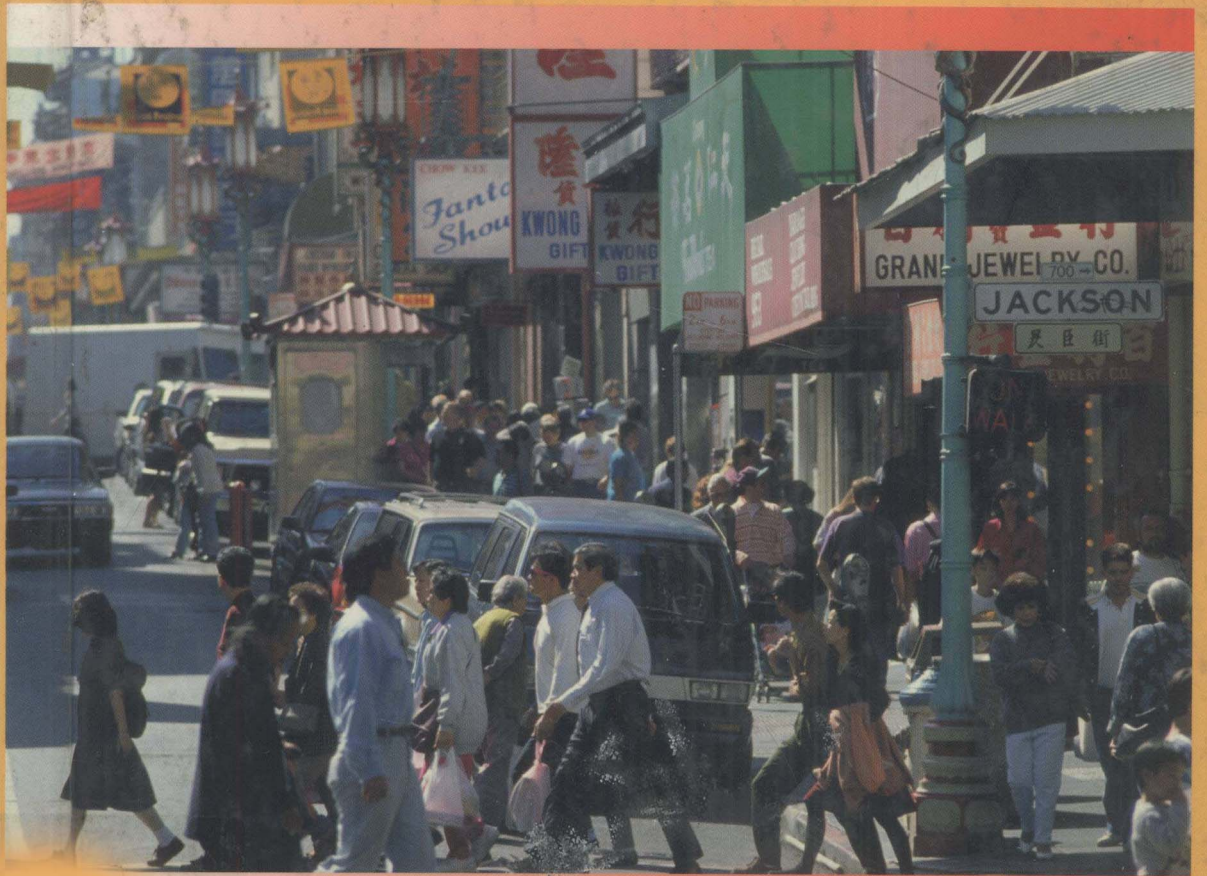


IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICA



The Chinese Americans



Barbara Lee Bloom



IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICA

The Chinese Americans

By Barbara Lee Bloom

Lucent Books, 10911 Technology Place, San Diego, CA 92127

Other books in the Immigrants in America series:

The Cuban Americans
Primary Sources
The Russian Americans
The Vietnamese Americans

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FOREWORD

Immigrants have come to America at different times, for different reasons, and from many different places. They leave their homelands to escape religious and political persecution, poverty, war, famine, and countless other hardships. The journey is rarely easy. Sometimes, it entails a long and hazardous ocean voyage. Other times, it follows a circuitous route through refugee camps and foreign countries. At the turn of the twentieth century, for instance, Italian peasants, fleeing poverty, boarded steamships bound for New York, Boston, and other eastern seaports. And during the 1970s and 1980s, Vietnamese men, women, and children, victims of a devastating war, began arriving at refugee camps in Arkansas, Pennsylvania, Florida, and California, en route to establishing new lives in the United States.

