

ABSTRACT

From Lady Liberty to Gold Mountain: An Examination of Chinese, Japanese and Italian Immigrants to the United States

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Beginning in 1850, America's doors really opened to the rest of the world, and the United States became a popular destination for people seeking life-altering changes. These people met prejudice and pressures to assimilate, but also formed strong communities, and developed identities unique from that of their home countries. In this thesis, I examine the plight and the triumph of Italian, Chinese and Japanese immigrants as they established new communities and grappled with their changing sense of self spurred on by their move across the ocean. In order to capture the immigrant experience from the immigrant perspective, I rely heavily on immigrant memoirs, autobiographies, and other sources written in the immigrant voice.

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FROM LADY LIBERTY TO GOLD MOUNTAIN
AN EXAMINATION OF CHINESE, JAPANESE, AND ITALIAN IMMIGRANTS TO
THE UNITED STATES

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Rota Fichbach emigrated from a small town east of Berlin in 1926 on the *S.S. Ballin* at only seven years old. The journey was a miserable experience: “The first four days we were deathly sick, seasick...I was so sick, and I wanted to die. I didn’t want to live anymore.”¹ Despite how miserable she and her family were during their eleven-day journey across the Atlantic, Rota had a conversation with her mother reminding her why they had left Germany and taken this long, arduous journey:

“Soon you are going to see the Lady of Freedom.” And I said “What’s that?” And she said, “That you’re free here. You can do as you please. You can talk and say what you want. When you see that lady we’re in America”²

America was worth four days of complete misery because as soon as immigrants saw Lady Liberty they knew their lives would change completely. Another immigrant, Larry Edelman, who left Poland in 1920 at age ten, describes his feelings in similar language:

When we were told... we would be passing the Statue of Liberty we all lined up on deck. The thrill of seeing that Statue there. And the tears in everybody’s eyes... It was more, not freedom from oppression, I think, but more freedom from want.³

Rota and Larry’s stories are not unique. Between 1892 and 1954, when Ellis Island was open, over sixteen million people made similar journeys to America and were greeted by Lady Liberty.⁴ On the other coast, immigrants from Asia left their homes with the same dreams in mind. In China, Yung Wing brought students to America to study with the goal of raising China up to the standards of other Western nations; Wen Bing Chung was one

¹ Coan, Peter, *Ellis Island Interviews* (New York: Checkmark Books, 1997) 188.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 155

⁴ Ibid., 414.

of the students that was sponsored under Yung Wing's program in 1873. When he arrived in America, he described how seeing the United States affected him and his fellow students:

The sights greeted that greeted the students in the harbor of San Francisco remained vividly in their memories for years afterwards. The steam launches and ships moving or anchored at their berths... the business houses clustering like bees in the centre of the city—all seemed very grand.⁵

While there wasn't a clear marker into the United States on the west coast the way the Statue of Liberty stood over the east, crossing the Atlantic was a significant, pivotal moment to many Chinese and Japanese journeyers. When they stepped off their ships a land vastly different and unfamiliar from where they came greeted them, and unfamiliar

America in the 1800s and 1900s was the land of opportunity and freedom, and many came for the chance to change their lives for the better. As Rota described her dreams in America:

In America you can get ahead. You can have everything you want, anything you can eat. You can get clothes cheaper. You can buy a whole house for... what is impossible in Germany. You have to come, have to come. That's all we heard.⁶

Immigrants abandoned their homes, their friends, and everything they knew for the chance of this fabled prosperity they had heard so much about. Lady Liberty, standing outside Ellis Island as a welcoming beacon, symbolized many of these changes immigrants hoped for: a new better life, economic opportunity, or freedom from persecution. However, many could not predict how drastic these changes could be. Beyond a change of home, the move to America fundamentally changed immigrant's own identity in ways they could not have imagined. Many were exposed to ideas they did

⁵ Wen, Bing Chung, "Reminiscences of a Pioneer Student," in *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present* edited by Judy Yung, H. Chang and Mark Lai, 30-38. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 33.

⁶ Ibid., 187.

not have in their home country such as civil liberties, weakening class barriers, and new technologies. Not all of these changes were positive; immigrants experienced intolerance, prejudice, racism, poor working conditions, and feelings of isolation from greater society. All of these factors coalesced into one simple change: immigrants were not the same people they were before they came to America. The move to America fundamentally changed how immigrants identified themselves and within society as whole.

This work ultimately seeks to describe how immigrant identity, life, and culture were changed, and how new cultures were created by the move to America during the 1800s and early 1900s by primarily focusing on the stories of Chinese, Italian, and Japanese immigrants. Specifically, I will focus on the period from 1850, when census data first exists for new arrivals, and end in 1924, with the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924. I chose this period because I wish to examine the development of new communities in the United States and how the earliest immigrants wrestled with their new roles in their new homes. The remaining portion of this introduction will serve to explain the choices made in this work, establish a framework to conceptualize and define the exact meaning of identity that will be used through out, and connect this framework to the immigrant experience.

An Explanation on the Choice of Groups to Highlight

While Chinese, Japanese and Italian immigrants may seem to be randomly chosen and unrelated groups, all three were chosen for a very specific purpose. Looking at the data in table one, the change in the foreign born population from 1850 to when the quota system was put in place, one can see that Italian immigrants had the largest positive

change over any other ethnic group before the quota system was put into place. Only three other groups, those from Poland, the Russian Empire, and Germany had numbers close to Italy's. Upon closer examination, the numbers of these groups are not as consistent as those of Italian Americans. The numbers for residents of the Russian Empire hit a high in 1900-1910, but throughout the rest of the period the numbers usually were lower than the amount of Italian Americans that immigrated in the same decade. Further, while Germans immigrated to the United States in great numbers at the beginning of the century, as the century progressed, the amount of foreign-born German immigrants declined significantly, while the change in foreign-born Italian Americans remained positive through out the period. Polish Americans come the closest to having numbers consistent like Italian Americans, but Polish immigrant numbers never reached a peak the way Italian immigration did. Therefore, due to the fact that Italian Americans made up the largest number of immigrants that immigrated to the United States before the quota system, and immigrated in consistently positive numbers, Italian Americans were chosen as one of this study's focuses. Beyond the focus on numbers, however, Italian Americans were chosen because they were among one of the most poorly treated immigrant groups when they came to America. As Mary Waters describes:

Italians...were one of the most despised groups. Old-stock Americans called them wops, dagos, and guineas and referred to them as the "Chinese of Europe" and "just as bad as negros"... In the both the North and South they were victimized by brutality. In 1875, the *New York Times* thought it "perhaps hopeless to think of civilizing them."⁷

⁷ Monsivais, George, *Hispanic Immigrant Identity: Political Allegiance Vs. Cultural Preference* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2004), 22.

<i>Country of Origin</i>	<i>1850-1860</i>	<i>1860-1870</i>	<i>1870-1880</i>	<i>1880-1890</i>	<i>1890-1900</i>	<i>1900-1910</i>	<i>1910-1920</i>	<i>1920-1930</i>	<i>Total Change</i>
England	153,017	119,232	111,752	245,465	-67,628	37,206	-63,866	-4,290	530,888
Scotland	37,968	32,335	29,301	72,095	-8,707	27,552	-6,506	99,753	283,791
Wales	15,895	28,770	8,769	16,777	-6,493	-11,098	-15,422	-6,861	30,337
Ireland	649,585	244,523	1,256	16,938	-256,050	-263,208	-315,017	-292,424	-214,397
Denmark	8,124	20,145	34,089	68,347	21,147	27,959	7,505	-9,680	177,636
Finland	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	67,039	20,144	-7,346	79,837
Norway	31,317	70,251	67,483	140,936	13,723	67,489	-40,014	-16,011	335,174
Sweden	15,066	78,707	97,005	283,704	103,973	83,193	-39,622	-30,335	591,691
Belgium	7,759	3,481	2,982	7,104	7,118	19,643	13,287	1,507	62,881
Netherlands	18,433	18,521	11,288	23,738	13,103	25,132	11,703	1,367	123,285
Austria	24,115	5,447	8,155	84,608	152,636	350,434	-50,714	-204,713	369,968
France	55,801	6,532	-9,431	6,203	-8,977	13,221	35,654	-17,480	81,523
Germany	692,301	414,458	276,209	818,152	-121,479	-352,181	-625,129	-77,294	1,025,037
Switzerland	39,969	21,826	13,468	15,448	11,524	9,255	-6,189	-5,649	99,652
Greece	242	62	386	1,111	6,628	92,767	74,694	-1,450	174,440
Italy	7,998	5,480	27,073	138,350	301,447	859,098	266,988	180,316	1,786,750
Spain	1,131	-480	1,357	1,064	865	15,058	27,427	9,827	56,249
Czechoslovakia	NA	NA	45,072	32,745	38,785	62,323	143,224	129,200	451,349
Hungary	NA	NA	7,789	50,909	83,279	349,895	-128,326	-122,833	240,713
Poland	NA	7,138	34,121	98,883	235,967	554,477	202,095	128,604	1,261,285
Russian Empire	1,746	1,484	31,078	146,922	241,082	760,686	216,083	-246,867	1,152,214
China	34,807	27,477	41,426	2220	-25,154	-24,778	-13,196	2,569	45,371
India	NA	NA	1,121	436	-112	2,633	237	949	5,264
Japan	NA	NA	328	1,891	22,496	42,956	13,758	-10,509	70,920
Oceania	2,082	1,888	2,831	2,494	-533	2,630	3,176	2,717	17,285
Australia	NA	1,699	1,788	1,078	823	2,228	1,879	1,902	11,397
Caribbean	1,581	4,217	4,894	6,855	2,179	22,200	31,327	27,279	100,532

Table One: Change in Foreign Born Population by Country of Origin from 1850-1930⁸

⁸ Created from data from: Gibson, Campbell and Emily Lennon, "Table Four: Region and Country or Area of Birth of the Foreign-Born Population, With Geographic Detail Shown in Decennial Census Publications of 1930 or Earlier," US Census Bureau, March 9, 1999..

Italian Americans faced a difficult uphill battle to establish communities and gain acceptance within American society because from the beginning they were seen as an inferior peoples. This prejudice more than once culminated in violence against Italians.

In contrast, while the numbers of Japanese and Chinese Americans are relatively small—at no point reaching over 100,000 new foreign born residents in a decade—I find it important to showcase the immigrant experience outside of the European perspective. All immigrant groups experienced at least some initial prejudice, Asian Americans where a very easy group to target because they were racially different. Examining the Chinese and Japanese case will demonstrate how Asian newcomers faced unique challenges and had a different cultural mindset coming into America than Italians did. Yet despite coming from a similar area of the world, the Chinese and Japanese are far from similar. Each group faced its own challenges and had its own strengths. By examining these two cases from these two different countries, one can begin to see how the structure of the immigrant's home country, the military, economic and political power it possessed, affected its citizens abroad in often more significant ways than cultural differences did.

Further, both Chinese and Japanese immigrants were discriminated against by national legislation. In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act; this act nearly halted Chinese immigration and revoked the citizenship of many Chinese. As the first federal act to ban immigration on the basis of race or nationality, the Chinese Exclusion Act was the first step toward the quota system implemented in 1924.⁹ Predictably, the act decreased the population of Chinese in America, but it also unexpectedly increased the violence against monumentally, “as if given a license and segregation and discrimination

⁹ Soennichsen, John, *The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2011), 67.

against the Chinese became institutionalized for over sixty years.”¹⁰ Likewise, the act caused problems for Chinese families that would lead to difficulties for many Chinese Americans in later generations.

While this thesis will not examine immigrant life beyond 1924, Executive Order 9066 targeted Japanese Americans through the order to the Secretary of War to:

Prescribe military areas in such places and of such places and extent as he... may determine from which any or all persons may be excluded, and with respect to which, the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Secretary of War... may impose.¹¹

In practice, this meant that 110,000 Japanese Americans were relocated from their homes and forced into enemy internment camps, despite official government reports that estimated Japanese Americans to be “90 to 98% loyal to the United States [and]... pathetically eager to show this loyalty.”¹² While I will not examine the effects of internment because the period this thesis studies does not extend that far, I will examine the beginnings of the development of Japanese American society in the United States, how Japanese Americans worked to establish communities that would later be demolished or uprooted by Executive Order 9066, and the early relationships between Japanese Americans and native born whites. Further, the Japanese American experience serves as an interesting contrast to the Italian and Chinese experience because Japan was a strong, powerful country while Italy and China were not during this time. Because of Japan’s status as a world power, Japanese immigrants to America had a vastly different experience than either Chinese or Italian immigrants.

¹⁰ Ibid. 74.

¹¹ Roosevelt, Franklin, “Executive Order 9066 dated February 19, 1942, in which President Franklin D. Roosevelt Authorizes the Secretary of War to Prescribe Military Areas,” US National Archives Catalog 2018. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5730250>

¹² Robinson, Greg, *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 67.

Historical Context

Prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, new arrivals to the United States assimilated relatively easily into American society because they did not conflict with the dominant conception of what an American was supposed to be. For example, in 1850 the US census recorded only 758 foreign born Chinese and 3,679 foreign born Italians in America.¹³ America initially welcomed immigrant labor because manifest destiny created many job vacancies, and immigrants were needed to fill this void, build railroads, and help develop the economy of the new western states.¹⁴ Yet, as the century progressed the United States became more attractive to less typically “American” newcomers, and the industrial revolution and development of new technologies allowed more of this new type of immigrant to travel. Trains and steamships slowly spread from Western Europe to Southern Europe which allowed more immigrants to travel safely and in less costly manners than before. As seen earlier in table one, by 1860 the population of foreign-born Chinese and Italians had increased by 34,807 and 7,998 people respectively. During and before the Civil War, tensions between nativists and immigrants were low, but economic down turns in the 1870s and labor unrest led to a rising nativist sentiment. Concurrently as nativist sentiment rose, the numbers of Italian and Chinese immigrants also rose.¹⁵

The increasing popularity of nativism led to three key factors that would affect new Americans: the advent of eugenics and scientific racism, the growing hostility toward immigrants from labor unions, and political questions regarding immigrants’ loyalty to the United States. Scientific racism first gained wide public notice with

¹³ Gibson, Campbell and Emily Lennon

¹⁴ Hing, Bill Ong. *Defining America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 25.

¹⁵ Altschuler, Glenn, *Race, Ethnicity, and Class in American Social Thought: 1865-1919*. (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc, 1982), 49.

publications from pseudo scientists like August Weismann and Herbert Spencer. Both of these men advocated for the government sterilization of “degenerates”, which was undoubtedly connected to the influx of new immigrants because criminals were thought to be primarily foreigners and blacks.¹⁶ Scientific racism created a hierarchy of the races; at the top of the hierarchy were the so-called original Americans- white, Anglo-Saxon protestants- the hierarchy continued down until one came to those at the lowest level: blacks, Asians, and immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. The people pigeonholed into this lowest category “were stereotyped as representatives of some kind of lower species”¹⁷ Because new arrivals were considered morally and intellectually inferior to native-born Americans, they were considered a threat to the American way of life. Many politicians and others in positions of power used scientific racism as a justification for nativism. Looking at Dennis Kearney, a vociferous supporter of Chinese exclusion, one can see how he peppered scientific racism into his speeches. In 1878, Kearney gave a speech known as the “Misery and Despair Address”:

To add to our misery and despair, a bloated aristocracy has sent to China... for a cheap working slave. It rakes the slums of Asia to find the meanest slave on Earth—the Chinese coolie—and imports him here to meet the free American in the labor market, and still further widen the breach between the rich and poor, still futher to degrade white labor... They are whipped curs, abject in docility, mean, contemptible, and obedient in all things.¹⁸

Kearney uses scientific racism’s logic throughout this small excerpt. He pins certain negative characteristics—being from slums, whipped curs, and meanness to point out a few—as inherent characteristics of Chinese workers. Further, he puts white men above Chinese men rhetorically in his speech by saying that Chinese workers are coming up

¹⁶ Ibid., 45.

¹⁷ Monsivais, 22.

¹⁸ Soennichsen, 53.

against free white America. He uses this rhetoric technique to put white men and Chinese men into a conflict that did not really exist because men from China were not a threat to white labor's dominance. Ultimately, Kearney uses this rhetoric to separate Chinese and White men into different hierarchies. The free white man couldn't possibly be anything like the contemptible Chinese coolie, and thus, Kearney uses scientific racism to support his ideas that Chinese immigration to the United States must come to an end. Kearney's speeches are an excellent example of how scientific racism was presented to the public. Reputable figures beyond Kearney used scientific racism in their addresses to the public, so many of scientific racism's suppositions trickled down to the general public. General society, hearing the rhetoric politicians and other prominent figures used, began to believe scientific racism as fact and doubted that immigrants had the ability to assimilate at all. Immigrant populations reacted in various ways to these assertions and scientific racism depending on their heritage and cultural context.

Hostility from labor unions came in tandem with economic downturns. When the economy crashed, nativists came out the woodwork in full force looking for a scapegoat to blame for job losses. Samuel Gompers, leader of the American Federation of Labor was one of the most vocal supporters of restrictive legislation. Gompers claimed recent arrivals were "behaving not as Americans but as aliens, only loyal to their country of birth" and that they were damaging the economy because "employers want to hire at the lowest possible wages and prefer a rapidly evolving labor supply to a labor supply of American wage earners."¹⁹ Union leaders like Gompers and even those who not leaders saw immigrants as unskilled workers who took unfair wages at the cost of the American worker. Immigrants, especially Italian Americans, were also widely despised by union

¹⁹ Feegler, 22.

members and many of their fellow workers as scabs and strikebreakers. While some labor organizations, such as the Knights of Labor, tried to reconcile the difference between native and foreign workers, the two were largely seen as in conflict, even though working poor whites and immigrants often held the same economic positions and interests.²⁰ Labor hostilities limited economic opportunity for immigrants, and made social ascension difficult for many individuals who came to the United States.

