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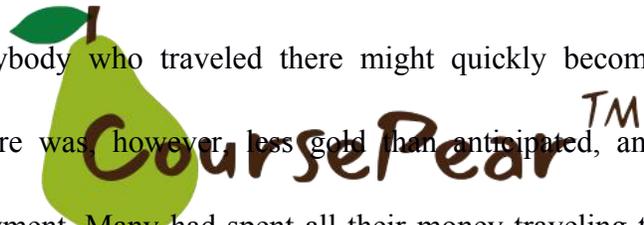
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Chinese Exclusion Act

On May 6, 1882, US President Chester A. Arthur signed the Chinese Exclusion Act, prohibiting Chinese workers from entering the United States. There had been an upsurge in Chinese immigration in the preceding 40 years. Wages fell as unemployment rose, and many Americans blamed Chinese immigration for this. This resulted in both social and legal discrimination against Chinese people. The Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted in reaction to increasing anti-Chinese prejudice and has had a major effect on Chinese-American culture and immigration law in the United States.

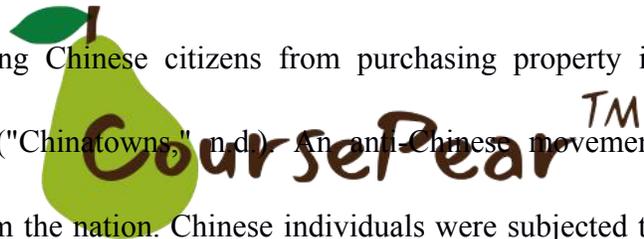
Chinese immigration to America surged in the mid-nineteenth century as a result of the California Gold Rush. The first wave of Chinese immigrants arrived in the 1840s and 1850s, mainly illiterate young men lured by tales of riches in California. People thought there was a "gold mountain" in California and that anybody who traveled there might quickly become wealthy ("Chinese Immigration," n.d.). There was, however, less gold than anticipated, and Chinese immigrants struggled to find employment. Many had spent all their money traveling to America and were thus unable to return home. Additionally, they lacked any means of communication with anybody in China. They made a living by doing whatever jobs were



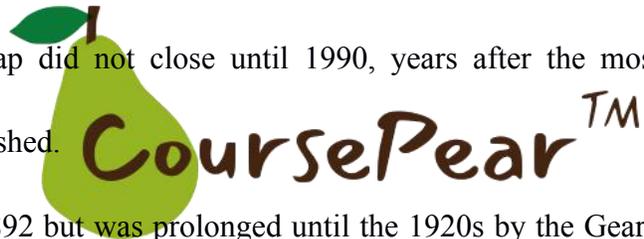
available, usually basic and requiring little English.

Several worked in agriculture and mining. Some established their own enterprises, most often laundries. Chinese laborers comprised the lion's share of the workforce that built the Transcontinental Railroad. Chinese laborers were exploited as a result of racist attitudes. They were paid less than white laborers and worked in potentially hazardous circumstances. For example, Chinese laborers on the Transcontinental Railroad sometimes had to use explosives to pave the way for the rails, and the foremen's negligence might result in the employees' deaths (Wong, n.d.). Chinese citizens have faced legal and social consequences as a result of racist attitudes. White Americans regarded them as "economic rivals and racial inferiors... the most foreign of the immigrants to arrive on American shores" (Wei, n.d.); this image of Chinese people was used to legitimize acts of violence and discriminatory legislation. Legislation has been enacted to prohibit the manifestation of Chinese culture. The 1873 San Francisco Queue Ordinance prohibited Chinese males from wearing queues. Chinese immigrants were not permitted to work for the government, enroll their children in public schools, or testify against European ancestors.

Furthermore, regulations were prohibiting Chinese citizens from purchasing property in certain regions to keep them "contained" ("Chinatowns," n.d.). An anti-Chinese movement developed intending to evict the Chinese from the nation. Chinese individuals were subjected to harassment and lynching. Their companies were boycotted, and they faced unemployment. Many sought refuge in Chinatowns, where they were secure and could rely on one another.



The Chinese Exclusion Act was significant legislation enacted in response to anti-Chinese prejudice. The legislation imposed a ten-year restriction on Chinese worker immigration. This was the first legislation prohibiting an ethnic group from immigrating because the Chinese "threaten[ed] the good order of specific areas" ("Chinese Exclusion Act, n.d."). A Chinese individual who was not a worker may immigrate as long as the Chinese government certified them as "eligible to immigrate" (n.d., "Chinese Exclusion Act"). The legislation classified the unqualified as "skilled and unskilled workers, as well as Chinese engaged in mining" ("Chinese Exclusion Act," n.d.). Merchants, diplomats, and students continued to be admitted. Individuals who violated this legislation risked jail or expulsion. Additionally, the legislation imposed limitations on Chinese nationals already in the United States. No Chinese were given citizenship, and they faced easy deportation. Chinese nationals who left the country were required to acquire certification in order to re-enter the United States. Due to the fact that the majority of Chinese immigrants at the time were males seeking fortunes to bring back to China, this legislation created a gender divide among Chinese people in America since Chinese women were not permitted to enter the nation. In 1890, a census revealed that the nation had one Chinese woman for every 27 Chinese males. The gender gap did not close until 1990, years after the most restrictive immigration restrictions were abolished.