Whatever the circumstances surrounding their departure, the immigrants' journey is always made more difficult by the knowledge that they leave behind family, friends, and a familiar way of life. Despite this, immigrants continue to come to America because, for many, the United States represents something they could not find at home: freedom and opportunity for themselves and their children.

No matter what their reasons for emigrating, where they have come from, or when they left, once here, nearly all immigrants face considerable challenges in adapting and making the United States

their new home. Language barriers, unfamiliar surroundings, and sometimes hostile neighbors make it difficult for immigrants to assimilate into American society. Some Vietnamese, for instance, could not read or write in their native tongue when they arrived in the United States. This heightened their struggle to communicate with employers who demanded they be literate in English, a language vastly different from their own. Likewise, Irish immigrant school children in Boston faced classmates who teased and belittled their lilted accent. Immigrants from Russia often felt isolated, having settled in areas of the United States where they had no access to traditional Russian foods. Similarly, Italian families, used to certain wines and spices, rarely shopped or traveled outside of New York's Little Italy, a self-contained community cut off from the rest of the city.

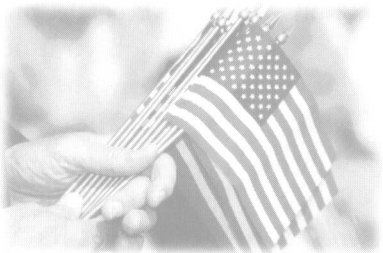
Even when first-generation immigrants do successfully settle into life in the United States, their children, born in America, often have different values and are influenced more by their country of birth than their parents' traditions. Children want to be a part of the American culture and usually welcome American ideals, beliefs, and styles. As they become more Americanized—adopting western dating habits and fashions, for instance—they tend to cast aside or even actively reject the traditions embraced by their par-

ents. Assimilation, then, often becomes an ideological dispute that creates conflict among immigrants of every ethnicity. Whether Chinese, Italian, Russian, or Vietnamese, young people battle their elders for respect, individuality, and freedom, issues that often would not have come up in their homeland. And no matter how tightly the first generations hold onto their traditions, in the end, it is usually the young people who decide what to keep and what to discard.

The Immigrants in America series fully examines the immigrant experience. Each book in the series discusses why the im-

migrants left their homeland, what the journey to America was like, what they experienced when they arrived, and the challenges of assimilation. Each volume includes discussion of triumph and tragedy, contributions and influences, history and the future. Fully documented primary and secondary source quotations enliven the text. Sidebars highlight interesting events and personalities. Annotated bibliographies offer ideas for additional research. Each book in this dynamic series provides students with a wealth of information as well as launching points for further discussion.

INTRODUCTION



Chinese Immigration

The Chinese were some of the earliest immigrants to reach America. During the mid-1800s, because much of China was stricken with extreme poverty, men began leaving China seeking jobs. Although these men loved their homeland and families, they left both behind to sail thousands of miles across the Pacific Ocean to California or Hawaii in search of jobs or riches.

Gold Mountain

The early immigrants had every intention of returning to China with enough wealth to help their families and to live out their

lives in the land of their ancestors. Because these men planned on returning home, they were known in their villages as sojourners, or temporary travelers. In 1849, though, tales of abundant gold in California, soon called Gold Mountain, reached the regions of China located on the South China Sea. By 1852, thousands of sojourners had set sail to seek their fortune.