Finally, many questioned immigrants' loyalty to the United States. Many prominent Americans argued the nativist stance that one could not be an American and also maintain any ties to their home country. Woodrow Wilson was an especially vocal about his disdain towards immigrants retaining remnants of their native heritage. After the League of Nations proposal had failed to pass in America, Wilson blamed immigrants for its failure saying, "Hyphens are the knives that are being stuck in this document."²¹ What is meant by this, is that Wilson believed those who had connections to another country (Italian-Americans, Japanese-Americans, German-Americans etc.) were unable to relinquish their ties to their former or ancestral homes, and were creating division that caused the League of Nations to fail. To be an American who identified any sort of connection to another country, and thus retained a hyphen in ones self-identification, was to not be an American at all. During this time, those who advocated for increased regulations toward immigrants erroneously equated culture and language with political loyalty. Nativists pointed to ethnic enclaves, foreign language newspapers, and even

²⁰ Rumbault and Portes, 8.

²¹ Altschuler ,69.

lingering accents as evidence that immigrant Americans were not fully assimilated, therefore, disloyal to America.²²

All three of these factors either increased the demand for more restrictions on immigration control or provided for their justification. As early as 1894, special interest groups were forming and lobbying for harsher laws.²³ Gradually, these groups became more predominant, and immigration to America became more difficult. In 1896, congress required immigrants pass a literacy test before they were allowed entry into the United States. While seemingly benign in nature these tests were designed to “weed out the inferior races.”²⁴ Such legislation became increasingly common throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the hurdles to immigration became more intense until the Immigration Act of 1924 was passed. The Immigration Act of 1924 operated on a national quota system. Each country was only given a certain amount of visas for new arrivals each year. Scientific racism was used to justify the national quota system of 1924 as less desirable races on the racial hierarchy had smaller quotas. Labor unions fueled xenophobia, lobbied for more restrictions, and convinced the American public that immigrants were taking American jobs. Finally, many politicians and other public leaders denigrated immigrants and convinced Americans that they were incapable of loyalty to America and thus should be excluded.

Understanding nativist sentiment sheds light on immigrant identity because it directly affects between group interactions and creates a demand that immigrants structurally assimilate. Angelina Palmiero, an Italian immigrant from Sicily who immigrated to America in 1923, felt this pressure and hostility towards her native culture

²² Monsivais, 25.

²³ Altschuler, 52.

²⁴ Monsivais, 30.

from a young age. She describes how she was mocked as a child for her Italian accent and how as a result, “I promised myself I would never have an Italian accent, because I was afraid of what I went through as a kid.”²⁵ Angelina responded to the hostility she experienced by relinquishing some of her Italian heritage. Immigrants adopt this strategy when between group interactions with the dominant culture shuns an immigrant’s native heritage and pressures assimilation. Immigrants try to “adopt a more accommodating, assimilation-orientated strategy in order to avoid discrimination and gain greater acceptance in the greater society.”²⁶ However, the opposite can occur as well, immigrants may develop what Portes and Rumbaut call a “reactive ethnicity” in which ethnic minorities rebel against the majority culture’s expectations by asserting their own identities and culture.²⁷ Amongst Chinese, Japanese and Italian immigrants, Japanese Americans were the most likely to adopt the assimilation-orientated strategy while the Chinese Americans responded to discrimination with a reactive ethnicity.

A Framework of Identity

In order to construct a framework of identity, I chose to utilize Vânia Penha-Lopes’ work, rather than a better-known work because she creates a clear, concise framework for identity with easy to follow components. According to Penha-Lopes’ research there are three main components of ethnic and racial identity formation: identity is a choice based on relational factors and interactions between groups, it is constructed

²⁵ Coan, 50.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Portes and Rumbaut, 269.

by symbols- religious, cultural, etcetera- that have no one particular or uniform meaning, and finally, it is based upon individual interpretation.²⁸

The first factor states that identity is relative to a group's greater context. As a result of the interactions with other groups, ethnic identity is formed, manipulated, and changed. For example, a dominant group may impose stereotypes upon a minority group and this may result in the minority group rejecting that image. The rejection then becomes a part of that group's identity. The opposite, however, is also possible; groups may form a negative identity as a result of interactions with other groups.

Next, the role symbols play in a group's identity is to connect the "group's integration in society and a group's increasing feeling of belonging"²⁹ Penha-Lopes uses the example of Israel's meaning to American Jews to illustrate this concept. Immediately after the Holocaust, Jews in America viewed the creation of a Jewish state as "worthy of sympathy and energetic support."³⁰ Despite this, Jewish organizations were torn on the role American Jews should have regarding Israel. Many did not condone Israel's military endeavors in the Middle East, and as a result, viewed Israel with a "somewhat disinterested attitude"³¹ By 1967, as anti-Semitism became less acceptable in America, and American Jews became more integrated into society, Israel had come to symbolize meanings to American Jews beyond mere sympathetic sentiments. American Jews, felt "Israel represent[ed] the cultural and spiritual heritage of Judaism, the feeling of peoplehood, a strong determination of a world people."³² This change did not occur in

²⁸ Penha-Lopes, Vânia. "Race and Ethnic Identity Formation in Brazil and the United States: Three Case Studies," *Afro-Hispanic Review* 29, no. 2 (2010): 253-258.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 254.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 256.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 257.

³² *Ibid.*, 256.

the American Jewish consciousness until American Jews were accepted by American society and anti-Semitism became largely unacceptable. This acceptance into society at large was the key that allowed American Jews to embrace Israel as a component of their ethnic identity.

Finally, the last of Penha-Lopes's factors argues that identity is not a fixed construct; it changes with individual choice and socialization through "ethnic or racial entrepreneurs", people who socialize, raise and teach individuals and intentionally or unintentionally influence their perceptions on their racial and ethnic identity. Essentially, individuals may choose to or not to identify with a particular ethnic or racial group because of their socialization regardless of their biological ethnicity or birth heritage. "Ethnic or racial entrepreneurs" could be influential figures such as teachers, religious leaders or parents. Research suggests, however, "in order for [racial or ethnic] identity to remain strong it needs to be reaffirmed beyond family life."³³

Related to ethnic identity formation, there are two models of assimilation: behavioral and structural.³⁴ Behavioral assimilation occurs when both the immigrating culture and dominant culture change to accommodate the new culture. This occurs because a new society is created through behavioral assimilation. Structural assimilation, however, involves no change on the part of the dominant culture. For an immigrant to structurally assimilate, they are expected to give up most of their native culture. Up until World War II, immigrants were expected to structurally assimilate, and abandon most of their heritage. Woodrow Wilson described this sentiment: "America does not consist of groups. A man who thinks of himself as belonging to a particular national group in

³³ Ibid., 258.

³⁴ Altschuler, 52.

America has not yet become an American.”³⁵ Ultimately, this means there was no concept of hybridization in American culture. One was not a Chinese-American, Italian-American or Japanese-American; instead one was either American or other because during this time there was no way to be accepted as both. President Wilson elaborated on this attitude in 1916, “hyphenated Americans have poured the poison of disloyalty into the arteries of our national life. Such creatures of passion, disloyalty, and anarchy must be crushed out.”³⁶ At least according to Wilson, anyone who identified as Chinese-American, German-American, or anything similar, was not only not American but also a “creature.”

This requirement that one give up all of their native culture and structurally assimilate affects all of Penha-Lopes’s three identity-forming factors. These changes that America demanded creates tensions among groups, discourages the association of ethnic and racial symbols attached to identity, and negatively impacts ethnic or racial socialization. No matter how an immigrant’s family and community may have encouraged that immigrants hold on to their ethnic identity and heritage, Penha-Lopes clearly argues that ethnic-identity must be reaffirmed beyond the family life, and encounters such as racism or prejudice can cause change in how one chooses to identify themselves.³⁷ According to social identity theory, “strong ethnic identity appears to be important for minority group members to develop positive self-esteem and some protection from negative societal stereotypes”³⁸ American society tried desperately to

³⁵ Monsivais, 26.

³⁶ Portes and Rumbaut, 172.

³⁷ Penha-Lopes, 258.

³⁸ Basow, Susan, Elizabeth Lilley, Jamila Bookwala, and Ann McGillicuddy-DeLisi. “Identity Development and Psychological Well-Being in Korean-Born Adoptees in the US.” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 78 no 4. (2008). 473.

remove any foreign culture or heritage in the immigrants of the early 1900s and late 1800s. This likely would have put immigrant identity on a precipice where immigrants would have struggled to be accepted by American culture and had great difficulties retaining their cultural heritage. Moving forward, I will use Penha-Lopes' framework for identity and the two models of assimilation in conjunction with the immigrant experience to show how immigrant identity changed with the move to America. Her framework will provide a structure for analyzing immigrant experiences by looking at in group changes through racial entrepreneurs and symbols and at the effects of between group interactions. Chapters two, three, and four will take a chronological approach to examine immigrants' experiences in depth. These chapters will look specifically at the Chinese, Italian, and Japanese experience in detail by dividing the time between 1850-1924 into three chapters. Each of these chapters will examine Italian, Chinese or Japanese immigrants and will focus on the internal changes these populations went through when coming to America, and changes that occur because of between group interactions with American society at large. Specifically, these chapters seek to show how immigrants first established an identity unique from their countries of origin in America. In order to do this, I will rely primarily on immigrant memoirs, interviews, and other writings in an attempt to capture how newcomers felt in their own words.

For the Italian American section, biographies are relatively abundant, so this will be the main source used in this section. Chinese immigrants from the earliest period did not write very many biographies, and the few that did rarely wrote them in English. Thus, rather than relying on biographies as a source base for Chinese immigrants, the sources used in this case are mainly unconventional writings from immigrants. This includes

pamphlets that have been translated, recorded song lyrics, interviews and the occasionally autobiography. Judy Yung's work is of particular importance because she worked to catalog and group Chinese Americans writings together in one source, and was able to conduct interviews with many individuals from the Chinese American community. Japanese Americans wrote a handful of biographies, but the majority of source for this group come from interviews. Mei Nakano, Ito Kazuo and Eileen Sunada Sarasohn all published collections of interviews of the first generation of Japanese Americans that will be utilized heavily during this study's examination of Japanese immigrants.

Beyond the difference in source material between these groups, there is a significant difference in the scope that research has focused on in each group. Specifically, while both scholarships on Chinese and Japanese immigrants has focused extensively on the plight of women—and thus my work will reflect a large portion of this scholarship—scholars of Italian American immigrants have not focused so heavily on this area. After having analyzed each of these peoples individually, I will conclude briefly on the similarities between these groups and how their differences led to each having unique experiences despite arriving to the United States at roughly the same time.

CHAPTER TWO

The Italian American Experience

Introduction

Within this chapter, I will discuss the demographics of the population that was leaving Italy to go to the United States as well as a brief examination of their motives for leaving. In general the major push factor in Italy was the lack of opportunity; tradition, class divides, and economic status crystallized the poor into a position they felt they would never be able to escape in Italy. Rosa Cassetari's biography by Marie Hall Ets is an important source in this section because Rosa had a critical eye for discerning social relationships and societal conventions. Beyond individual changes, I will also look at how group identity as a whole developed. By this, I mean I will look at how Italians came to overcome their regional identifications and form a larger Italian American identity. This development was a gradual process that progressed from Italians living in separate neighborhoods organized by region to coming together to form a strong unified identity in the United States. Language, religion, and men known as *padroni* all played crucial roles in this change. Robert Orsi's examination of the Church of the Lady of Mount Carmel will provide an excellent representative case study of the religious development of Italians in the United States. After having looked at Italian America identity as an enclave, I will then examine Italian Americans in the larger context of American society by analyzing the worst instance of violence and conflict against the Italian American community: the Hennessy Incident of 1890 in New Orleans.

The Decline of the Importance of Class

Prior to coming to America, many Italians, and especially those in the South suffered from extreme poverty and had little possibility of social mobility. As Peter Mossini, who was born in 1898 in Sicily, describes:

“In them days, there were two classes of people in Sicily the rich and the very poor. My family was very poor. I never went to school. I started working from before I was ten years old...I work from one o'clock in the morning to about two in the afternoon the next day. Eleven, twelve hours. Them days, if you make ten cents a day that was a lot of money.”³⁹

Mossini's salary, ten cents a day, would have culminated into roughly three dollars monthly. A similar job in the poorest part of America would have resulted in a monthly salary nearly five times as large.⁴⁰ The purchasing power of the Italian lira was also much weaker than the US dollar.⁴¹ Because of this, the average Italian could not afford meat, except for very rare occasions, and lived in desperate poverty compared to even the poorest Americans.⁴²

As a result of the economic stratification, the social structure in Italy was much more rigid and complicated than Mossini's simple assertion of the rich and the very poor. Italy's class system was based on four hierarchical classes. At the top, were the *galantuomini* (the upper class, usually landed aristocracy or professionals such as lawyers or doctors), then the *artigiani-mercanti* (skilled artisans and merchants), then the *contadini* (peasant farmers who generally rented a small plot of land from the upper class), and the bottom were the *giornalieri* (day labors without any land or capital)⁴³. Italy's stratified society had a variety of social effects beyond economic disparity. Firstly,

³⁹ Coan, Peter, *Ellis Island Interviews* (New York: Checkmark Books, 1997) 43.

⁴⁰ US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. “Historical statistics of the United States, colonial times to 1970.” (Washington DC, 1975), 163.

⁴¹ Iorizzo, Luciano and Salvatore Mondello. *The Italian Americans* (Twayne Publishers, 1980), 60.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴³ Gallo, Patrick, *The Ethnic Alienation* (Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickson University Press, 1974), 75.

class distinction separated individuals by social standing and resulted in which neighborhoods one could live.⁴⁴ Higher classes lived a world apart from the lower classes, in separate neighborhoods with separate concerns. There was often resentment between the classes. As Alfredo Gaetano, a first generation Italian American reflecting on his home village in Italy, describes, “I never felt inferior to [those in higher social classes]. They got there not by their own intelligence. In reality they may really be inferior to me.”⁴⁵ Gaetano’s reflections imply the consensus that lower classes felt regarding the upper classes: they had not gotten to their positions by their own merit, and were merely lucky to be born at the top. The people in the lower classes did not believe Italy worked by way of meritocracy.

Beyond restrictions on one’s residence, there was very little possibility of social mobility in Italian society for two reasons: the strict social classes played a strong role in limiting contact between social groups and the value Italians placed on tradition unintentionally discouraged upward social mobility. Because contact between the social classes was limited and rare, intermarriages between classes were relatively uncommon. Therefore, one could not easily or realistically hope to move up in Italian society by marrying above their class. Italians also felt a strong compunction because of tradition to take up their parents’ occupation.⁴⁶ Tradition further limited Italian’s acceptance of education because abject poverty had conditioned Italians so that “they felt that the only security obtainable was achieved by following the rules of life received from his

⁴⁴ Ibid., 76.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Engel, Madeline and Silvano Tomasi. *The Italian Experience in the United States* (Staten Island: Center for Migration Studies, 1970), 128.

forefathers.”⁴⁷ Therefore, Italians were trapped in a cycle of poverty. They had little hope to marry out of this cycle, and tradition meant they would pursue the same jobs their parents had and not seek any education to break the cycle either.

Italy’s rigid social structure, and lack of opportunity thus played a very important role in why Italians left their homes for a new life in America. As one farmer described to his landlord:

Italy is America for you not for us. We work, become impoverished and die; you grow wealthy... So it is always; the most numerous class of the landless is therefore truly extraordinarily poor, without any hope of savings or redemption.⁴⁸

Where Italy left no room for social movement, America had fewer social barriers and many Italian Americans believed they would be able to climb the social ladder for the first time in their lives. America presented a viable alternative for social advancement that Italy did not have.

Rosa Cassetteri stands in contrast to the unnamed farmer. Rosa left her home in Northern Italy to marry a man she had never met and migrate to America. When she first saw America’s shore, she and her fellow *paesani* (country men) crowded along the railing of the ships. She thought, “America! The land where everyone could find work! Where wages were so high no one had to go hungry! Where all men were free and equal and where even the poor could own land.”⁴⁹ Rosa’s argument that “even the poor could own land” and its juxtaposition next to the argument that “all men were free and equal” argues that in Italy, the poor were restricted from landownership in part because of Italy’s strict social hierarchy, not merely economic hardships. As Rosa further delves into

⁴⁷ Ibid.,

⁴⁸ Iorizzo and Mondello. 58.

⁴⁹ Ets, Marie Hall, “Rosa: An Italian American Immigrant”, in *Immigrant Voices* edited by Thomas Dublin (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 113.

American life, she notes more evidence to support this theory. While on a train during her first week in America, Rosa is shocked by rich, well-dressed ladies not only sitting in the same train car as her, but speaking to her as well. This positive interaction with people from the upper classes causes her to posit that America is “all equal and free [poor and rich] together.”⁵⁰ Rosa’s shock clearly indicates that this is a phenomenon that does not occur in her home country or at least one she has never encountered.

One can see another example of the decline of the class importance in the United States compared to Italy when Rosa briefly returns to home country. After having been exposed to weaker class barriers in the United States, Rosa takes her new perspective with her in an interaction in Italy. During her time there, she must speak with a man at a bank and is given the opportunity to demonstrate her newfound American attitude about class. Before she speaks to the man, Rosa notes, “I wasn’t afraid at all. In America the poor can talk to anyone and ask what they want to know.” This statement asserts that prior to coming to America, Rosa would have been afraid because the social structures in Italy were so strict that one simply would not talk to anyone. This supports the idea that there was very little intermarriage between social classes. Rosa’s experience in the United States changed her perceptions on social structure and class. Later on, Rosa’s memoir gives further evidence to illustrate how strict Italy’s social structures are during her time, and how her life in America has changed her perception regarding class barriers. While she is waiting for the man at the bank, Rosa notices empty chairs and describes an exchange that results in her sitting in the chairs, and in doing so breaking an Italian social more:

⁵⁰ Ibid., 118.