The Chinese Exclusion Act expired in 1892 but was prolonged until the 1920s by the Geary Act. It maintained the immigration restriction and required all Chinese citizens in the United States to carry identification proving they were lawful residents. Chinese nationals who were

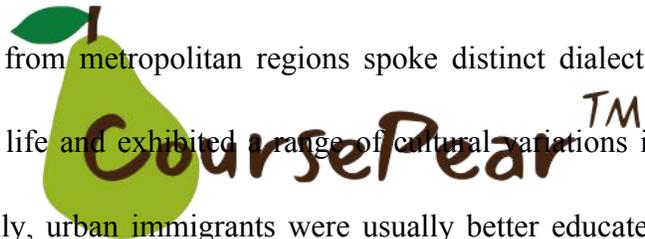
discovered without a certificate risked up to one year of work and deportation. It was repealed in 1929 and replaced by the National Origins Act, which limited annual immigration to 150,000 persons. Additionally, it prohibited any Asian immigration. Anti-Chinese prejudice started to wane after World War I. The Magnuson Act, enacted during World War II, relaxed immigration restrictions. Each year, 105 Chinese immigrants were welcomed. Chinese nationals born outside the United States were eligible for citizenship. The War Brides Act of 1945 enabled the spouses of Chinese American soldiers to enter the nation without being included among the 105 permitted immigrants. Chinese immigration restrictions were eased during World War II when the US cooperated with China against Japan. This factor also contributed to the decline in anti-Chinese sentiment and violence.

The 1965 Immigration Act, which became effective on July 1, 1968, increased the number of immigrants permitted from any nation. One hundred seventy thousand immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere were permitted to enter the United States, but no more than 20,000 from any one nation. Immigrants were accepted on the basis of their abilities and their need for refuge. Chinese nationals having relatives in the United States were permitted to immigrate without being counted against the quota. Chinese immigration on a large scale became feasible, and many families were reunited. This resulted in a significant increase in the Chinese population in the United States, changing Chinese American lifestyles and cultures.

When anti-Chinese prejudice was still very prevalent, Chinese individuals formed Chinese communities in metropolitan areas. As these communities grew in size, they had the ability to

operate independently and were called Chinatowns. Many non-Chinese regarded Chinatowns as "ethnic ghettos" or "bachelor outposts" densely packed with opium dens and prostitutes ("Chinatowns," n.d.). However, Chinatowns served as gathering places for Chinese immigrants to assist one another in adapting to the American way of life. While the American government failed to assist Chinese-Americans, they devised methods to assist one another. Residents in Chinatowns assisted one another in obtaining employment, caring for the ill, and learning English. Chinese people were absorbed in their culture in these areas. They could get Chinese cuisine that was unavailable elsewhere in America. In certain areas, the building resembled traditional Chinese architecture, and there were traditional houses of worship. Chinese individuals nearly entirely owned firms and industries, and they usually employed a majority of Chinese employees since other American businesses were unable to recruit Chinese owing to prejudice.

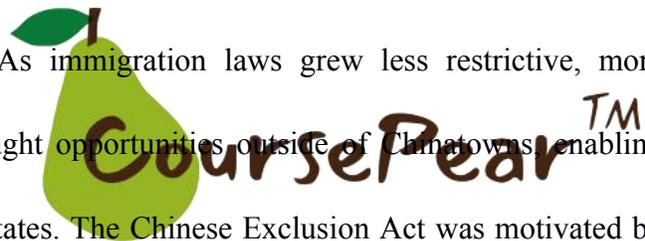
Following the 1965 Immigration Act, there was a dramatic surge in Chinese immigration. In little than a decade, China's population almost doubled. Prior to the Chinese Immigration Act, the majority of Chinese immigrants originated in rural areas of China. The majority now originate in metropolitan regions such as Hong Kong and Taiwan. This had a major effect on Chinese American culture since Chinese individuals from metropolitan regions spoke distinct dialects, had varying expectations for their quality of life and exhibited a range of cultural variations in terms of dress and entertainment. Additionally, urban immigrants were usually better educated than rural immigrants. Numerous residents resided outside of Chinatowns. Chinese immigrants with a higher level of education saw an increase in their quality of life as they were able to obtain



better jobs outside of Chinatowns.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was the first piece of legislation prohibiting a particular ethnic group from immigrating. It sparked a surge of racial-prejudice-based immigration restrictions. Following the Chinese Exclusion Act, the main immigration legislation was the Geary Act, the Magnuson Act, and the Immigration Act of 1965. The Geary Act prolonged the Chinese Exclusion Act, but with the passage of the Magnuson Act, immigration restrictions started to ease. It represents a watershed moment and shifts in attitudes toward Chinese people by allowing Chinese immigration to America. Another watershed moment occurred with the 1965 Immigration Act, which allowed Chinese people to enter the nation freely for the first time in 80 years. Chinese immigration has continued at a steady pace since then.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was founded on prejudice and fear of foreigners. Along with others who disregarded prejudice against Chinese people, it justified hate and resulted in a self-inflicted schism between Chinese immigrants and the rest of America. As a result, Chinatowns located across the nation remain hubs of Chinese culture and serve as a resource for immigrants seeking assistance integrating into American society. Prior to 1965, Chinese culture in America was confined to Chinatowns. As immigration laws grew less restrictive, more immigrants from other regions of China sought opportunities outside of Chinatowns, enabling Chinese culture to thrive across the United States. The Chinese Exclusion Act was motivated by prejudice and sparked a wave of xenophobic immigration laws, but it also resulted in the establishment of Chinatowns, cultural hubs for Chinese people. The Act has left an indelible



impact on the history and culture of Chinese Americans.



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