Families in China became dependent on the money that the sojourners sent back, so the men overseas kept working year after year after year. Some became prospectors and miners throughout the West, following discoveries of gold and silver. Others found work on the fast-growing frontier. They be-

came fishermen and helped establish commercial fishing along the West Coast. They cut timber in forests; they labored in early industries; they dug coal; they made swampland into farmland. When the transcontinental railroad was built, Chinese immigrants laid tracks through some of the most rugged land in America. Furthermore, their knowledge of the soil, plants, and cultivation and their willingness to labor long hours in the fields, vineyards, and orchards made the West one of the most productive agricultural regions in the nation. The Chi-

nese immigrants' legacy in agriculture continues to this day.

Despite these contributions, Chinese immigrants faced an inconsistent welcome in America. As the Western states grew and prospered, the immigrants' labor and skill benefited the expansion of the frontier. However, when jobs and money became scarce, they were told to go back to China, and few new immigrants were allowed to come. Although the Chinese were some of the first immigrants to arrive, they were also the first to be excluded by specific laws.

Many of the first immigrants to the United States were Chinese men who came to California during the mid-nineteenth century in search of gold and silver.



Sandalwood Hills

Chinese immigrants also went to Hawaii, or Sandalwood Hills as they called it. During the mid-1800s, the islands were part of the Kingdom of Hawaii, which was ruled by a royal family of Hawaiians. Hawaii was green and lush, and Americans living on the islands wanted to use the land to grow sugar to make them rich. By 1900, American businessmen had made Hawaii a U.S. territory. More than half a century later, in 1954, Hawaii was admitted to full statehood.

During the 1850s, the lure of Hawaii for the Chinese was the promise of jobs. They arrived mostly as workers for sugar and rice plantations, and the state's agriculture flourished with their tending. During the late nineteenth century as Chinese immigrants on the mainland were shunned, on the islands they were welcomed for their labor, and their families fit in well among the Hawaiians. They helped boost Hawaii's production of pineapples and sugarcane and made the islands a place of wide cultural diversity.

These early immigrants to Hawaii and to the U.S. mainland were part of the first wave of Chinese immigrants. Some of

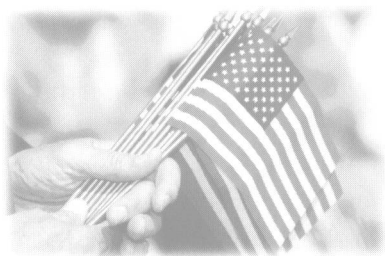
them returned to China, but many settled down and eventually became American citizens.

Another Wave of Immigrants

Another wave of Chinese immigrants arrived in America after World War II. The Second World War and a civil war in China prompted this new influx of immigrants. These Chinese newcomers were different from the frontiersmen. Men, women, and even families came. They arrived from a variety of places—the People's Republic of China, the British colony of Hong Kong, and Taiwan—and they spoke a different Chinese dialect than the first wave spoke.

Most of the newer immigrants had lived in cities, and many were well educated; often, they had professional skills. Some became scientists, researchers, politicians, mathematicians, doctors, teachers, laborers, and computer experts. Again, their skills helped America prosper, and again they faced discrimination. Despite this, they settled in every section of the country. Today, Americans of Chinese ancestry can be found from New York to California to Georgia and Michigan.

CHAPTER ONE



Immigration Begins from Imperial China

For hundreds of years, Chinese rulers considered their vast empire the only civilized place in the world. By 214 B.C., the Chinese had built the Great Wall along China's western border to keep out "barbarians" (non-Chinese). To the east, they were protected by thousands of miles of ocean. As a result, most Chinese knew little about what happened beyond their own shores, and fewer still cared. The Chinese remained isolated this way for centuries, with only occasional Europeans venturing into their lands.

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, though, colonial powers from Europe made attempts to trade with China. These

efforts to establish commerce and diplomatic relations were rejected by the Chinese emperors, but the foreigners were determined to change that policy by force of arms if necessary. The Chinese lost the battles that followed, and the colonial powers forced the Chinese government to allow Europeans into the country. Ultimately, the entrance of these powers into China had a profound impact on the nation.