There were some nice chairs- chairs for the high people. But why should the high people have chairs and not the poor? ... I went in and sat down.
'Oh Rosa!' gasped the other woman in line 'Come back! They will put you in jail you will get arrested! They will put you in jail!'
Soon the janitor came, 'Che impertinenze! (What nerve) Who gave you permission to sit down?
"Myself," I smiled because I was no longer afraid.
"You think you're so smart because you come from America?"
"Yes," I said in America the poor people do get smart. We are not so stupid anymore."⁵¹

This exchange shows several key details about Italian society and the changes Italian-American immigrants would have experienced. First, the social hierarchy in Italy is shown to be socially and legally enforced. Even if the threat of imprisonment is an exaggeration, Rosa's companion's genuine fear about the legal consequences of defying social norms, shows how deeply engrained the social hierarchy of Italy was in its citizens. The companion's fear shows there likely were legal barriers to class mixture. The barriers would have greatly hindered social mobility because someone cannot expect to move up in society if they are punished for such a minor peccadillo as Rosa's. Lastly a final crucial aspect that can be noted from this exchange is that a janitor, not someone in a higher class, like a banker, enforces the social norms. This likely signifies that not just the rich enforced the social norms in Italy. Thus, social climbing in Italy at the turn of twentieth century seems to have been incredibly difficult. This may explain Rosa's statement that the poor are no longer stupid in America. In America, while class divides existed, they were not as strong as in Italy, nor did the poor enforce them against the poor. By coming to America, Rosa was able to escape what the Italian farmer had

⁵¹ Ibid., 130.

described as “working becoming impoverished and dying with out hope of savings or redemption.”⁵²

Rosa Cassetari’s experiences with increased social mobility in America were not unique. Edward Corsi, who immigrated to America in 1907 from Naples, supports Rosa’s observations:

My new father had resigned from the army at the time of his marriage. To start life over at any work below his caste would have been embarrassing in Italy. America was different. There he could take any sort of employment at first, and no one would think the worse of him.⁵³

Interestingly, Edward’s observations demonstrate the other side of Italy’s social structure. Although Edwards’s family was well off, his stepfather had to leave the army, and he could not find work that was socially appropriate for his “caste” as Edward puts it; thus, Italy’s social structure proved to be a financial barrier even to those who were not on the bottom of the class system.

A report conducted by a social worker further illustrates the increased social mobility in America compared to Italy. In the 1909 to 1910 school year, children of Italian descent were questioned about their future goals and aspirations. Despite these children being among the poorest and having the least opportunity, “over three-fourths of the children possessed aspirations to earn a living in a higher level than that of their parents and a number chose the professions.”⁵⁴ While in Italy, tradition ruled ones ambitions and prevented social mobility. Italian children in America absorbed the possibility of greater social mobility and ran with it. Regardless of whether children

⁵² Iorizzo and Mondello. 58.

⁵³ Corsi, Edward. *In the Shadow of Liberty*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), 21.

⁵⁴ Engel and Tomasi. 138.

followed through with their aspirations, the desire to become something more than their parents shows America's decreased social barriers and class hierarchy.

The Construction of the Italian Identity in America

Before 1871, there were no Italians; there were Sicilians and Milanese and Florentines, but no Italians because the country had not yet united. This meant one from a northern province like Piedmont would feel little kinship with an immigrant from a southern province like Naples. Italians from different provinces viewed each other as foreigners; this notion is illustrated by how Rosa Cassetari describes an interaction with her friend Francesca, a fellow Lombardo:

‘Look at me’ said the comical Francesca... ‘I’m going to marry a man I’ve never seen in my life. And he’s not *Lombardo*- he’s *Tuscano*! But I’m not afraid.’ Of course Francesca was not afraid “Crazy Francesca” they called her... She was so happy she was going to America that she didn’t care who the man was.⁵⁵

From this observation, one can see how disjointed Italy was during this time. Lombardy is only one region away from Tuscany, only a couple hundred miles, yet Francesca spoke of her husband as if he was from another country. After hearing that Francesca had not yet met her Tuscano husband, Rosa calls her crazy, possibly in reference to her marrying a man from a different province. Italians of this generation developed strong associations with their province, not Italy as a whole. This identification with and loyalty to provinces is called *campanilismo*. Oscar Handlin eloquently describes *campanilismo* in his work, *The Uprooted*:

Always start with the village. “I was born in such a village in such a parish” –so the peasant invariably began the account of himself. Thereby he indicated the

⁵⁵ Ets, 112.

importance of the village in his being; this was the fixed point by which he knew his position in the world and his relationship with all humanity.⁵⁶

Handlin's description elucidates the importance of an Italian peasant's village and the difference between Italian immigrants from different regions. Peasants usually lived their whole lives in one village without traveling much if at all. Therefore, the first meaningful interactions between the average Italian citizen from different provinces such as Puglia and Veneto were in America, not Italy. However, this is not to say that Italian immigrants from different regions immediately intermixed when coming to America. In the 1890s and 1880s, when Italian immigration to the United States first began to reach a peak, Italian immigrants largely resided and socialized with their fellow *a*, or countrymen. *Campanilismo* was a way to cope with the loss of the village identity back home. While Italian immigrants could obviously not bring their village and all of their old ways with them, living with their *paesani* was a way to bring some social safety and comfort to the new world. This desire for some of the old world's security led to unintentionally segregated neighborhoods. In the same city, Neapolitans, Abruzzesse, and Calabrians all lived on separate streets. Pascal D'Angelo, a poet who immigrated to America in 1910 as a young boy described the effects of living in a community with only his *paesani*, "We formed out own little world—one of many in this country. And the other people around us who spoke in strange languages might have been phantoms for all the influence they had upon us or for all we cared about them."⁵⁷ By sequestering themselves with their *paesani*, immigrants were able to recreate some of the old world comfort of their villages.

⁵⁶ Handlin, Oscar. *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People*. (Boston: Brown and Company, 1952), 8.

⁵⁷ D'Angelo, Pascal. *Son of Italy*. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1924), 70.

To complicate matters, standard Italian was also not the language of most people from the Italian peninsula. Italian only became the majority language in Italy in the 1950s.⁵⁸ Prior to this, dialects were spoken in all the provinces, and they varied widely enough to nearly constitute their own languages. As Nancy Carnevale notes, the dialects are not merely regional varieties of one language, they can be as dissimilar as Portuguese or Spanish is to Italian. To illustrate this point, Carnevale gives the word for children (*bambini* in standard Italian) in various dialects: “In Piedmont the term for children is *cit* or *folin*; in Campania it is *criature*; in the Sardinia dialect speakers use *pizzinnu* or *pipiu*.”⁵⁹

Italy’s disjointed state and the prevalence of *campanilismo* became problematic upon migration to the United States. In line with factor one of Penha-Lopes’s three factors, the move to America changed individual Italians’ greater context, because in order to have a community, Italians had to communicate with Italians from different provinces as well as American society at large. However, there were few commonalities between groups and no consistent overarching Italian identity, so Italian immigrants created an Italo-American identity that was unique from their village or province identities in Italy. The Italo-American identity was constructed in three key ways: the use of a unique Italian American dialect, the *padroni* system, and finally the development of Italian Catholic churches.

The dialect differences created a variety of problems for Italian Americans. Some of these were minor, for example, Rosa Cassettari describes how she had great difficulty understanding a man from Tuscany and had to listen closely to understand him, but other

⁵⁸ Carnevale, Nancy. *A New Language, A New World: Italian Immigrants in the United States 1890-1945*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 26.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

instances were more serious.⁶⁰ Fiorello La Guardia, the future mayor of New York City, worked as an interpreter on Ellis Island and witnessed a more extreme consequence of dialect differences amongst Italian Immigrants:

A young girl in her teens from the mountains of Northern Italy turned up at Ellis Island. No one understood her particular dialect very well, and because of her hesitancy in replying to questions she did not understand, she was sent to the hospital for observation. I could imagine the effect on this girl, who had been carefully sheltered... when a doctor suddenly rapped on her knees [and performed other tests] The child rebelled... In two weeks time that child was a raving maniac, although she had been sound and normal when she arrived at Ellis Island.⁶¹

This anecdote illustrates the necessity of a common language amongst Italian immigrants. Not being able to communicate can have detrimental effects to mental health and wellbeing, as demonstrated above, but also economic consequences. How could one earn a living when no one understands his or her specific dialect? To compound the problem, dialect was often the only language many Italian immigrants spoke since few could speak standard Italian or English. Neither Italian nor English could then easily function as a lingua franca. The solution to this quandary was to develop an Italo-American dialect that was distinct from standard Italian and blended in pseudo English words. The development of a common language was possibly the first factor that served to unite Italians outside of their regional enclaves and move Italian-American immigrants beyond *campanilismo*.

This hybrid language mixed dialects—mainly Neapolitan—Italian, and English.⁶²

While not uniform to any extent, this phenomena was common in Italian immigrant communities across the United States. Despite the lack of uniformity, a case study

⁶⁰ Ets, 119.

⁶¹ Brownstone, David, Irene Franck, and Douglass Brownstone. *Island of Hope Island of Tears*. (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2000), 211.

⁶² Carnevale, 36.

conducted in 1975 by James Cascaito and Douglas Radcliff-Umstead in the Pittsburgh neighborhood of Panther Hollow found the specific Italo-American dialect native to that neighborhood could be understood by Italian American immigrants from Cleveland, Chicago, New York, and even as far as San Francisco.⁶³ Examples of some words from Italo-American include *stritto* (for street), *boia* (boy) and verbs such as *faitiar* (to fight), which were often conjugated according to Italian, not English grammar rules, resulting in *faiti*, *faito*, *faitava* and more.⁶⁴ Yet, the rules of Italo-American language were not strict. One could use either English or Italian syntax structures and be understood. A very basic example of this concept can be seen in the Italian phrase “I’m sleepy” the correct Italian structure in the Neopolitan dialect would be *ajjē sonnē*, which translated literally means “I have sleep”. Cascaito and Radcliff-Umstead observed examples of Italo-American speakers using *so ’durmadē*, which follows the English syntax of I am sleepy.⁶⁵ Grammar and syntax ultimately followed a flexible structure that allowed Italian immigrants to communicate somewhat regardless of their skill in either standard Italian or English.

Not only did this language allow immigrants from different parts of Italy to converse more easily, but versions of Italianized English helped immigrants with limited knowledge of English communicate with English speaking society. Gabriel Iamurri, a young Italian man who immigrated to the United States in 1895, illustrates a very simple example of the usage of the Italo-American dialect. He describes an exchange with a store clerk in which he tried to purchase a new shirt. After much confusion, Gabriel attempts to speak to the clerk in Italianized English: “I started again to say: ‘Me, me,

⁶³ Cascaito, James and Douglass Radcliff-Umstead. “An Italo-English Dialect.” *American Speech* 50, no. 1/2. (1975). 5.

⁶⁴ Carnevale, 38.

⁶⁵ Cascaito and Umstead, 11.

Mister wanda shorta, guda shorta, capish?’ ... ‘Ah, at last!’ he exclaimed triumphantly, ‘I got you this time, my boy.’”⁶⁶ While not perfect English, Gabriel’s use of Italianized English words like “wanda” for want achieved his goal of communication. Thus, the Italo-American dialect functioned as a way to form connections between Italian-Americans from different regions and a way to connect them to American society at large and diminished the reliance on *campanilismo*.

Before the Italian-American dialect could develop, Italians had to come to America in the first place. This meant acquiring transportation from their village to the nearest port, purchasing a ticket to cross the Atlantic, and ensuring they had all the proper documents and funds needed to pass immigration checks at Ellis Island. Clearly this was a lengthy and often very confusing process. So, many migrants relied on *padroni* to arrange the finer details and help them better understand what would be required of them in the United States. A *padroni* served as racial entrepreneurs to new Italian immigrants that first arrived in America; they served various functions and were called by various names such as labor agents, interpreters, or bankers. One could sum up a *padroni*’s role as a middle man who worked to represent and fulfill the needs of his Italian American community; this aid may include writing letters, finding housing, or sending remittances back to Italy.⁶⁷ While the *padroni* played a crucial role in integrating new immigrants into American society, they were not universally respected. As Gabriel describes, “Bordanti (boardkeepers)...were at the same time labor-agents, since they found you a job besides feeding you. They were the very SCUM of the Italian race: Liars, cutthroats,

⁶⁶ Iamurri, Gabriel. *The True Story of an Immigrant*. (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1945), 51.

⁶⁷ Iorizzo and Mondello, 166-167.

ruffians.”⁶⁸ This reputation was not undeserved as many *padroni* cheated the immigrants they lured under their care.

Rocco Corresca, who immigrated in the early 1900s, was briefly under a *padroni*’s care and detailed his firsthand experience living with a *padroni*. First, Rocco encountered a man “who pulled out a handful of gold and told [him] he had made it in America in a few days.”⁶⁹ Rocco then inspired by this man’s success, began the journey to New York for himself, but when he arrived he was not permitted entry because he lacked the necessary funds. But Bartolo, a man Rocco had never met before, lied and said he was Rocco’s uncle, sponsored him and Rocco was allowed entry. Bartolo took Rocco to a room with fifteen other men and put Rocco to work as a trash picker looking for discarded scraps that could be salvaged for a small profit. The men working for Bartolo “paid [Bartolo] about one quarter of their wages. Then he charged them for board and clothes. So they got little money after all.”⁷⁰ Eventually, Rocco comes to realize that Bartolo was “what they call a *padroni* and is now a very rich man. The men that were living with him had just come to the country and could not speak English. They had all been sent by the young man we met in Italy.”⁷¹

Analyzing Rocco’s experience reveals several key aspects about the *padroni* system. First, and most obviously, one can see how objectively exploitive the *padroni* system could be. Bartolo lured men to Italy in order to have men to work for him, and while Bartolo became rich, his workers struggled as rag and trash pickers. On the other hand, the *padroni* system clearly was an important factor in bringing new immigrants to

⁶⁸ Iamurri, 40.

⁶⁹ Corresca, Rocco, “The Life Story of an Italian Bootblack”, in *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans as Told by Themselves* edited by Hamilton Holt, 29-38. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 33.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 34.

⁷¹ Ibid., 35.

America. All fifteen men and Rocco came to America because of the one man they had met in Italy. This man presumably worked with Bartolo to convince people to leave Italy, and Bartolo played a key role in Rocco's admittance into the United States. While morally questionable and certainly exploitative, the *padroni* system encouraged and provided the means for many people to come to the United States in the first place. In this way, the *padroni* functioned almost as racial entrepreneurs. By encouraging immigration, *padroni* often introduced a new identity, that of an American immigrant, to Italian immigrants. Further, the *padroni* were often essential for immigrants to first acquire employment.⁷² While the work Bartolo provided his charges was less than ideal, it was their first step in establishing themselves in America. Therefore, the *padroni* system cannot be overlooked as a crucial component in the formation of the Italian American identity, even if it was a less than savory one.

While Bartolo made no effort to actually integrate immigrants into American society, Iorizzo and Mondello argue that despite the *padroni* system's failures, many *padroni* made significant positive contributions for immigrants and acted as agents of Americanization.⁷³ In order to support their claim, Iorizzo and Mondello cite Thomas Marnell, a *padroni* from Naples who immigrated to America in 1877, as a case study. Marnell was a *padroni* in Syracuse, and he took it upon himself to personally welcome each new member to his community, served a variety of leadership functions in his community such as a banker, interpreter, mediator of disputes between community members, and was a founding member of the first Italian Catholic church in Syracuse,

⁷² Iorizzo and Mondello, 165.

⁷³ Ibid., 164.

St. Peters Italian Church.⁷⁴ Imperatively, Marnell urged his community “to be good Americans... He urged them to obey the law, to become naturalized citizens, and to stand ready to champion the cause of their adopted country.”⁷⁵ Thomas Marnell is the epitome of a *padroni* who while making personal gain from his position, provided direction and useful assistance to aid their communities. *Padroni* were no doubt often exploitive, but they also served key roles as go betweens from the old to the new world. Without the contributions of the *padroni*, Italian Americans would have likely advanced much slower in American Society than they did.

After the changes brought on by the *padroni*, perhaps the final and most crucial step in creating the Italian-American identity was the foundation of Italian American Catholic churches. Before official Italian-American Churches were built, the Irish dominated Catholic churches. Italian Americans resented many aspects of the Irish Catholic Church from liturgical differences to the “pervading supernationalistic spirit, identified with all things Irish.”⁷⁶ The theological differences between the two sects of Catholicism were not insurmountable and were actually quite minor. The tension came from the assertion that Irish Catholics had a more valid form of Catholicism than Italians. As a result, Italian practices, like the worship of saints, were often regulated to basements. The overall feeling one got as an Italian American was that the Irish Catholic church subjugated Italian worship as lesser.

Despite these tensions, few Italians turned to the Protestant church, largely because Italians believed Protestantism to be a heresy. Antonio Arrighi, a young Florentine who immigrated 1855, reflects this sentiment when he mistakenly attends a

⁷⁴ Ibid., 172.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 170.

⁷⁶ Engel and Tomasi, 197.

Protestant service: “Had I known it was a Protestant church no amount of money would have induced me to enter... I trembled at the thought that I had committed a mortal sin... the devil shall not lead me again into that trap!”⁷⁷ Clearly, the Protestant church was not a viable alternative to the Irish Church, so Italians either worshipped privately in their homes or with the Irish in the basements of churches. In their homes, Italians worshipped the patron saint of their home region for example, in New York, “the Neapolitans on 106th Street between First and Second Avenues continued to celebrate the feast in honor of Saint Anthony while the Sicilians on the next block celebrated the one honoring Saint Benedict.”⁷⁸ *Campanilismo* still dictated religious practices in the New World as they had in the Old World.

