness, frugality, and willingness to undertake any kind of work pleased the employers but generated jealousy and antagonism among white workers.

The California legislature enacted the Foreign Miners' License Tax Law, under which laborers of Chinese descent and of some other nationalities were required to pay special taxes.

1851 There was a rapid increase of Chinese in California, from four thousand to twenty-five thousand within one year.

1852 The California legislature imposed a new tax of three dollars per person on foreign miners. Another law was enacted to enforce masters of ships to pay five to ten dollars for each passenger. More than twenty thousand Chinese arrived in San Francisco this year, contributing 45 percent of the total amount of this tax. In spite of the discriminatory measures passed by the legislature, Governor McDougal openly praised the Chinese as "one of the most worthy of our newly adopted citizens."

Miners in Marysville, California adopted a resolution denying mining claims to Chinese. In several other communities, Chinese workers were forced out of mining operations.

In Hawaii, the Royal Hawaii Agricultural Society imported 280 Chinese laborers.

1853 March 30. The California legislature passed An Act to Pro-

vide for the Protection of Foreigners, and to Define Their Liabilities and Privileges. It imposed special taxes on foreign gold miners, who were then largely Chinese. Because of the license tax and discovery of gold in Australia, only 4,470 Chinese came to the United States this year, barely offsetting the number of departures.

1854 There was again an influx of over thirteen thousand immigrants this year, when California suffered a business recession. White workers blamed the colored people, particularly the Chinese, as partly responsible for their unemployment and economic reverses.

The State Supreme Court of California ruled, in People, Respondent, v. George W. Hall, Appellant (see Document 18), that the laws of California prohibited all colored people from giving evidence in court against white persons. This ruling was affirmed in The People of the State of California, Respondents, v. James Brady, Appellant, decided by the same court this year.

April. The first Chinese newspaper in California, the San Francisco Golden Hills' News (Kim Shan Jit San Luk), was published.

The Chinese in California formed the Six-District Association for mutual help in the midst of American prejudices and discriminations. Almost all of the early immigrants came from six districts of Kwangtung province, each of which established its own organization: Kong Chow, Sam Yup, Sze Yap (later replaced by Hop Wo), Yeung Wo, Kip-kat (later changed to Yao Wo), and Ning Yung (the largest in membership).

1855 January 4. The San Francisco Oriental (Tung Ngai San Luk), another Chinese newspaper, published its first issue.

April 28. The California legislature passed an Act to Discourage the Immigration to This State of Persons Who Cannot Become Citizens Thereof, whereby the master, owner, or consignee of any ship was required to pay fifty dollars for each of its passengers ineligible for American citizenship. (See Document 1.)

1856 December. The Sacramento Chinese Daily News was published, but it lasted only two years.