In the eyes of some Chinese, losing battles with foreigners meant that their government had grown weak. Others resented the corruption and power of the imperial court. In response, peasants revolted. However, these uprisings only weakened the

government and country further. In addition, the fighting, whether against the colonial powers or the Chinese rebels, often destroyed farms and villages in the region near the South China Sea.

Guangdong Province

The people of Guangdong (Kwangtung) province originated from pioneering tribes who moved southward as China's borders expanded. When they reached the South China Sea, they stopped traveling and established villages. Up until the nineteenth century, the rhythm of life in Guangdong remained almost unchanged. The people of this region spoke unique Cantonese dialects of Chinese. Most farmed the valleys; others planted crops on the terraced mountainsides; and fishermen caught fish and "farmed" the salt from the sea.

Here, as in all of China, the Chinese followed the teachings of Confucius, an ancient sage who preached respect for honest rulers, elders, and family. According to Confucianism, everyone from the poorest peasant to the emperor had a well-defined place in society. Farmers and laborers were held in higher esteem than merchants, and scholars were valued above all others. It was the duty of each son to look out for the well-being of his parents, and once a young man married, his wife, too, had an obligation to her husband's parents. Thus, for peasants in Guangdong, life centered around a large extended family, or clan, that made up an entire village. And because family was so important to the Chinese, they wrote their last name (their family's name) before their first.

Lee Chew, who later immigrated to the United States, described this family-centered life. In his childhood community,

All the village belonged to the tribe [family] of Lee. They did not intermarry with one another, but the men went to other villages for their wives and brought them home to their fathers' houses, and men from other villages . . . chose wives from among our girls. . . .

[In this community, most people grow rice and food crops but have houses away from the wet, insect-inhabited fields.] All the men of the village have farms, but they don't live on them. . . . They live in the village, but go out during the day time and work their farms, coming home before dark.¹

Sometimes women also worked in the fields, but in general, it was their job to manage the home, cook, look after the needs of their children, and follow the wishes of their elders and husband.

Guangdong remained a quiet rural province until the sixteenth century when Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, and British merchants began arriving eager to trade for Chinese goods such as spices, porcelain, silk, and tea. Once the Chinese saw and became enamored with the European luxuries, the imperial government seemed helpless to stop its subjects from trading with the barbarians. Moreover, many men left their villages, becoming seamen on foreign vessels and emigrating overseas in search of wealth. One young man recalled,



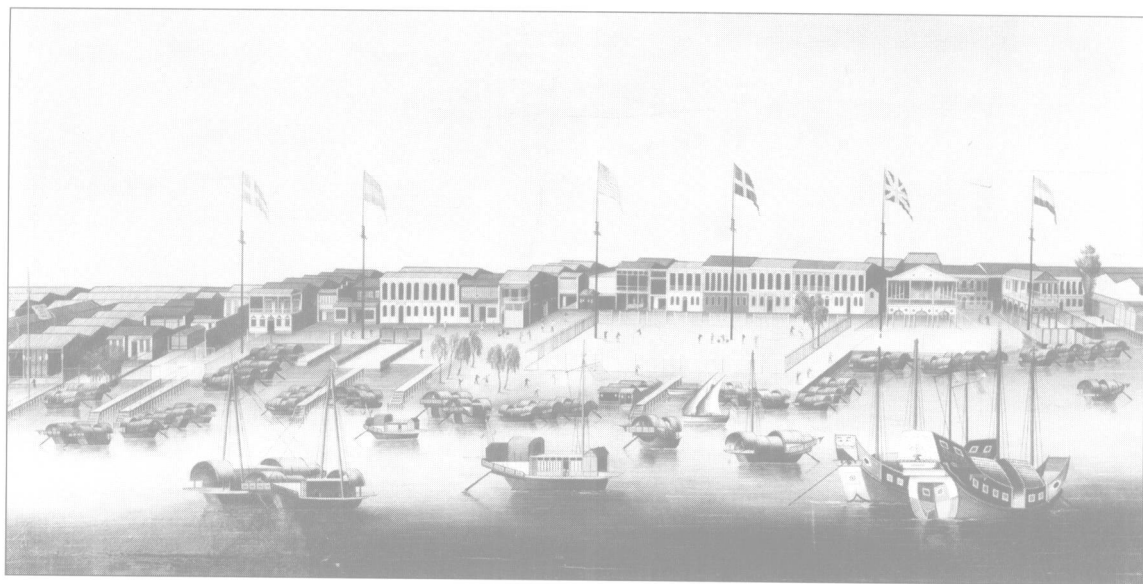
Some of these things [that the British had] were very wonderful, enabling the red haired savages [the British] to talk [by telegraph] with one another, though they might be thousands of miles apart. They had suns [gas lights] that made darkness like day, and their ships carried earthquakes and volcanoes [cannons] to fight for them, and thousands of demons that lived in iron and steel houses [factories with steam engines and machines] spun their cotton and silk, pushed their boats . . . and did other work for them. They were constantly showing disrespect for their ancestors by getting new things to take the place of the old.²