Regional variations in worship practices slowly began to dissolve as Italian Americans constructed their own churches. In New York City, the Neapolitans, Sicilians, and Abruzzesse came together to build a place of their own to worship in. Robert Orsi’s examination of the Church of the Lady of Mount Carmel perfectly illustrates the uniting factor religion had in creating the Italian American identity. The church was in New York City East Harlem and its patron saint was la Madonna del Carmine. While the church and la Madonna del Carmine originated from Neapolitan traditions, the church came to represent all Italian American immigrants.⁷⁹ The Madonna was celebrated with elaborate festivals, joyous parades where Italians from all sections of East Harlem, regardless of region of origin, took to the street and worshipped, and walked in massive processions holding huge candles dedicated to the Madonna, while the smell of street food wafted in

⁷⁷ Arrighi, Antonio. *The Story of Antonio the Galley Slave: A Romance in Real Life In three Parts*. (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1911), 201.

⁷⁸ Iorizzo and Mondello, 226.

⁷⁹ Orsi, Robert. *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 58.

the air.⁸⁰ Most notably, an effigy of the Madonna was paraded through the streets followed by praying worshippers. The Madonna being worshipped in the street stands in stark contrast to former Italian saints relegation to basements of churches. Thus, the public worship of the Madonna, and other saints like her, became a point of pride. Interestingly, these *feste*, with elaborate street parades marked by an effigy venerated in the streets, were more common in the United States than in Italy, and became an important marker of Italian American identity. As the *feste* were regarded hostilely by non-Italian Catholics—at one point even being called “sacrilegious” by New York Church officials—the retainment and expansion of this tradition exported from Italy shows an active attempt to hold on to Italian traditions and a refusal to submit and assimilate to the hegemonic Irish Catholic traditions.⁸¹

In order, to house the Madonna they so cherished, Italian Americans themselves regardless of their origin in Italy, worked together to build the church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel; the residents of Italian East Harlem thus formed a community and sense of solidarity they had lacked. The church, and others like it in other Italian American neighborhoods in America, came to be a very strong symbol of Italian American identity that over came *campanilismo*. As all of these changes- the *padroni* system, the Italo-American dialect, the development of their own Catholic Churches—coalesced, and regional identity in Italian immigrants was gradually supplanted by a stronger sense of belonging as Italian Americans.

Italian Americans and American Society

⁸⁰ Ibid.,3.

⁸¹ Ibid.,57.

While the Italian American identity was forming and overcoming *campanilismo*, early Italians still had to reckon with American society at large. These interactions were rarely positive, and between group interactions with American society and Italian Americans were strained. One of the earlier and most impactful incidents in Italian American and American between group interactions was the Hennessy Incident. In 1890, the New Orleans Police Chief David C. Hennessy was assassinated, and because of his reputation for stopping Italian crime—which consisted mostly of arresting Sicilians—it was assumed that the crime was mafia related. In fact, during the investigation, the mayor ordered the police to “scour the neighborhood. Arrest every Italian you come across.”⁸² From the very beginning the case was prosecuted with an anti-Italian bias, and this trend continued through out the trial. During jury selection, “seven hundred and eighty jurors were examined before one could be found who were free of prejudice against Italians or capital punishment.”⁸³ Despite the difficulties in finding a nonbiased jury and the clear anti-Italian prejudice that thrived in New Orleans, there was not enough credible evidence to convict, and the jury found the defendants not guilty. After this verdict, a New Orleans politician W.S. Parker gave a speech urging citizens to amend the supposed injustice:

When the courts fail, the people must act. What protection... is there left when our Chief of Police is assassinated in our very midst by the mafia society and his assassins are again turned loose on the community? Will every man here follow me and see the murder of Hennessy avenged? Are there enough men here to set aside the verdict of that infamous jury, every one of whom is a perjurer and a scoundrel.⁸⁴

⁸² Boltein, Barbara. “The Hennessy Case: An Episode in Anti-Italian Nativism.” *The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 20, no. 3. (1979).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 269

⁸⁴ Iorizzo and Mondello, 84.

As a result, a mob formed to hunt after the defendants and the accused, and as they marched to the jail through New Orleans, the mob chanted Italian slurs saying, “We want the dagoes.”⁸⁵ By the end of the day, eleven Italian prisoners had been shot and lynched, of whom five had not yet stood trial, three had been found not guilty by a jury of their peers, and no conclusive verdict had been reached regarding three.⁸⁶

By analyzing the Hennessey incident, one can derive two major points of significance. The first is tied directly to and in many ways caused by the Hennessey case, and is the increased supposed connection between Italian immigrants and the mafia. The second is the immigrants’ increasing disillusionment with America’s values and legal system. With regards to the first, after the Hennessey incident, the word mafia appeared in the American news and was directly linked to Italian Americans for the first time. The word began to appear more frequently in national newspapers across the country, and the association mafia and crime became irrevocably linked with Italian Americans, and served as an albatross around their necks that damaged employment opportunities and created a new prejudice against Italian Americans.

With regards to America’s supposed promised values to immigrants, the Hennessey incident served as evidence to immigrants that American values and protections would not protect immigrants like it would native born citizens. Coming to America, immigrants were not ignorant of the protections afforded to them by the constitution. Many came to America because of the promise of freedom, yet the reality they met was often starkly different. Looking at the specifics of the Hennessey case, although the accused had had a fair jury trial as the constitution afforded them, in the

⁸⁵ Botein 272.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

eyes of the public, this trial's conclusion was meaningless. W.S Parker said as much in his speech when he provoked the citizens of New Orleans to "cast aside the verdict of that infamous jury."⁸⁷ The accused in the Hennessey murder trial were guilty by the way of public opinion regardless of the law. This hypocrisy in between American rhetoric and practices was puzzling and upsetting to immigrants. Antonio Arrighi, while not involved with the Hennessey incident, describes his conflicted emotions when he experienced injustice in America. Antonio had fallen asleep on a park bench and awoke to a policeman ruthlessly beating him, although he had committed no crime. Reflecting back on this moment, Antonio says,

My introduction into free America was peculiar, and entirely contrary to the expected spirit of freedom. I could not understand how a country, which did not even allow men to sleep peacefully, could be called the Land of the Free. Not only that, but how can it be the Home of the Brave when a fellow being is unjustly clubbed in a cowardly and brutal manner?⁸⁸

Antonio had been aware of what America had purported itself to be, brave and free, and is disappointed at America's reality. Truly, in this time America was the land of the brave and free for a very select few. Immigrants often did not have the privilege of partaking in the rights supposedly guaranteed by the constitution. Upon realizing this contradiction, many immigrants became disillusioned with America, and begin to feel hopeless. Pascal D'Angelo voices these ideas in his memoir, "I had resigned myself to my fate. I was a poor laborer—a dago a wop or some such creature—in the eyes of America. Well, what could I do? Nothing."⁸⁹ America made many promises of freedom and political rights to immigrants, but often carried out very few of them. Immigrants quickly learned the disheartening reality behind America's rhetoric.

⁸⁷ Iorizzo and Mondello, 84.

⁸⁸ Arrighi, 193.

⁸⁹ D'Angelo, 138.

CHAPTER THREE

The Chinese Experience

Introduction

Like the previous chapter, this chapter will also begin by examining the demographics of Chinese American immigrants and describing the push factors that motivated them to leave. A crucial concept that will guide much of the early part of this chapter is an examination of Shin-Shan Tsai's idea of the sojourner's mentality and how this affected the construction of early Chinese American communities and familial relationships. One of the key consequences of the sojourner's mentality was that men often did not bring their wives and families with them to the United States, which created a huge gender imbalance in early Chinese America. Because of the gender imbalance, as well as general Chinese customs men and women then had very different experiences and employment. Often at times these situations forced Chinese men and women into circumstances where components of their individual identity, masculinity and femininity respectively, were challenged. Fortunately, Chinese voyagers were not left to negotiate the changes the move left with them with alone. Chinese Americans from the same regions in China came together to form regional associations called *hui-guan*. These associations eventually coalesced into one large body, The China Six Companies, that provided assistance to their fellow country when they first arrived in the United States. Beyond providing material assistance, The China Six Companies served as representatives of China town to American society at large and attempted to negotiate

Chinese Americans image to be more positive. Despite the efforts of the China Six Companies, Chinese Americans were still widely discriminated against, most egregiously by the Chinese Exclusion Act.

The life of a Chinese American

Despite the vast cultural differences, those coming from China had a surprising amount of similarities to newcomers to the United States from Italy. These similarities were mainly the result of structural similarities between China and Italy themselves that resulted in their citizens having similar economic situations and cultural ties. Firstly, many Chinese citizens felt more of an identity with their province than with China proper. Similar to Italians who were more likely to identify as Sicilians for example over Italians, Chinese were more likely to identify with their province or ethnic group, such as Fujian or Hakka. The language barriers that existed between provinces reinforced this divide. Different dialects of Chinese, like Hokkien or Shanghainese, varied greatly from modern standard Mandarin and Cantonese, which dominated a significant portion of South Eastern China, constitutes its own language. Liang Qichao, a scholar who spent time in North America during 1903, noted this regional preference amongst his countrymen:

Our character is that of clansmen rather than citizens... We have a village mentality and not a national mentality. I heard Roosevelt's speech to the effect that the most urgent task for the American people is to get rid of the village mentality, by which he meant people's loyalty to their own town and state...Developed to an excess [the village mentality] becomes an obstacle to nation-building...We Chinese have developed it too far.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Arkush, David and Leo Lee, *Land Without Ghosts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 92.

The earliest Chinese immigrants did not come to America with a strong self-identification as Chinese. This tendency to identify more strongly with a province or region followed Chinese across the ocean and affected how they chose to formally organize in America, as will be seen in the development of The China Six companies later on which organized along national lines.

The Chinese tendency to identify along regional rather than national lines caused problems within the Chinese community and often left them susceptible to exploitation from American society because they did not act as a united front together. A very good example of this is from a pamphlet from the Chinese community urging that the individuals put aside their regional and ethnic differences so that they could form a *Bow On Guk*, or Protection Bureau to collectively defend their community from attacks—such as violence or discrimination—from American society at large. The pamphlet read:

Conflicts arose amongst ourselves as we cut each other's skins. And because of this weakness we were frequently subject to foreign exploitation. If we are not harmonious among ourselves and promote friendships among our countrymen, how can we protect our property and life?⁹¹

The line “cut each other's skins”⁹² is a reference to infighting between the Hakka and Punti, two ethnic groups from China. This brief excerpt demonstrates that the Chinese recognized that presenting a divided front was counter productive to their ultimate security, but also shows that feuds from China followed immigrants across the ocean. This regional preference was an early barrier to the formation of the Chinese American community.

⁹¹ Glick, Clarence. “Sojourners and Settlers: Chinese Migrants in Hawaii,” in *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present* edited by Judy Yung, H. Chang and Mark Lai, 68-69. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 68-69.

⁹² Ibid.

Also like Italian voyagers to America, Chinese immigrants were fleeing destitution. In 1850, a rice shortage made food incredibly scarce and expensive, and the Taiping Rebellion still wreaked havoc through much of China.⁹³ As a result, many Chinese, inspired by the whispers of prosperity, fled China to seek their fortune in America. However, only men left while wives and children remained in China. Confucian values and Chinese society dictated that women stay home and care for the family, as a popular Chinese proverb says, “Men travel between countries and provinces, women just run around the kitchen stove.”⁹⁴ Women left behind were faced with a difficult dilemma. Many of them never saw their husbands again, but the remittances sent back from America were desperately needed. A song sung by the wives of men who had taken the journey to America—which, as in this song, was commonly referred to as Gold Mountain by the Chinese—encapsulates this dilemma:

“O, just marry all the daughters to men from Gold Mountain: All those trunks from Gold Mountain—you can demand as many as you want!
O, don’t ever marry your daughter to a man from Gold Mountain: Lonely and sad—a cooking pot is her only companion.”⁹⁵

Marrying a man who left for Gold Mountain was to choose between economic and familial stability. Wives back home could not remarry if their husbands did not return, so the life of a Gold Mountain wife could be very lonely. Clearly, the decision to emigrate was not easy; it had long lasting effects on the Chinese family and required sacrifices from both the husband and wife. This course was usually only taken because of severe financial need.

⁹³ Hing, Bill Ong. *Defining America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 28.

⁹⁴ Yung, Judy. *Unbound voices: A documentary history of Chinese women in San Francisco*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

⁹⁵ Hom, Marlon K, “Gold Mountain Wives: Rhapsodies in Blue,” in *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present* edited by Judy Yung, H. Chang and Mark Lai, 7-8. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 8.

As a result of the toll emigration took on individuals in China, most of the early Chinese immigrants adopted what Shin-Shan Tsai coined a sojourner's mentality, essentially meaning that those who first came to America had no intention of staying permanently.⁹⁶ The goal was always to return to China richer than before, not to make a new life in America. The Chinese peasant's life revolved around their village much in the same way as the Italian peasant, so most of those who came to the United States envisioned returning to China and never imagined they would settle permanently. This goal applied even after death. Returning to China was so important to the first Chinese immigrants, that immigrants established a mutual fund to pay to send the remains of their fellow Chinese who had passed away in America back to China to be buried.⁹⁷ Chinese workers often had little money to spare, so one can only imagine the significance burial in China must have meant. In the pamphlet first proposing this mutual fund, the author described the condition of those buried in America:

Yet who knows how many of them died with their ambitions unattained, their dreams unfulfilled. Instead their spirits could not return to their homeland since their bones were buried in foreign soil. They could only gaze longingly toward home, and their anguish deepened with each passing of Ching Ming.⁹⁸

This writer's use of strong connotative words like "anguish" and "dreams unfulfilled" demonstrates exactly how important burial in China was to Chinese immigrants to the United States. America, at least in the beginning, was only seen as a stepping-stone to better life in China. The sojourner's mentality was exacerbated by the treatment many Chinese immigrants received from the United States. Lee Chew, a successful Chinese

⁹⁶ Tsai, Shin-Shan Henry. *The Chinese Experience in America*. (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1986), 34.

⁹⁷ Ow, Yuk, Him Mark Lai, and Philip Choy, *A History of the Sam Benevolent Association in the United States* in *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present* edited by Judy Yung, H. Chang and Mark Lai, 26-29. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 27.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

merchant echoes this sentiment and is adamant that he generally speaks for all of his country men:

More than half of the Chinese in this country would become citizens if allowed to do so, and would become patriotic Americans. But how can they make this country their home as matters are now?... All congressmen acknowledge the injustice of treatment of my people, yet they continue it. They have no backbone. Under these circumstances, how can I call this my home, and can anyone blame me if I take my money and go back to my village in China?⁹⁹

Lee Chew references discriminatory laws against the Chinese as one of his reasons for never fully assimilating into his new home or even fully starting to think of as America as a home.

There were many consequences and side affects of the sojourner's mentality. Firstly, early Chinese immigrants held to their traditions tightly because they felt very little pressure to assimilate. Men, following the Manchurian practice, continued to wear their hair in queues, and the few women in the United States continued the practice of foot binding. Secondly, as will be explored in greater detail later on in this chapter, the sojourner's mentality caused a huge gender imbalance. Chinese men who came to America were either unmarried or left their wives and children in China, so very few Chinese women came to America in the 1850s. For example, in 1852, there were 155 Chinese men to every one Chinese woman in California.¹⁰⁰ Immediately, this imbalance reflects two key aspects of early Chinese society in the United States. First, family dynamics were severely disrupted. Men did not have the support a family provides, and often missed their wives desperately, as is evident from a letter sent from an unknown

⁹⁹ Lee, Chew, "The Life Story of a Chinaman", in *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans as Told by Themselves* edited by Hamilton Holt, 174-185. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 185.

¹⁰⁰ Tong, Benson. *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994),3.

men to his wife via the Kam Wah Chung Company, a Chinese company that served as a post office and letter writing station to China:

I received another of your letters. I could not keep the tears from running down my cheeks when thinking about the miserable and needy circumstances of our home, and thinking back to the time of our separation. Because of our destitution I went out, trying to make a living... My beauty you are implicated in an endless misfortune.¹⁰¹

This excerpt emphasizes the sojourner's mentality. This man only left China because of the severe destitution at home. One can also see the emotional toll it took to leave behind his family. This man was moved to tears thinking about how he had left his wife in China. This man's experience was not entirely universal, as some men unscrupulously abandoned their wives in China and remarried in the United States. Either way, immigration severely disrupted family dynamics at home in China and in the United States.

Male Employment in Early Chinese America

A common misconception during this time was that the first Chinese immigrants came to America as coolies, or forced workers, but for Chinese immigrants this stereotype was a pervasive and harmful myth. By accusing the Chinese of being coolie workers, anti-Chinese activists were able to justify Chinese exclusion even as early as 1852. Governor John Bigler of California, one of the earliest advocates of restricting Chinese immigration, argued that California must "check the tide of Asian immigration"

¹⁰¹ Chen, Chia-lin. Ow, "A Gold Dream in the Blue Mountains: A study of the Chinese immigrants in the John Day Area, Oregon, 1870-1910," in *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present* edited by Judy Yung, H. Chang and Mark Lai, 97-102. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 98.

because of coolie labor¹⁰². In response, Norman Asing, a naturalized U.S citizen from China, wrote a letter defending the Chinese community from these accusations:

The effects of your late message have been thus far to prejudice the public mind against my people, to enable those who wait for the opportunity to hunt them down, and rob them of their toil...we are not the degraded race you would make us. We came amongst you as mechanics or traders, and following every honorable business of life¹⁰³

Asing fiercely denies accusations that the Chinese are low skilled workers by providing concrete examples of skills that the Chinese brought to America, and he objects to the premise that the Chinese are racially inferior to white Americans. By this time in his life, Asing was a South Carolina resident who owned several businesses, but he still feels tight enough kinship with his fellow countrymen to attest to the skills of the common laborer coming from China. Asing's defense of his people shows how tightly connected and supportive the Chinese America community was of each other. Further, this is a key example of Penha-Lopes's theory regarding identity formation. Chinese America resolutely rejected the majority opinion and accusations leveled against them, rather than incorporating these stereotypes into their perception of themselves. Through out the early years of Chinese America, the denial of stereotypes and resistance to marginalization will be a key aspect of the Chinese American identity.