Yet despite this perceived disrespect, many Chinese remained fascinated with life overseas and the opportunities that it seemed to offer.

Contact with Outsiders Increases

China's government disliked having its civilization contaminated by foreigners and their ideas. To keep its subjects at home, the Chinese government made emigration from China and contact with other countries a crime. As political scientist Kil Young Zo explains,

The official attitude toward the emigrants was outright hostility, regarding



A nineteenth-century Chinese painting shows foreign factories and trading stations in Canton harbor, which Emperor Qian Long opened for international trade in 1757.

all those who disappeared into, or appeared from, “lands beyond the sea,” as potential rebels. An imperial edict of 1712 . . . declared that: “The Chinese government shall request foreign governments to have those Chinese who have been abroad repatriated [sent back to China] so they may be executed.”³

Foreign governments, though, paid no attention to the edict and made no attempt to send immigrants back to China. In fact, European countries became more desirous of Chinese goods and more insistent with the passing years that China open itself to trade. As early as 1557, the Portuguese had established a fortified trading post at Macao, an island off the coast of Guangdong. By the eighteenth century, other colonial powers came from Europe, and it became obvious they would use any means

possible, even force if necessary, to take what they wanted. So in 1757, Chinese emperor Qian Long was coerced into opening the port of Canton, the capital of the province, for international trade.

The result was an influx of Europeans and their ideas. Traders, merchants, and Western missionaries entered China. According to historian John King Fairbanks,

St. Francis Xavier, one of the founders of the Jesuit order . . . died off the coast of China in 1552. During the next two centuries he was followed in the effort to Christianize China by some 463 selected and highly trained evangelists. . . . The great Jesuit pioneer Matteo . . . took twenty years to work his way step by step from the Portuguese community at Macao to the [imperial] court at Peking [Beijing].⁴

As missionaries brought Christianity, trade with Europeans brought prosperity to the region. Farmers learned to grow new vegetables from abroad such as sweet potatoes and yams, which thrived in the mild climate of southern China. The nation's merchants and tradesmen discovered new markets for Chinese goods, and craftsmen found new buyers for their wares. With new prosperity flowing into the region, the population steadily grew.

The growth in population, though, soon became a burden. Peasant farmers divided up their land among their sons until, by the nineteenth century, many plots had become too small to support a family. Furthermore, Guangdong was a tropical region where monsoon rains often led to disastrous floods. During the few dry years, drought killed almost all the crops, creating food shortages throughout the overpopulated province.