Another crucial point worth noting in Asing's letter is his appeals to American history. He argues, "the framers of your declaration of rights [never] suggested the propriety of establishing an aristocracy of *skin*."¹⁰⁴ By referencing the intent of the original framers of the constitution, Asing disproves the idea that the Chinese were

¹⁰² Asing, Norman, "To His Excellency Governor Bigler," in *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present* edited by Judy Yung, H. Chang and Mark Lai, 9-12. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, 9.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

uninterested in assimilating to or learning about American culture. Asing points out that despite his ethnicity, he is just as capable as studying America's heritage as anyone else. Secondly, and more obviously, Asing is pointing out the hypocrisy in The United States' actions and stated values. Relying on America's heritage to defend themselves—as Asing does here—would become a very common rhetorical technique amongst Chinese Americans.

Very few, if any, Chinese men came to America as coolies; most came to work either as railroad workers or miners. Almost no first hand accounts of Chinese working conditions in the mines or on the railroad have survived, but the general historical consensus is that the conditions were awful. While he worked on a Canadian instead of American railroad, Wong Hau-Hon wrote possibly the only surviving account of his life as a Chinese railroad worker. The conditions Wong Hau-Hon experienced likely would have been very similar to what the conditions of railroad workers in America. Wong Hau-Hon describes many tragic events, including watching his friends and fellow country men die from exposure to the cold, sickness, and hunger, not being able to properly bury his friends who had passed away, and many deaths that could have been prevented had their employers had a little more concern for the safety of Chinese lives.¹⁰⁵ At the end of his recount, Wong Hau-Hon asserts that, “more than three thousand Chinese laborers died in the building during the building of the railroad from diseases and accidents.”¹⁰⁶ While Wong Hau-Hon's quantitative assessment is likely an exaggerated figure, his estimation demonstrates how the railroad, and possibly America itself, loomed in the Chinese mind:

¹⁰⁵ Wong, Hau-Hon, “Reminiscences of an Old Chinese Railroad Worker,” in *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present* edited by Judy Yung, H. Chang and Mark Lai, 39-42. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. 40-41.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

it was a dangerous place that took Chinese lives. However, despite the sacrifices he had to make, Wong Hau-Hon still says, “I am proud of the fact that we Chinese contributed so much to the development of transportation in Canada.”¹⁰⁷ Despite the dangers involved with building the railroad, Wong Hau-Hon still took pride in being able to contribute to his new home. His assertion contradicts many of the accusations pitted against Chinese in the Western hemisphere. The Chinese were accused again and again of being unassimiliable and loyal only to China, but Wong Hau-Hon’s pride in building Canadian infrastructure proves this fact contrary. Many Chinese Americans must have taken pride in their work just as Wong Hau-Hon did, and factored into their identity that they could be proud of having taken part in constructing America. Despite the pride he felt in contributing to his new home, Wong Hau-Hon points out, “Yet now the government is enforcing forty-three discriminatory immigration regulations against us. The Canadian people surely must have short memories.”¹⁰⁸ Regardless of his and other Chinese’s sacrifices to contribute to Canada’s infrastructure, he and his fellow countrymen were still rejected by society. While Wong Hau-Hon was in Canada, very similar attitudes towards the Chinese existed in America as well. In fact, discriminatory measures soon forced the Chinese out of the mining and railroad industries all together.

In 1850, California first proposed the Foreign Miners Tax; the initial tax imposed a twenty-dollar a month tax on Chinese workers. Most laborers in California, Chinese included, earned around thirty to thirty-five dollars a month—regardless if they worked on the railroad or in mines—and the even most frugal worker’s living expenses were

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.,41.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.,42.

generally around fifteen to eighteen dollars a month.¹⁰⁹ This makes the original twenty-dollar tax practically unfeasible. This amount was lowered to only four dollars a month after the California State Court declared the legislation unconstitutional, but this cost was still a high toll on Chinese workers. Eventually, costs of living became too high and became a significant factor that pushed Chinese immigrants out of traditional labor jobs.

On top of the economic cost, working as a miner or railroad worker became increasingly dangerous to the Chinese because their fellow white workers brutally attacked them. One of the worst instances of this type of violence occurred in Rock Springs, Wyoming in 1885, but smaller scale burst of violence were not uncommon throughout the country. Violence broke out after Chinese workers declined to join in a strike with white workers, but the violence was no doubt racially as well as economically motivated. One of the survivors of the attack appealed to the Wyoming Supreme Court for Justice and described the massacre:

During the past two years there has been in existence in “Whiteman’s Town.” Rock Springs, an organization composed of white miners, whose object was to bring about the expulsion of all Chinese from the Territory...About 2 o’clock in the afternoon [on the day of the massacre] a mob, divided into two gangs, came toward “Chinatown,”...At that time the Chinese began to realize the mob was bent on killing... Chinese would be beaten with the butt ends of the weapons before being let go. Some of the rioters, when they could not stop a Chinese, would shoot him dead on the spot, and then search and rob him... Some who took no part in either beating or robbing the Chinese, stood by, shouting loudly and laughing and clapping their hands.¹¹⁰

At the end of the day, seventy-nine Chinese homes had been razed and twenty-eight Chinese miners were dead.¹¹¹ Incidents like the Rocky Springs massacre were

¹⁰⁹ Chen, Jack. *The Chinese of America*. (San Francisco: Harper & Row. 1980), 62.

¹¹⁰ *U.S. House Report* (1885-1886), 49th Congress, 1st session no. 2044, in *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present* ed. by Judy Yung, H. Chang and Mark Lai (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006),49-52 .

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 52

unfortunately common across America and sent the message to Chinese workers that they were unwelcome in mines or on railroads because they would be accused of taking white men's jobs, and this accusation came at the cost of Chinese lives.

As a result of the economic pressures and increasing danger working in mines and on the railroads posed, Chinese workers gradually vacated these fields. However, these workers, for a variety of reasons, did not seek to return to China. Rather, Chinese workers shifted their focus and pursued jobs that were unthreatening to the white male majority: launders, nannies, and cooks. However, these are not professions Chinese men would usually occupy in China. Lee Chew, the Chinese businessman, started his life in America as a domestic servant, and described how he learned the skills that would later allow him to become a launderer in America: "The Chinese laundryman does not learn his trade in China... The women there do the washing in tubs and have no washboards or flat irons. All the Chinese laundrymen here were taught in the first place by American women just as I was taught."¹¹² Perhaps the most important observation from Lee Chew's description is his insistence that in China women, not men did the laundry. While seemingly an insignificant detail, this is yet another example of how America undermined the traditional Chinese family structure and dynamic. In China men were heads of the household and women did the housekeeping roles, but America forced Chinese men into taking on women's work. With this reversal of gender roles, Chinese men in America perhaps lost a crucial component of their identity in their masculinity. Men may have felt they lost a crucial part of themselves in coming to America, and that made the adjustment from one culture to another all the more difficult.

¹¹² Lee, 179

Chinese women in America

As a result of the gender imbalance between Chinese men and women, there was a very high demand for companionship amongst the lonely Chinese workers and miners. Many Chinese women soon arrived in the United States to meet this demand. The term arrived is appropriate in this case because very few of these women came of their own free will. Most women who came to America to work as prostitutes were either sold by their families, tricked into leaving China, or simply kidnapped. Eventually, women were often brought from China by the tongs, structured street gangs in American Chinatowns that ran brothels, opium dens. One former slave-dealer describes how the tongs worked in the middle of the nineteenth century: “It was not hard to smuggle girls into the country...the Hop Sing tong fix it with the Custom House. They swore to the officers that the children were born here and went to China to visit. Some witnesses come and they say they knew the girl who wants to land was born here.”¹¹³ Smuggling women in was very profitable for the tongs, and by 1870, there were about thirteen Chinese men in America for every woman, an extreme drop from the numbers twenty years earlier, but a significant portion of these women—in San Francisco it is estimated to be up to 77 percent—worked as prostitutes.¹¹⁴

A particularly relevant—and sadly typical—example of the struggle of the Chinese woman brought to America to serve as a prostitute is the story of Wong Ah So. Wong Ah So was born in Guangdong to a poor sailor and his wife, and in 1922, when she was 19 a man came to her mother and told her, “that in America there was a great deal of gold. Even if I just peeled potatoes... I would earn seven or eight dollars a day, and if I

¹¹³ Yung, 1999, 149.

¹¹⁴ Tsai, 40 and Tong, 30.

was willing to do any work at all I would earn lots of money.”¹¹⁵ Like many others, Wong Ah So was amazed by the prosperity of America, and her family’s poverty served as a push factor that made America even more appealing. Aboard the ship to America, Wong Ah So described how she felt, “I thought I was his wife, and was very grateful that he was taking me to such a grand, free country, where everyone was rich and happy.”¹¹⁶ Not only did she look forward to America’s economic prosperity, but she also welcomed the chance to be free, which is a tragedy given that the man who had promised to take her to America sold her into prostitution. Like many who came before her, Wong Ah So had been tricked into coming to America. When she learned this deception, Wong Ah So was shocked and asked, “What is a prostitute am I not your wife?”¹¹⁷ Wong Ah So’s story is tragic partially because of how common it was. Unlike many others, Wong Ah So escaped prostitution, and eventually lived a happy life, but not all stories like hers have happy endings.

While Wong Ah So escaped her contract, many women unfortunately did not. In a Chinese woman’s bill of sale, there were conditions that mandated a woman work for usually three to four years, all of this time without wages. Many of these women did not live out their contracts for a variety of reasons: many became sick and passed away before their contracts were over, and many women had clauses in their bills of sale mandating they pay their employers back for sick days with increased time on their contracts. For example, in Loi Yau’s bill of sale from 1875 a clause reads, “If Loi Yau should be sick fifteen days she shall make up one month.”¹¹⁸ Given that these women

¹¹⁵ Yung, 1999, 203.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 204.

¹¹⁸ “Chinese Immigration,” *Senate Report 689*, 44th Cong., 2d sess. (serial 1734): 146.

were not provided health care and rarely adequate living conditions, one could see how these contracts could spiral on and become a never-ending debt. Further, some contracts, like that of Yat Kum's mandated that if a woman tried unsuccessfully to escape, "her time shall never expire."¹¹⁹ Thus, a contract that was meant to last only four years could quickly turn into lifetime slavery. While most Chinese prostitutes passed away before their contract expired, the few who lived to be considered old and unattractive were put into tiny little rooms with barred windows that looked out onto the street.¹²⁰

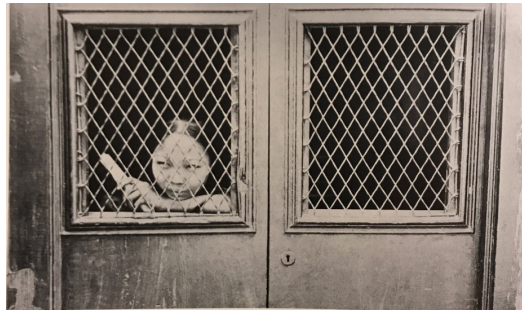


Figure One: The small, cage like room elder prostitutes worked from¹²¹

The entire experience of Chinese prostitution was dehumanizing and demoralizing, these women were treated as commodities and prisoners before they were treated as humans. Like Chinese men who lost a part of their identity in their masculinity, Chinese women had their femininity and autonomy stripped from them because of prostitution. Chinese women were left with little hope in Gold Mountain, despite the prosperity they had dreamed of while still in China.

Beyond the immediate effects, prostitution also carries psychological problems that the victim may suffer from for the rest of their life. Chinese prostitutes experienced a variety of violence from verbal abuse, to being assaulted on the streets. Much of the

¹¹⁹ *Congressional Record*, 43d Cong., March 1875, 3, pt.3:41.

¹²⁰ Yung, Judy. *Chinese Women of America: A Pictorial History*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 23.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

violence they experienced was caused more so because they were Chinese, and less so because of their profession. For example, American boys throwing stones once attacked a group of Chinese women, all ex-prostitutes who had fled to live in a nearby Christian missionary in China Town. The boys escalated the violence and started ripping at the women's clothing and tearing away their jewelry. Most humiliating of all, one boy used a brush and marked one of the women's face with black ink.¹²² In this case, it did not matter to the boys that these women had left prostitution they were still marked as different and unclean. The cause of the violence in this case was their ethnicity. However, the nature of Chinese prostitutes' work—independent from their ethnicity—still left them vulnerable to attacks from angry customers, or abuse from the brothel owners. There are numerous examples of prostitutes being attacked by angry customers or beaten by angry brothel owners.

Many of these women were also sold into prostitution at a young age. Suey Hin describes the day she was sold: "One day it was my turn. They said I was 14 years old, but I was really twelve. I don't know how much I cost, but I know both my hands were filled three times with all the gold they would hold. The money, you know, is always put in a girl's hand when she is sold."¹²³ Such experiences, the abuse from a young age, being treated not as human but a commodity, and the racial discrimination likely led to trauma. Research shows that women who have worked as prostitutes may suffer post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, high levels of traumatic stress, as well as relational and identity problems.¹²⁴ Identity problems, in this specific case, are defined as lack of

¹²² Tong, 138.

¹²³ Yung, 1999, 148.

¹²⁴ Choi, Hyunjung, Carolin Klein, Min-Sup Shin, and Hoon-Jin Lee. "Posttraumatic Stress

introspection, difficulty communicating one's thoughts, emotions, and views of others, and susceptibility to influence by others.¹²⁵ In the context of analyzing assimilation and changes in immigrant identity, identity problems are crucial. Many Chinese women, due to the trauma they had experienced, were not given the choice to assimilate and may have been incapable of forming an American identity.

Unlike Italian women, many Chinese women found little liberating or new and exciting about life in the United States. Even for the women who did not have to work as prostitutes, America was hardly the land of opportunities. Sui Sin Far, or Edith Maude Eaton, was the daughter of a Chinese woman and English man. She socialized with many upper class Chinese merchant wives and described their daily lives. Sui Sin described the life of the upper-class Chinese-American woman as such:

The Chinese woman in America differs from all others who come to live their lives here, in that she seeks not our companionship, makes no attempt to know us, adopts not our ways and heeds not our customs. She lives among us, but is isolated as if she and few Chinese relations who may happen to live near were the only humans in the world.¹²⁶

In a roundabout way, Sui Sin describes the effect of gender roles on Chinese culture in America. Like in China, women in America stayed home and took care of the house, and because of this, these women had little opportunity or felt little need to interact with their new communities. In realizing this, one must be careful not to assume that Chinese women found this way of life oppressive. Law Shee Low immigrated to California in 1922. Like Sui Sin described, she had very little interaction with American society. Law Shee mainly stayed home, cared for her eight children, and sewed to help earn a little

Disorder (PTSD) and Disorders of Extreme Stress (DESNOS) Symptoms Following Prostitution and Childhood Abuse.” *Violence Against Women* 15, no 8. (2009). 933-951

¹²⁵ Ibid.,938.

¹²⁶ Yung, 1999, 158-159.

extra money for her family. When asked if she found her life imprisoning Law Shee answered, “There was no time to feel imprisoned, there was so much to do. We worked like crazy... there was no time to attend [the family association] banquets, get involved with any women’s group... we were barely able to keep ourselves alive.”¹²⁷ Women in China saw their obligations at home not as a prison sentence, but a duty they took on without resentment. Their culture had taught them their greatest aspiration was to be a good mother and wife, and they took this teaching with them to America. Really, the life of the Chinese woman in China and America were incredibly similar. A Chinese wife in America and China would have stayed home and cared for the family and house. The key difference between the two is a woman in China would have kept her access to support networks and would have been in familiar, comforting surroundings.

In the greater context of the creation of Chinese America and the Chinese-American identity, the situation Chinese women faced in America likely meant very few of them shaped their new community in America. Perhaps more than any other immigrant group, Chinese America was formed and created by men, not women because prostitutes likely did not have enough power to shape their new lives in America and wives did not have the time.

The gender dynamics changed again in 1875 with the passage of the Page Act. The Page Act was meant to be a concession that would appease the anti-Chinese movement and not offend China and jeopardize diplomatic ties. The act forbade the importation of any Asian citizens against their will and explicitly prohibited the importation of prostitutes, whether they were willing transported to America or not. While seemingly harmless and even beneficial to the Chinese American community, this

¹²⁷ Ibid.,220-221

act had several negative impacts on the Chinese community. Firstly, the act likely increased the gender disparity again. As seen in table two,

Year	Number of Chinese men per each Chinese woman
1860	18.58
1870	12.84
1880	21.06
1890	26.78
1900	18.87

Table Two: The Gender Ratio Between Chinese Men and Women in America from 1850-1900¹²⁸

the gender gap between men and women had been steadily declining until the decade between 1870-1880, where the difference skyrocketed again. This sudden change in numbers could be attributed in part to the Page Act because the act made it very difficult for Chinese women—legal and illegal alike—to come to the United States. Data compiled and analyzed from 1913-1916 by Barde and Bobonis shows that Chinese women were 2.65 times as likely to be detained on Angel Island for further questioning than Chinese men.¹²⁹ Especially in the early days of the Page Act, detainment resulted because Chinese women were assumed to be coming to America for immoral purposes. The consequences of this presumption are perhaps best illustrated by the case of Quok Shee who tried to come to America in 1916. Quok Shee’s case is not the usual experience women coming to America, but rather an example of the worst case scenario.

¹²⁸ Tsai, 40.

¹²⁹ Barde, Robert and Gustavo J. Bobonis. “Detention at Angel Island: First Empirical Evidence.” *Social Science History* 30, no. 1 (2006): 124.



Figure Two: Quok Shee¹³⁰

Robert Barde pieced together Quok Shee's story from her investigation file, Case no. 15530/6-29, at the National Archives and Records Administration for the Pacific Region in San Bruno, California. From these records, Barde discovered Quok Shee's husband was Chew Hoy Quong. Chew Hoy Quong had lived in America since 1881, prior to the exclusion act, and was a part of the Dr. Wong Him Company. Chew's inclusion in the company granted him the exempt-class status of a merchant, and meant that if he left America, he would be allowed to return. He took advantage of this status and left for China to find a wife. There, he met and married Quok Shee. Quok Shee and her new husband boarded the *Nippon Maru*, aboard which they had their documents investigated and health certificates issued. Everything seemed to be in order for the new couple. To come to America though, Quok Shee had to pass the final hurdle: the interrogation. The interrogation was common for Chinese immigrants trying to come to America. The new immigrant would be placed in a room and asked questions about their

¹³⁰ Barde, Robert, "An Alleged Wife: One Immigrant in the Chinese Exclusion Era," *Prologue Magazine* 36, no. 1 (2004): 1.

lives to assure the stories of the two immigrants trying to enter matched. However, these questions were incredibly difficult, even for women whose stories were completely true. The standard procedure was to be asked fifteen to twenty questions, but Quok Shee and her husband were each asked over a hundred. At the end of the interrogation, the inspector passed Quok Shee, but she was still denied admittance to America. Quok Shee and her husband were interrogated again, and they had a few discrepancies in their answers that cast suspicion on the validity of their relationship; these questions included: the nature and number of occupants on the second floor of Chew Hoy's apartment, whether a clock in their apartment was made of wood or metal, and the number of men who accompanied Quok Shee and Chew Hoy to depart to America.¹³¹ Because of these discrepancies, Quok Shee was denied entry and dragged into a legal battle that ended up lasting for two years during which Quok Shee was detained on Angel Island.

Quok Shee's case is significant and representative in a variety of ways even if she represents the extremes of what could happen when one was detained on Angel Island. Firstly, throughout her documents she is referred to as an "alleged wife."¹³² From the very beginning her relationship was presumed to be illegitimate, essentially guilty until proven innocent. Despite having recommendations from her first inspector and the valid paper work, Quok Shee was treated like a criminal. The dogged insistence in which the immigration officers pursued her case is also telling. Quok Shee went through nearly a dozen interrogations and court appeals because the immigration officers were convinced that she had to be coming to America for immoral purposes. This is not to say that all of those from China who came to America in the 1800s were legitimate, but this is yet

¹³¹ Ibid., 8.

¹³² Ibid.

another example of how America's stated values did not apply to immigrants. More importantly, one can only imagine the psychological effects this must have had on Chinese women coming to America, and how incredibly difficult it would be to take part in and assimilate with a society that assumed from your very arrival that you were there for "immoral purposes."

The move to America forced Chinese men and women into roles that challenged their masculinity and femininity, yet while many Chinese may have struggled to negotiate their identity and sense of self during the move to America, they did not have to make this transition completely alone. The American government provided little assistance—and more often than not acted antagonistically toward Chinese immigrants—so immigrants turned internally to themselves and formed self-governing organizations based on ethnic divides to help new migrants adjust to life in America. These ethnic ruling bodies were collectively known as the China Six Companies.

The China Six Companies

The China Six companies developed out of clan based support networks. Chinese immigrants of this time had a strong identity with their clan or family, but a loose identification with China as a whole. Thus, the very first form of support coming in the 1800s was based around family or clan groups that provided initial housing, interpreters and assistance finding work.¹³³ These organizations have basis in Chinese customs called *hui-guan*, and by 1854 these organizations had more or less formed into the China Six

¹³³ Jack Chen, 23.

Companies—or as the Chinese actually referred to them, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association—by 1854.¹³⁴

In addition to providing basic necessities to help new immigrants get started, the China Six Companies also served almost as the public face of Chinatown to the rest of America, and often worked to try to prevent new comers from becoming too assimilated and detached from their culture. One way in which the China Six Companies urged their fellow Chinese to not assimilate too much was how they actively discouraged anyone from converting to Christianity. The China Six Companies very staunchly advocated that the Chinese retain their traditional religions and even went as far as ostracizing Chinese Christians to prevent the religion from spreading in Chinatown.¹³⁵

In serving as the face of Chinatown, the China six companies often wrote letters to important political figures arguing on behalf of Chinese Americans as a whole and working to dispel any myths about Chinese immigrants. In 1876, for example, the China Six Companies addressed a memorial to President Grant in which they argued their rights afforded to them by various treaties between China and the U.S. had been violated and that many of the charges levied against the Chinese were harmful mistruths. In this document, the China Six companies fought against the accusation that Chinese were of no benefit to the U.S. and that all Chinese American women were unvirtuous.¹³⁶ Further, the China six companies actively sought to curtail problems and control Chinatown's image when societal issues did occur. A key example of this is how the China Six Companies sought to end prostitution in China town. In 1868, the China Six Companies

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Tsai, 45.

¹³⁶ Gibson, Otis, *The Chinese in America*, in *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present* edited by Judy Yung, H. Chang and Mark Lai, 18-25. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006),21.

wrote a memorial to the California State legislature detailing a plan to stop prostitutes from coming into the U.S. According to the memorial, prostitution must end because, “moral standards were high and the laws were strict and clear” and prostitution sullied “the moral integrity of this great nation.”¹³⁷ To solve this problem, the China Six Companies requested “the general managers of the big ships check for the stamp of the Chinese Six Companies to verify that the holder is really a maid or concubine before she is allowed to disembark... Only then can the continuous influx of prostitutes be checked.”¹³⁸ By proposing a solution to one of the shadier and more negative sides of Chinatown the China Six Companies were actively seeking to control China Town’s image and present a picture of China town that was more in line with “moral standards.”¹³⁹ Finally, The actions of the China Six Companies are a perfect illustration of how Chinese America generally asserted a reactive ethnicity and rebelled against many of the labels greater society tried to impose upon the Chinese. The China Six companies played a significant role in providing a welcoming and familiar atmosphere to new immigrants, but perhaps their role in negotiating Chinese America’s image and with greater American society the role they paid in balancing American ideals with traditional Chinese values was even more crucial to Chinese America’s early development.

The Exclusion Act and Life After

The most impactful change to Chinese America came in 1882 with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act. The act had been a long time coming. Men like Dennis Kearney held rallies advocating against the Chinese, and state and national legislators

¹³⁷ Ibid., 23.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 24.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

passed laws that hindered the Chinese's ability to live their lives in America. One of the more extreme examples of this concept is the 1864 Gold Hill, California law, which forbade any Chinese from living within 400 feet of any white person.¹⁴⁰ No matter the exact restriction imposed on Chinese Americans, all of these laws sent a clear message that the Chinese were inferior to white Americans.

However, the Chinese community did not let the exclusion act pass without a fight. Many voices of Chinatown argued against the common reasons cited for why the Chinese must have been excluded: that the Chinese were a threat to Christian society, were inassimilable, were taking American jobs, were unclean and criminal, and finally that the Chinese were uninterested in becoming American citizens.¹⁴¹ For each of these accusations, prominent voices in Chinatown responded with a reason why it was a falsehood. The most interesting arguments against Chinese exclusion, however, came, when the Chinese argued that America would be violating its own ideals to exclude the Chinese. Yan Phou Lee was a Chinese immigrant who had come to America and converted to Christianity who argued against complete Chinese exclusion. Like others before him, Yan Phou Lee had to argue against the typical xenophobic claims made against the Chinese, but he argued for his people using the logic and rhetoric America held up as its ideals.

In the first paragraph of his essay advocating for the Chinese, Yan Phou Lee opened with, "No nation can afford to let go of its high ideals. The founders of the American Republic asserted the principle that all men are created equal, and made this

¹⁴⁰ Soennichsen, 34.

¹⁴¹ Yan, Phou Lee. "The Chinese Must Stay," *The North American Review* 148 no. 389 (1889): 478-482.

land a refuge for the whole world.”¹⁴² Yan Phou Lee appealed to America’s history and called its commitment to its ideals into question. On the surface level, this is a wonderful rhetorical technique: Yan Phou Lee points out America’s hypocrisy and the contradictions in what they have claimed and their actions. On closer examination, by demonstrating his knowledge of American history and his support of American values, Yan Phou Lee demonstrates his ability to adopt U.S. values and absorb American history. One of the most popular denigrations lobbied against the Chinese was that they were unassimilable. Yan Phou Lee’s knowledge of American values and history contradicts this claim.

Despite all the arguments and supporters for the Chinese, the exclusion act passed in 1882. This new act banned all except a select few exempt classes. Those who were exempt included merchants and their families, students and teachers, travelers, and officials from the Chinese government or diplomats.¹⁴³ However, being a member of the exempt class did not mean easy passage to America. Like Quok Shee, those coming to America were often detained and interrogated on Angel Island. Regardless of whether those detained were coming to America legitimately or not. While on Angel Island, many immigrants voiced their frustration by carving or writing poems on their barrack walls. These many poems often expressed similar themes: frustration with China’s inability to protect its citizens abroad, the humiliation felt by the invasive questions and tests done by the investigators on Angel Island, and general despair and homesickness for China. Throughout these threads though, one common note emerges. Despite the humiliation

¹⁴² Yan, 476.

¹⁴³ “Chinese Exclusion Act Transcript,” National Archives, May 6, 1882, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=47&page=transcript>

and frustration, Chinese immigrants never felt ashamed of their birthplace. Poem number 22 is a good example of how the Chinese handled life in America under exclusion:

America has power, but not justice.
In prison, we were victimized as if we were guilty.
Given no opportunity to explain, it was really brutal
I bow my head in reflection but there is nothing I can do.¹⁴⁴

The Chinese immigrants were angry and discouraged by their treatment in America, but they never turned this frustration inward towards themselves. The author of poem 22 clearly expresses that he believed America was in the wrong. He argues the Chinese were treated “as if they were guilty”, and by using the conditional the author affirms the Chinese’s innocence in coming to America.¹⁴⁵ America, powerful but unjust was the problem, not the Chinese.

Other poems reflect the Chinese’s pride in their identity. Lines from poems 8 and 9 respectively tell how two authors wished they had stayed in China, and were not lured by the United States’ promises: “Instead of remaining a citizen of China, I willingly became an ox” and “I used to admire the land of the Flowery Flag as a country of abundance... Now on an extended sojourn in jail, I am subject to ordeals of prison life. I wish to go back to my motherland.”¹⁴⁶ The Chinese detained on Angel Island took a reactive ethnicity. They rejected the notion that they were criminals deserving of punishment and found comfort in their identities as Chinese citizens. Perhaps this is the story of early Chinese-America as a whole. When anyone tried to denigrate the early Chinese, Chinatowns responded by doubling down on their traditions and rejecting any

¹⁴⁴ Lai, Mark Him, Genny Lim and Judy Yung, *Island: Poetry of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island*. (San Francisco: History of Chinese Detained on Island: A project of the Chinese Culture Foundation of San Francisco, 1980), 58.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 40.

negative notions about their culture. Chinese America survived against all odds because this was not a community of victims who internalized insults about them from their naysayers.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Building of Japanese America

Introduction

Most obvious from a comparative examination of these three cultures, is the uniqueness of the Japan case. To begin, Japanese immigrants left Japan much later than other immigrants left their countries of origin and usually were not motivated by extreme economic concerns. Crucially, Japan itself—as a culturally unified industrial power—was incredibly structurally different than either China or Italy. Like other groups, Japanese settlement began as a male dominated bachelor society, but Japan had a lack of intercultural barriers. So in order to form community Japanese immigrants had less barriers, like language, than other groups. Initially, Japanese America began as a bachelor society that never planned on making America its permanent home, but this mindset changed as more Japanese Americans began to form families and America became a viable home. As Japanese Americans formed more permanent homes in Japan, the generational terms *issei*, *nisei* and *kibei* came into popular use and had important significance to Japanese immigrants. Further, as Japanese society in America progressed, Japanese moved out of the cities and had families in rural environments. A rural lifestyle gave the Japanese a completely different environment to raise children in and generally provided a healthier environment than city life did. In this way, the rural life style and the family unit became crucial measures by which Japanese immigrants defined themselves.

However, this sense of identification was taken away from them with Alien Land Law Act.

A Different Beginning

Japanese America did not begin like Chinese or Italian America did. Firstly, Japanese began to immigrate to America much later than Italians or Chinese did. This is largely because of Japan's *sakoku*, or closed country, policy. In 1635, the Tokugawa *shogunate* issued an edict declaring outlining Japan's new foreign policy: "Japanese are prohibited from going abroad. If a Japanese goes abroad in secret, he will be put to death... If any Japanese returns home after residing abroad, he must be put to death."¹⁴⁷ Obviously, this edict meant a negligible amount—if any—Japanese citizens left Japan to settle in the United States. *Sakoku* was Japan's foreign policy until Matthew Perry landed in Japan in 1853 and forced Japan to change its foreign policy. A consequence of *sakoku* meant that Japanese coming to America had little to no existing support networks like the Chinese or Italians did—both of which can trace at least very small settlements to America prior to 1850 and even as far back as the American revolution. The majority of Japanese immigration to America happened from 1885 to 1924.¹⁴⁸ In fact, in 1880, less than 150 Japanese lived in America, after ten years the number jumped to around 2,000, and by 1899 around 35,000 Japanese lived in America.¹⁴⁹ This late arrival meant Japanese immigrants to America in the late 1800s and early 1900s were essentially

¹⁴⁷ Vaporis, Constantine Nomikos, *Voices of Early Modern Japan: Contemporary Accounts of Daily Life During the Shoguns*, (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 1957), 96.

¹⁴⁸ O'Brien, David J. and Stephen S. Fugita, *(The Japanese American Experience*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 14.

¹⁴⁹ Ito, Kazuo. Issei: A History of Japanese Immigrants in North America. Trans. Shinchiro Nakamura and Jean S. Gerard, (Seattle: Japan Publications, 1973), 4.

building their communities from scratch. Shizuko Takahasi left Japan in the early years of the twentieth century to live with her new husband in America, and noted this exact feeling of isolation in her biography:

She realized now that her husband had lived a long time in the United States unbefriended. Most of the Japanese who came had no helpful connections, and above all didn't even know the language. They must all share this feeling of uneasiness.¹⁵⁰

Even late into the second decade of the twentieth century, at which point Chinese and Italian immigrants had established concrete communities, Japanese immigrants were still essentially heading out by themselves.

Secondly, the motives of individual Japanese migrants differed greatly from Chinese and Italian immigrants; individuals from Japan for the most part were not fleeing poverty or famine. Japan in the 1890s and early 1900s was a thriving nation with a high literacy rate for the time and area, and the people were prospering. As a testament to Japan's high literacy rate even amongst the poor, a unique motivation for Japanese immigrants to come to America was the *Nippon Rikkokai*, a guidebook that described life in America and inspired many Japanese to migrate to America¹⁵¹. Ms. Kunitaro Tanabe was one of the many immigrants persuaded to journey to the United States: "While I was working as a silkworm technician, I earnestly read 'Going to America' [A publication of the *Nippon Rikkokai*]. According to what people said, in America money was hanging from the trees and one could rake up treasure like fallen leaves."¹⁵² A silkworm technician was not part of the elite in society, but even Kunitaro was literate and had access to books, showing how widespread literacy was in Japan. For the Japanese

¹⁵⁰ Hull, Eleanor. *Suddenly the Sun: A biography of Shizuko Takahasi*, (New York: Friendship Press, 1957), 57.

¹⁵¹ Ito, 5.

¹⁵² Ibid., 18.

immigrant, the move to America was made as a calculated decision for economic gain, adventure, or other reasons rather than out of pure necessity. Immigration still enacted a heavy cost, as ship tickets could be very expensive and often put Japanese purchasers in debt. However, those who made the journey to Japan from America were not primarily from the lowest economic echelon, but rather from the well-educated middle class.¹⁵³

Shika Takaya, a young Japanese woman who ventured to America in 1917 described why she believed all Japanese women chose to come to America in her journal:

I believe we all go to America for one of the following reasons:

1. Hopes of becoming rich.
2. Curiosity of this civilized country called America.
3. Fear of mother-in-law in Japan.
4. Sexual anxiety in those who passed marriage age.
5. Dreams of an idyllic romantic life in the new land.
6. Lack of ability to support self.
7. Filial obedience: sacrificing self to obey parents' wishes.¹⁵⁴

Of the seven motives listed, only two are financial. The rest involve escaping Japanese traditions that women may have found stifling along with personal enrichment and desire to explore. For men, many left Japan because they were younger sons and would not inherit most of the family fortune. Riichi Satow, a younger child in his family, came to America in 1912 for this exact reason:

I also had an increasing desire to come to the States, for I decided it wouldn't do any good to stay in the village... Japanese custom was such that the first son would succeed as the family head; consequently, the alternatives left for the second son and down were to marry into someone's family or to go someplace else to seek their own fortune—most likely to Tokyo or Osaka.¹⁵⁵

Riichi Satow demonstrates that there was economic opportunity in Japan; immigrants did not feel their only hope for themselves and their families was to immigrate. Compare this

¹⁵³ Sarasohn, Eileen Sunada. *The Issei: Portrait of a Pioneer*, (Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1983), 27.

¹⁵⁴ Nakano, Mei T. *Japanese American Women: Three Generations 1890-1990*, (San Francisco: National Japanese American Historical Society, 1990), 26.

¹⁵⁵ Sarasohn, 25.

attitude to the poems of Chinese immigrants on Angel Island: “People who enter this country come only because the family is poor selling their fields and lands” and “Living at home, there were no prospects for advancement. The situation forced one to go to another country”¹⁵⁶ While there is admittedly a problem in comparing the attitude of a free person to detained men, the difference in tone is still stark and worth noticing. The Chinese men do not speak of dreams or curiosity as motivating factors in coming to America, only financial necessity and desperation.