The Opium War

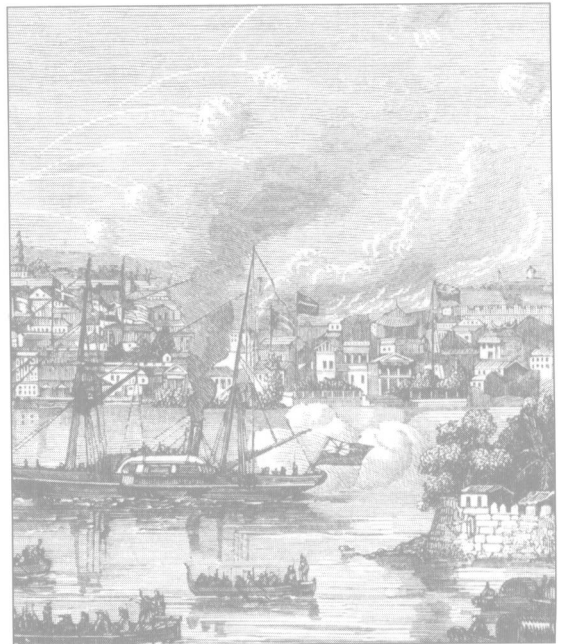
More than just small farms and insufficient food brought misery to the people of Guangdong. The outbreak of war added to the hardships of the peasants. The cause of the conflict was opium, an addicting drug that the British hoped to exchange for Chinese goods. The Chinese government imposed high tariffs on British goods to keep them out, but English merchants smuggled in opium, which they acquired from their colony in India. The emperor quickly saw how opium's addicting potential could destroy the productivity of his subjects; as the Chinese used opium, they got addicted and were less able to concentrate on their jobs,

farms, and families. The importation of the drug was ultimately banned by a decree from the emperor, but the British defied the decree, continuing to smuggle in opium.

A confrontation soon followed. The emperor sent a commissioner, a representative of the imperial court, to Canton. The commissioner went to the docks, ordered the opium chests removed, and demanded the drug be burned. Then he had the ashes floated on the river as an offering to the deities. Angry at the loss of the valuable cargo, England retaliated, using their guns and military might to defeat China in the First Opium War, lasting from 1839 to 1842. The Second Opium War involved the French as well as the British and ended in 1857.

The treaties signed after these wars forced China to open five of its ports to foreign trade, and to cede the island of

The English bombard Canton during the First Opium War.



Hong Kong to the British. England also demanded that China render monetary compensation for the damages to English ships and property caused during the war. In turn, to cover payments to the British, the imperial government raised taxes on the land. It fell to the people of Guangdong, on whose soil the war had been fought, to pay about 70 percent of the reparations for the First Opium War. Furthermore, the opium, which the British were now free to import to China, drained currency away from the

province; profits went to English rather than Chinese merchants. This made prices on purchased goods rise, and everything became more expensive than before.

As making a daily living grew more difficult in Guangdong, most Chinese resented what they thought were the Europeans' attempts to weaken China and colonize their lands. Lee Chew remembers,

My grandfather told how the English foreign devils had made wicked war

The Manchus and the Taiping Rebellion

After thousands of years of rule by the Han (the native Chinese), in 1644 northern Manchu nomads conquered China and established the Qing dynasty. At first the dynasty prospered, but by the mid-nineteenth century the rulers had grown corrupt and were unable to rule efficiently. For some years the dynasty continued to rule, but the First Opium War brought a humiliating defeat to the empire and the Manchu army in 1842; the Europeans now demanded that China allow them to trade tea and opium within its borders.

The defeat dealt Chinese pride and patriotism a terrible blow. In the south, with its traditionally rebellious clans, secret anti-Manchu societies arose to force the Manchu rulers from China. One of the secret societies was called the Taiping Tienkuo (the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace).

Using the hatred for the conquering Manchu dynasty and his own version of Christianity, Hong Xiuquan, a peasant rebel, led men, women, and children on a crusade to save China. Hong Xiuquan's followers provided food, money, and weapons, and they were his troops as they fought the government soldiers in a conflict that became known as the Taiping Rebellion.

The imperial forces sent to do battle were a vicious group who raped, robbed, and burned out the peasants, driving even more farmers into the Taiping camp. Hong and his followers put up a good fight, winning many battles and bringing several villages and towns under their control. Despite these victories, the government's superior ammunition and resources prevailed in the end. Hong and the peasants were defeated, and the Manchu dynasty ruled China until 1911.