Japan was much more unified culturally than either Italy or China. Japan, with the exception of Hokkaido and Okinawa, had been united for nearly three hundred years when Japanese immigrants began to journey to America. This means Japanese immigrants had a much stronger conception of their Japanese identity than Italian immigrants or Chinese immigrants did. Additionally, Japanese dialects are not as varied as Chinese or Italian dialects. Misao Tojo, a Japanese linguist who researched Japanese dialects in the 1950s, divided Japanese into 16 dialects.¹⁵⁷ While by no means an easy language barrier to overcome, compared to the 34 dialectal groups spoken in Italy and the nearly 200 dialects spoken in China, 16 dialects is not as fractured. This relative lack of a language barrier is crucial to the development of Japanese American communities and adjustment of individuals because the earliest Japanese settlements were largely male dominated bachelor societies. These men, lacking wives or children to act as individual support, had to rely on each other.

¹⁵⁶ Lai, Mark Him, Genny Lim and Judy Yung. *Island: Poetry of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island*, (San Francisco: History of Chinese Detained on Island: A project of the Chinese Culture Foundation of San Francisco, 1980), 150.

¹⁵⁷ Onishi Takuichiro. “Analyzing Dialectical Distributions of Japanese,” *Dialectologia* Special Issue 1, (2010): 124.

Because Japan was much more unified, Japanese Americans did not have to struggle to unify initially the way other immigrants did. Japanese from one prefecture to another did not hold resentments against each other the way some Chinese ethnic groups did or form segregated neighborhoods the way Italian Americans did. Japan was ultimately the unifying factor, not being from Saitama or Hiroshima. Having a different point of relation comparison to each other changed how Japanese immigrants formally organized themselves. Rather than choosing to organize along regional lines, Japanese Americans formed *Nihonjin Kai*. Comparable to the China Six Companies, but associated with Japan as a whole rather than individual regions or towns, *Nihonjin Kai* were organizations that served to promote Japanese culture in America, and had a political role as well. One migrant, Nisuke Mitsumori described the *Nihonjin Kai* as follows:

Their goals were mainly political. They may have supported a Japanese school. They celebrated the Emperor's birthday, showed Japanese movies, and collected some funds. When anti-Japanese feelings developed, the *Nihonjin Kai* took an initiative in creating a movement against this.¹⁵⁸

Because Japan was more culturally and politically unified than other countries during the time, those who left Japan had a strong enough sense of Japanese identity that they thought of themselves as Japanese over their regional identities and were able to form *Nihonjin Kai*. The *Nihonjin Kai* united Japanese immigrants together regardless of where they came from originally in Japan.

One final difference worth noting had less to do with everyday immigrant life, but affected Japanese immigrants significantly in a tangential way. Japan was a rising military power in the 1900s and late 1800s, on par with some Western nations. This

¹⁵⁸ Sarasohn, 64.

status was solidified in 1905 when Japan defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese war. While Japan's military might did not protect its citizens from day to day discrimination, Japan's voice was taken much more seriously at the bargaining table than other non-Western countries. This meant Japanese citizens abroad were not as blatantly discriminated against in the law as other countries were. There was no Japanese Exclusion act like there was the Chinese Exclusion act, rather there was the so-called Gentleman's bargain, a topic I will investigate in greater depth later on when I discuss Japanese women.

While the Japanese case had many unique elements, some aspects of the immigrant experience were more universal. Although Japanese immigrants, on average, came from higher socioeconomic classes and were better educated, this difference hardly transferred over to life in America. Like other new coming ethnic groups, Japanese in America often lived in racial communities separated off from traditional white America. To be clear, this mostly occurred in the early phases of Japanese immigration and began to come to end around 1910 when Japanese communities made the switch from bachelor oriented societies to family oriented societies. Even if the occurrence of Japanese slums in urban areas was not the permanent mode of Japanese immigrants, the initial sight of the neighborhoods could be very shocking. Shizuku Takahasi was one of the women who was very disappointed with her environment when she first came to California:

The streets seemed wide and dirty. And she noticed that instead of mere indifference to strangers that she had expected, there was a kind of sharp unfriendliness in some of the glances that fell on them... As they drove through streets of jerry-built and dingy buildings, she grew silent. Even the United States had its slums. And when the cab stopped and her husband opened the door... Shizu was incredulous... "Are all the shops like this in Oakland?" Shizu asked...

“Oh, no. There are many streets of fine shops and many blocks of lovely homes. But this is where the Japanese live and trade. This is our part of America.”¹⁵⁹

The ghettos of Japanese America were really no different than Italian or Chinese ghettos, all, as Shizuku put it, slums. They were a shock to her after hearing tales of prosperous America; her part of America was a horrible disappointment compared to Japan. Early Japanese Americans as a primary male dominated society originally saw America as a temporary step with return to Japan as the ultimate end goal. The Japanese word for this mindset is *dekasagi*.¹⁶⁰ Under *dekasagi*, America was always a stepping-stone to life in Japan; the dream was to come to America make it rich, and return home to retire. *Dekasagi* began to change and slowly die out as Japanese America shifted from primarily a bachelor society to a family orientated society and with the birth of the *nisei* generation—Japanese for second generation.

Issei, nisei, and kibe

Japanese Americans developed specific vocabulary to describe the generational differences amongst those who first came to America from Japan and Japanese Americans who were born in America. The *issei* were the first generation, those born in Japan, and the *nisei*, were the second generation born in the United States. The *kibe* were those who were born in America, but educated in Japan. Depending on which category an individual fell into, changed how they viewed themselves and their relationship with Japan and America. Unlike other groups, Japanese Americans ascribed unique qualities

¹⁵⁹ Hull, 55-56.

¹⁶⁰ Ichioka, Yuji. *Before Internment*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 11.

to the *issei*, *nisei* (and later generations such as the *sansei*), and *kibei*. These terms became important markers of self-identification for Japanese immigrants. The *issei*, as the first arrivers and builders of Japanese America had social dominance. Christie Kiefer, a *nisei* herself, concisely explains the difference, both concrete differences and perceived differences, between these groups:

Before the war, the term *issei* designated those who were in the ethnic power establishment... The *nisei* spoke English fluently and regarded the United States as their home. Although they were basically Japanese in many of their underlying attitudes, they had many American tastes skills, and habits that their parents lacked. They were culturally different... The *kibei* were neither functionally *issei* (being younger and having American citizenship) nor culturally *nisei*. They were subjected to a kind of double jeopardy. Being both less skillful in American culture than the Nisei and subordinate to the *issei*, they often held low status.¹⁶¹

As Kiefer argues, the generational terms used by Japanese Americans described the social structures of Japanese American society. *Issei*, by virtue of their age, were the architects and leaders of this society, and *nisei* served as mediators between their Japanese traditions and new American ideas. The *kibei*, however, had a difficult time carving in a niche for how they would relate to their Japanese peers and greater American society. One *kibei*, Kathleen Tamagawa who was born in New Jersey in 1893 and educated in Yokahama beginning in 1910 described how she viewed her social position and status between America and Japan:

I lived on in Japan and yet never as a Japanese would live, and I was Japanese and I was not Japanese. For no one who had even the most superficial knowledge of Japan considered that I was Japanese, and the Japanese themselves considered me a foreigner, and yet was I a real American? Would I ever be completely anything?¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Kiefer, Christie W. *Changing Cultures Changing Live: An Ethnographic Study of Three Generations of Japanese Americans*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1974), 97.

¹⁶² Geok-lin Lim, Shirley and Floyd Cheung. *Holy Prayers in a Horse's Ear: A Japanese American Memoir*. (New Brunswick: Rutger's University Press, 2008), 52.

Kathleen's experiences perfectly fit into Kiefer's description of the *kibei* as experiencing a double jeopardy. She was not completely Japanese by virtue of her American birth, but her ethnicity and time in Japan prevented her from ever fully feeling American. Later on in her memoir, Kathleen describes her feelings about her identity in much stronger language: "I'm not even sure that I'm not the world's first prize freak... I don't know whether it's better to eat with chop sticks or knives and forks...or whether now I should be a cherry blossom instead of a primrose?"¹⁶³ Words like "world's first prize freak" go far to explain how alienated the *kibei* felt being pulled between two cultures. As social identity theory argues, Kathleen did not have a strong sense of who she was in relation to the two cultures she took part in, so she developed a sense of low esteem. Additionally, as Penha-Lopes argues cultural symbols are crucial in integrating an individual into society and giving them a feeling of belonging. Kathleen's indecisiveness over whether she is a cherry blossom or primrose and uncertainty between western and eastern utensils shows she did not have a strong system of cultural symbols to rely on to affirm identity. *Kibei* like Kathleen felt like their dual cultures prevented them from fully taking part or belonging to either Japan or the United States. They lacked the authority granted by age that the *issei* had and lacked a *nisei*'s knowledge of and adeptness in American culture. *Kibei* were truly trapped between two identities unable to feel apart of either one completely.

While the *nisei* were less unsure of their social standing and cultural position in society. They experienced some social strife between feelings of loyalty for their parents and their culture, and the culture of their new home. A lot of this uncertainty can be traced to the fact the *issei* were uncertain racial entrepreneurs for their children—

¹⁶³ Ibid., 159.

uncertain of what aspects of American life they should instill and what traditions from Japan they should pass on to their children. This uncertainty can be seen in how the pedagogical ideology in Japanese American language schools changed. The very first language school was established in San Francisco in 1902 with the goal of educating “the *nisei* to enable them to enroll in the public schools of Japan.”¹⁶⁴ No less than six years later this ideology completely flip-flopped. The new goal of Japanese language schools was “that the education of the *nisei* must be principally the assimilation of American customs and manners, supplemented by education in other essential ideas so they will not forget the motherland.”¹⁶⁵ This policy remained the policy of Japanese language schools until they ceased to exist.

No doubt part of this uncertainty came from the usual friction that comes from moving from one place to another and establishing a new community, but Daisuke Kitagawa, an *issei* who came to America at the height of Japanese immigration, ascribed different motives to his people.

[The Japanese immigrant] accepted racial discrimination as a price he had to pay in order to be fully Westernized. To the Japanese of that period and to those who came later, there was nothing worthy of pride in Japanese culture whereas there was nothing to be depreciated in Western civilization... No amount of discrimination discouraged them from trying to win acceptance [from American society]. The individual Japanese concluded that it was not unnatural, not even unjust, for Americas to reject him as long as he was not like them.¹⁶⁶

Clearly Kitagawa’s words cannot be taken as a hundred percent accurate of the entire Japanese American consciousness. His claim that Japanese immigrants found no value in their own culture is disproved by the existence of and ideology of the language schools.

Clearly the *issei* valued their home culture enough that they did not want their children to

¹⁶⁴ Ichioka, 11.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹⁶⁶ Kitagawa, Daisuke. *Issei and Nisei: The Internment Years*. (New York: Seabury Press, 1967), 10 and 12.

completely forget Japanese traditions. However, the sentiment Kitagawa presents is worth closer inspection. Even if Japanese immigrants did not completely disregard their own culture, Kitagawa's assertion that no discrimination could discourage Japanese America from seeking acceptance from larger society clearly shows an adaption of an assimilation-orientated strategy. The new credo of the language schools supports Kitagawa's assertion that the Japanese pursued this assimilation strategy. Amongst the Japanese-American community, this sentiment was popular enough to be given a name—*beika* or Americanization. According to Junhei Kono, who came to the United States as a teenager in 1911, the logic behind *beika* was as such:

We gave up on the idea of naturalization, because we were told that we could not obtain citizenship. If that was the case, we thought, even if they don't give us our citizenship, the Japanese have to become Americanized... we emphasized appreciation of American life... In short, we tried as much as possible to live as Americans live... We tried to adopt some aspects of American life to our own and to the education of our children. Japanese women in the past used to work in the fields with small children on their backs. Though nobody these days would say anything against it, it was thought that Americans might be averse to such a practice.¹⁶⁷

Much of what Junhei observes rings true with Kitagawa's observations. Despite blatant discrimination, the denial of citizenship, Japanese Americans still attempted to avoid further discrimination by adopting American habits. Most telling is how Japanese women changed their child rearing techniques to better fit in with American culture. Child rearing is deeply engrained cultural practice. For women to switch over to American practices in less than a generation shows how deeply women wanted to adopt American cultural practices.

An alternate theory argues that the *issei* were simply looking to equip their children for life in America. David O'Brien argues that *issei* conformed to society's

¹⁶⁷ Sarasohn, 68-69.

expectation that they assimilate themselves and their children because doing so gave their children the best chance of success in the United States.¹⁶⁸ Takae Washizu reflects this sentiment when she looks back on her life, a difficult farm life after leaving Japan for California in 1921 after marrying a man twice her age, and described her experiences as such:

“I wanted to run away from my husband, for he was too old and too small-minded for me to communicate with, but I couldn’t leave my children. I couldn’t trust my husband to raise the children besides, I didn’t have anyplace to go. I was just patient and dreamed about my children’s bright future...When my children were happy, I was happy too.”¹⁶⁹

Takae’s words reflect a common sentiment amongst *issei* parents, especially mothers: that they could find value in their children’s accomplishments no matter the misery they endured. *Issei* parents found meaning in their own work and identities by ensuring that their children were happy. The individual family became a crucial support for Japanese immigrants.

The value Japanese immigrant placed on family comes from the Japanese ideal of *ie*, or the extended family units.¹⁷⁰ In Japan, the *ie* were quite extensive, included multiple families or even an entire village. Obviously in the United States, such large scale organizations would have been very difficult as whole families could hardly all cross the Pacific, so the importance of the *ie* continued but on a smaller scale in individual families. Japanese family building was not disrupted in the way other immigrants’ were because of the so-called Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907. Much in the way anti-Chinese sentiment gained popularity in America and led to the exclusion act, so began calls to prevent Japanese from continuing to settle in the United States. The key difference here

¹⁶⁸ O’Brien and Fugita, 33.

¹⁶⁹ Sarasohn, 113.

¹⁷⁰ Nakano, 33.

though was that Japan and the United States were much closer to equal powers, so Japan was able to protect its citizen's interests abroad much more effectively. In the agreement reached between the two countries, Japan agreed to cease to issue passports to unskilled laborers, in order to curb Japanese competition for U.S. jobs, but this left an opening for many Japanese citizens who did not meet this limitation, such as parents or children of established residents, to continue to immigrate to the United States.¹⁷¹ The most important group that came over under this legislation were new brides from Japan who married Japanese laborers who had already been in America. These women were collectively referred to as picture brides.

Picture Brides and Japanese Women

When Japanese America still operated under the *dekasagi* mindset, there was an unequal gender ratio. While the gender ratio was not quite as extreme as it was in early Chinese America, Japanese men outnumbered the women twenty-three to one in 1900.¹⁷² As the *dekasagi* dream began to die out, Japanese men eventually came to realize that the move to America was more permanent than originally expected. Unlike they had initially envisioned, these men could not be simple five-year sojourners and return to Japan rich beyond their wildest dreams, so these men began to seek families and look for wives. Just twenty years after 1900, the gender ratio had balanced out to a nearly equal 1.89 men to every one woman.¹⁷³ In line with Japanese tradition, the men in America sought marriages by arrangement through mainly two means. Firstly, a few men returned to Japan briefly to meet their wives and their families during the arrangement process.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁷² O'Brien and Fugita, 32.

¹⁷³ Ibid.,

Shizuku met her husband Chiyokichi Takahashi in this manner, but this was not common because of financial restrictions. The other way, was by a process known as picture brides or *shashin kekkon*—picture marriages in Japanese.¹⁷⁴ Unmarried men would write to women in Japan and exchange letters and pictures until a marriage was arranged or the correspondence ceased. These correspondences usually began by way of mutual acquaintances or other loose ties. If a match was successful, the man and wife could be married in Japan without the groom ever having to leave America. Oftentimes, the betrothed would never meet in person until the bride stepped off the boat onto American shores. Chioichi Nitta, who left Japan at sixteen, was one of the men who choose this path to start a family:

Though I was from Yamaguchi, the wife of a Japanese pastor here suggested that I marry a girl she knew from Aomori, Japan... Unless the marriage was recorded in Japan, a wife could not come to this country. It took quite awhile to get my family's approval... My mother had suggested other persons, but by the time I had decided to live permanently in this country and had corresponded with this person in Aomori. My mother approved of the marriage with the understanding that the bride go to Yamaguchi to meet my mother. My mother met my bride and liked her... My wife prepared for her trip to America and came here on the *Shunyo Maru* from Yokohama in March 1917.¹⁷⁵

From Chioichi's account, one can see the connections through which picture met their husbands could be very tenuous and cross prefecture lines. Chioichi had never met his wife or even been to her home in Japan; he only knew her as the acquaintance of an acquaintance. One did not need to have a connection to their wife before beginning the process of picture marriage. In America, a Japanese men was likely to make acquaintance with people from outside of his home village, and thus was just as likely to marry a woman from outside said village. Chioichi's account in many other ways, is atypical of

¹⁷⁴ Nakano, 25.

¹⁷⁵ Sarasohn, 109.

the picture bride experience. Many picture brides never met their husband's families or had any idea who their spouse would be outside of their spouse's own claims. While Chioichi and his bride's marriage had a happy ending, not all such picture brides could say the same. Finally, one last crucial detail is that most picture brides made the journey alone without family or husbands to guide them. This meant that many brides encountered small doses of American culture on their own without any of their support networks to help them negotiate the cultural differences. No one was there to share the confusion or try to work through the mores of an unfamiliar culture with the picture brides. The picture brides, as seen in Figure 3 arrived in their finest kimonos and stood out starkly from western women. They were not fully prepared for the changes they would experience in coming to the United States.



Figure Three: Picture brides arriving on Angel Island¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Nakano, 21.

Take Eto was one of the picture brides who crossed the Atlantic alone and experienced a variety of culture shocks. Aboard the *Minnesota*, Take was “struck by the cultural differences she faced. For example, in the dining room she was bewildered by the array of silverware before her and waited, shy and uncomfortable, until a kind waiter inconspicuously pointed out the correct one to use.”¹⁷⁷ While a small cultural peccadillo, Take’s experience was indicative of how little picture brides—kimono clad and unable to speak English—were prepared for life in America, and how much of a shock the journey was. The cultural differences could be overwhelming. Small trivial matters like knowing which utensil to use, can go a long way in establishing how welcome or at home one feels in a new environment. Another Japanese woman, Mrs. Shibata described how she felt while aboard the *Saibei Maru*, “Eating was about the only thing I did on the ship...I didn’t know anybody; so I had no friends or acquaintances to talk to and stayed on deck most of the time. With tears in my eyes, I watched the other ships.”¹⁷⁸ The journey to America could be a very confusing, lonely, and emotionally taxing experience. Given that the picture brides were not prepared for great differences of American life, and had no support networks other than their new husbands who they may or may not have met before, it is not a surprise that many picture bride arrangements ended poorly.

Some picture brides, after the taxing voyage, changed their minds and refused to step foot in America. Kamechiyo Takahashi met and befriended one of these women:

I met a picture bride from Hiroshima, who was looking at a photo of her husband and worried about her future. When we got to San Francisco, she didn’t want to land. She cried and insisted on going back to Japan... She went back to Japan on the same boat.

¹⁷⁷ Nakano, 77.

¹⁷⁸ Sarasohn, 50.

Picture brides were not beholden to joining their husbands in America. Though they were legally man and wife, the bride still had agency and could choose to return home should she change her mind. While many brides did go through with the agreement, they were disappointed by what they encountered. Men could very easily doctor their photos or lie about their livelihoods, and once their brides had set foot in America, they were more or less locked into their fates as they were unable to speak English well enough to negotiate the return trip to Japan on their own.

Once they had arrived in America, the picture brides had a very different life in store for them than what they would have had in Japan. Unlike Chinese women who had roughly the same lives and expectations they would have had in China, Japanese women often had an active social life and many outlets outside of the home to socialize and be involved with the community. Women were involved in churches, the *Nihonjin kai*, and as the Nisei aged became increasingly active in their children's education, such as joining PTA committees. Women also worked the fields alongside their husbands, and usually helped contributed to the household income in a more tangible way than they would have in Japan. Hanayo Inouye was one such woman who found her new economic role to be freeing: "However, I think I began to like it here for its vastness of land and for the fact that a day's work for a living meant a day's wages. Back in Japan I never had to work for a living myself, and therefore, working for money was kind of foreign to me."¹⁷⁹ Hanayo was able to find a new purpose in work even though she hadn't experienced this at home in Japan. Work, and the meaning found in it became a very important motivator and component to Japanese men and women in the United States. The social outlets available to *issei* women meant that while they still had a rocky transition from kimono to

¹⁷⁹ Sarasohn, 117.

western clothing, once they settled in they became relatively well-adjusted and felt less socially isolated than many other women of immigrant groups.

Still, despite having more external supports, the life as an *issei* wife was still very difficult. A common phrase used as inspiration to push through the difficult times and hard work was “*Shikata ga nai*” or “It can’t be helped”¹⁸⁰ The saying was a cultural encouragement reminding these women that their destiny had been ordained, and that they should continue to work diligently no matter the circumstances. A young picture bride, Tsuruyo Takami who left Japan in 1915, phrased this sentiment in slightly different manner: “I looked at Mt. Fuji... and I resolved. A woman going to America, depending on a husband she has never seen, should have the noble spirit of this majestic mountain. Such High-mindedness and equally firm strength, indifferent to any weather, should be the spirit of Japanese women.”¹⁸¹ This attitude and mentality helped Japanese women persevere through excruciating labor, discriminatory laws, and the general difficulty of adjusting to live in a new country. One could not control their environment, but one could remain strong whatever outside circumstances may be. And the work required of *issei* women could be very taxing. One woman, Hosoe Kodama describes the type of work she did:

I got up at 5:00 in the morning and prepared breakfast and got the children ready for the day. Since my husband was a “Meiji Man,” he didn’t split firewood and didn’t help me... From 8:00 till 2:00 I tended watered and tended the greenhouse and took care of household matters... During the few moments of rest I washed the children’s dirty clothes. Then I returned to the greenhouse again, and came home at 6:00. After that I did miscellaneous chores until about midnight.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Nakano, 22.

¹⁸¹ Ito, 247.

¹⁸² Ibid., 282.

Even in her moments of rest, Hosoe spent her time completing chores. While all men may not have been as unhelpful as Hosoe's husband, there were no doubt many tasks and chores that fell squarely on women's shoulders alone. Thus women carried a unique responsibility where they were expected to do work alongside their husbands and take care of chores at home. Work, the mentality of *shikata ga nai*, and family became pillars of the Japanese woman and man through which they came to define themselves. Life would go on through family and hard work.

A Rural Lifestyle

In contrast to other immigrant groups, Japanese Americans settled largely outside of major cities, and largely worked in agriculture. According to the 1900 census the majority of Japanese settlers, 62.2% worked in agriculture as opposed to working as domestic servants in the city, railroad workers, or miners.¹⁸³ This choice in occupation may have been because Japanese-American society was more family orientated, so it makes sense that families would choose to move away from the slums in the cities to provide a better life for their children. Interestingly, rural life often provided a less hostile and prejudiced environment than cities did in many cases. Take Eto described how she and her husband were warmly welcomed: "friends and neighbors gave them a wedding reception at the Parrish Ranch. Wash tubs were used as drums to hail the new couple and the event was published in the *Arroyo Grande Recorder*."¹⁸⁴ Many other women described small acts of kindness and friendliness. Shiki Ito lived amongst very friendly neighbors who gave her family venison during the winter, and Shika Takaya's neighbors

¹⁸³ O'Brien and Fugita, 18.

¹⁸⁴ Nakano, 78.

taught her valuable skills such as baking American meals like bread and beans.¹⁸⁵ This is not to say that relationships were perfectly equal and harmonious. Jimmie Omura, famous for his resistance of the Japanese internment, attributed this peaceful relationship to motives outside of goodwill and friendliness. He argued:

Discrimination and race intolerance were strongly rooted in the predominantly Scandinavian, British, and old-line Yankee-stock island residents. By the time of my birth [1912], much of the hostility and antagonism toward people of Japanese descent had gone underground and the two races existed in a peculiar separation style society... Tolerance was thinly veiled, surface deep, and intolerance was always ready to erupt given a reasonable excuse.¹⁸⁶

Omura did not believe the tolerant relationship between Japanese and white Americans was out of any permanent or long-term respect. Even in his skeptical view of the tenuous peace between Japanese immigrants and native born Americans, Omura concedes that there was a sort of tolerance between the two, even if its motives were superficial. In this way, both Omura and the *issei* wives describe an environment with somewhat minimal group tensions. Even if white Americans did not particularly care for their Japanese neighbors, this prejudice almost never escalated to violence, so Japanese immigrants lived a more harmonious existence.

Regardless of the motives of this peaceful relationship, rural life may have given many Japanese Americans a chance to experience life in the United States without blatant prejudice or danger that was more predominant in the city. This is not to say that the earliest Japanese Americans did not encounter any discrimination, the opposite is true in many cases, but early Japanese American settlements experienced less between group tensions than say Chinese settlements in the city experienced. This may have been

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 27.

¹⁸⁶ Omura, James. *Nisei Naysayer: The Memoir of a Militant Japanese American Journalist Jimmie Omura*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 18.

because Japanese farm workers in rural environments were not in direct economic competition with white workers the way Chinese or Italian railroad workers were. Chinese and Italian rail workers were despised because they were seen as driving wages down and as strike breakers, which likely increased the between group tensions. On the other hand, the market controls what farmers earn. So, for a long time, Japanese rural workers were not seen as a direct threat economically, so tensions were low. The low conflict level between these two groups may also go to explain why Japanese Americans initially adopted an assimilation-orientated strategy; it is much easier to try to assimilate into a culture that is not openly hostile.

While the between group tensions were low, rural life was not without its difficulties. The work could be excruciating. Isamu Kobata describes the work he had to do in 1918, “Those days we had no farm machines...everything had to be done by hand, and it was hard physical labor. In the busiest season I got up around 3 a.m. with dawn and worked until 6 or 7 p.m. in the fields.”¹⁸⁷ Isamu Kobata toiled for hours in the field for the hopes of a good crop that was not always guaranteed. A common saying amongst issei farmers was, “If you hit once in five years, you should be satisfied.”¹⁸⁸ With such a margin for success, debts often piled up very quickly. Such difficult work necessitated that women and children worked alongside their husbands and fathers in the fields. Yoshiko Ueda settled in Spokane in the 1920s and employed her three children in the fields alongside her and her husband: “Our three children also went into the fields and worked pulling weeds. Kikusaburo, at the age of 4, Hirosaburo at 7, and Shige, our 10-

¹⁸⁷ Ito, 438.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 456.

year-old daughter, helped us to weed, crawling through the fields.”¹⁸⁹ Yoshiko’s description of the farm work is another example of how vital the family unit was to Japanese Americans. Japanese Americans were able to live a rural life because they did not have the cumbersome barriers to form families that plagued other immigrant groups. In addition to serving as ways for *issei* parents to define themselves and find meaning in their new lives in the United States, the *nisei* also served as crucial economic assets, as sons and daughters of all ages helped their parents. The value of their labor as farm hands undoubtedly contributed to their parent’s economic success.

Unfortunately as James Omura predicted, the tenuous peace between the Japanese and native born Americans would not be long standing. In 1920, California passed the Alien Land Law act, which barred *issei* from owning or leasing land or acting as the guardians of minors who owned or leased land.¹⁹⁰ Under this rule, *nisei* were not allowed to own land until they were legal adults, which prevented parents from purchasing land in their children’s names. Previous iterations of this law, such as the 1913 Alien Land Law had passed before, but this law was different because it closed the loopholes that had allowed Japanese farmers to continue to farm in spite of the law. The law was passed because even if economic tensions were originally low, white farmers eventually came to view their Japanese neighbors as having an unfair advantage because they farmed lands no one else wanted. Further, white farmers objected to how the entire Japanese family would help in the fields. One attorney general heavily implied that the *issei* way of farming was un-American, and *issei* only succeeded because they were violating

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 252.

¹⁹⁰ O’Brien and Fugita, 24.

American traditions such as gender roles.¹⁹¹ Essentially, the *issei* did not assimilate enough to please American society, so they lost their rights to farm. The 1920 Alien Land Law was incredibly demoralizing to the *issei* community. Farming had allowed the *issei* to rise to a middle class lifestyle, and provided meaning and structure to their lives.

A common sentiment amongst the *issei* was frustration that even though they had played by the rules and attempted to assimilate they still had not done so well enough. After the passage of the act, Toshibaburo Fukuzawa described the consequences: “Threatened by this notorious Act, I had to shrink into a corner and could never go ahead openly.”¹⁹² To people who had come to define themselves by hard work, losing the right to that work was a brutal loss of a symbol of their identity. Toshibaburo further elaborated on what farming meant to the *issei*:

Farming was not necessarily a steady job. However, it was much steadier work than day work in the towns... We had to cling to the land in order to live in the foreign country, America... Because of the Alien Land Law there were many who changed their occupations, swallowing their tears. However, the situation at that time was quite different from today when a person with ability can have the hope of becoming a senator or judge...the only places [Japanese] could work were as railroad boys or as lifters and carriers at a sawmill.¹⁹³

The *issei* had felt secure in their occupations and felt they had a way to fit into American society that wasn't as a lower class lifestyle. When the Alien Land Law took that security away, the *issei* lost a part of themselves. The decision to stop farming was emotionally draining, as Toshibaburo describes it was a decision made through tears.

But beyond the psychological loss, the Alien Land Law also imposed harsh economic difficulties on Japanese settlements. The law imposed a hard choice for Japanese farmers to either continue to farm through illegal means or switch occupations.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 23.

¹⁹² Ito, 450.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 165.

Switching occupations as Toshibaburo explained was not a very realistic option, so most Japanese farmers continued to farm illegally. This was done by hiring a *nisei* over twenty-one or a trusted white person to buy the *issei*'s land and then claim the *issei* farmer was working for them as a manager of some sort. In reality, the *issei* continued to be in charge of and operate the farm, but the owner of the land would now receive a cut of the farm profits, which no doubt added another unneeded economic burden. In addition, to the economic cost, this type of arrangement also resulted in lots of anxiety for the *issei*. If found in violation of the law, *issei* could be charged in court. Matsukichi Ohashi was a small farmer in Seattle who operated a farm illegally; he said the following about his feelings of operating below the law:

Although we knew that the purpose of the law was primarily political, still, if it was strictly applied we would be helpless in the face of economic ruin. When would our turn come? It was truly nerve-wracking to live under this heavy pressure of waiting and wondering. Looking back now, we lived through a long series of dark gray months and days.¹⁹⁴

Matsukichi describes life under this law incredibly strongly, as “nerve-wracking” and “dark gray months and days.” The loss of the ability to farm clearly came hand in hand with the loss of a feeling of safety; it was a transition from an unstable security to little to no security at all.

The Alien Land Law was the clearest strike against the Japanese community, but establishing a community at all had been an uphill battle from the beginning. Japanese America did not have the foundations that other communities had, but they had a strong nation backing them in Japan. This is the clearest reason why the *issei* had such a unique experience. The answer to the question of how Japanese America was able to survive is

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 166.

to look at the structure Japan provided, but also the individual determination of the Japanese settlers.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

In reaching the end of this work, one begins to notice the value of a comparative study over an individual case study of any one of these groups. A comparative study speaks more to the universalities of the immigrant experience that transcends culture or nation of origin, but also illuminates the situations that culture and ethnicity did affect. As far as the similarities go, all three groups struggled with prejudice, and by virtue of being a small minority these groups often did not carry the political capital that was necessary in the nineteenth century to protect their legal rights fully. At times United States' law and supposed ideals failed these people; one need only look at the Hennessey Incident, the Chinese Exclusion Act or the Alien Land laws for proof. But the story is not all so bleak. These groups also formed structures that served to unite their newfound communities, the Chinese Six Companies, Italian Catholic churches, and *Nihonjin kai*. In accordance with Penha-Lopes factors of identity forming, all of these groups used racial entrepreneurs—like the Italian *padroni*—and created new symbols to form an American identity or repurposed old ones from their homelands, like the way Japanese families were an attempt to recreate *ie* arrangements.

Amongst the differences, the starkest one is how structural differences between these three countries of origin affected their citizens abroad. Japan as a rising industrial power, was not as easily trifled with as Italy or China, and thus carried more bargaining power which resulted in a less harsh exclusionary law: the gentleman's agreement. A

comparative approach highlighted these similarities as well as the differences better than an individual case study could have. Additionally, Japan as a long unified country provided its citizens with a strong national identity that Chinese and Italian immigrants did not have. Many from the Italian peninsula only became Italian once they had migrated and their newfound status as a minority group necessitated that they put aside regional differences to form a community in the larger context of American society. Likewise, many Chinese ethnic groups hardly thought of themselves as countrymen until prejudice they encountered united them together.

An important issue that this study raises is the relationship between class and race. As scientific racism demonstrates, a lot of newcomer's struggles came from the fact that they were not considered racially on the same level as white Americans. While race is an immutable factor, I believe that class differences worked to mitigate some of the prejudice and hostilities Americans had towards immigrants. Look at the case of Japan and China, while both groups are the same race and experienced racial tensions and prejudice, Japanese immigrants had a much less actively hostile environment. Part of this, as discussed, can be attributed to the structural differences between Japan and China, but this explanation only explains why Japanese immigrants did not face as harsh discrimination from legal venues, not why the average citizen was less prejudiced. The average United States citizen was hardly likely to understand Japan's place in the world as a developing world power, so this distinction would have been meaningless to them. Rather, class is the crucial variable that explains the difference in how Japanese and Chinese immigrants were treated. Japanese immigrants left the city and chose a middle class life style as farmers. In contrast, Chinese immigrants stayed in the city and worked

largely lower class, service jobs: launderers, domestic servants, and restaurant owners. These occupational differences translated into different degrees of tolerance for each group.

With regards to Italian Americans, the issue of race takes a different form. The Immigration Act of 1924, completely banned all immigration from any Asian countries—with the exception of the Philippines because it was under United States administration—but Italian immigration was allowed to continue. The quota for those coming from Italy was 3,845 individuals each year, compared to the 51,227 Germans this is a paltry number, but is not a total ban like that of those of Asian descent.¹⁹⁵ The differences in the quotas show how gradually Americans began to develop a tolerance for peoples who not traditionally considered white. This tolerance was not particularly impressive, as one look at the near complete Asian exclusion demonstrates, but it was a gradual process in which the conception of what an American was supposed to look like and be was extended. While it is a very small step, the fact that immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe were not completely excluded represents a gradual weakening of the racial hierarchy towards a more accepting nation.

A final issue that should be addressed is the somewhat subjective nature the sources used in this this work. Of course, the defense of the Chinese American community written by a member of that community will lean towards highlighting the good and minimizing the negative within that community, but I do not believe this a problem about this work. I did not seek to describe immigrant communities with an impartial lens, but rather I wanted to look at Japanese, Italian, and Chinese American's

¹⁹⁵ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. "Statistical Abstract of the United States." Washington DC, 1929. <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1929/compendia/statab/51ed.html>

worlds in the United States through their own eyes and their own words. Too often, the story of history is told through the powerful, and by nature of coming to a country that was not their own, did not share their culture or their language, the people I chose to study were relatively powerless in the grand scheme of things. I choose to tell their story with their words, subjective or not. I can only hope I did their voices justice.

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