

The history of chinese american immigration



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Since the first immigrant reached to the American during the gold rush in 1849, among the past 160 years, the population of Chinese-American has dramatically increased. Now, Chinese Americans become the largest ethnic minority among the Asian American and represented about 24% of the Asian population. However, there is an unusual phenomenon that different from the other nation. The majority of the Chinese Americans are still immigrants.

The domain Chinese American people are composed by first and second generation, while most Italian Americans and Japanese Americans have already had their fourth generation.(Zhou 3) According to the American Census 2000, 70% of the Chinese Americans are foreign born. At the same time, the second generation only occupies 20% of the total population. The third generation, which means their parents are also born in America, account for only 10 percent of Chinese American population. From the history of Chinese immigration, the phenomenon can be closely connected the American immigration policy. In 1849, a piece of news spread through the south China that there were gold mountains in the America. During that time, Chinese were suffered in all kinds of wars. On one hand, China was defeated by the Britain in the Opium war which begun from 1840.

On the other hand, a civil war called Tai Ping Rebelling broken out in 1850. Although leaving China was illegal during Qing Dynasty, homeless people bought the tickets to go to the United States to search for better economic opportunities. By 1851, over 25000 Chinese immigrants had left their home and moved to California.

(Chinese Immigration par 3) The port they arrived is San Francisco which is still called Old Gold Mountain in China. However, when they finally reached to the California, they found the gold dream was an illusion. Mining was uncertain work and the gold area was not enough with the local people.

(Chinese Immigration par 5) Either because Chinese looked strange or they worked hard, they were harassed in many ways. Unlike the European immigrants, the purpose of Chinese immigrants was to make enough money then go back to China.

In this case, most Chinese immigrants found it is difficult to survive through mining, not mention to afford the tickets for going back to China. When they finally realized their gold dream was collapsed, the first generation of Chinese Americans commenced to find other ways to earn their living. Most of the labors were young male from the rural area of China.

Therefore, they were less educated and the most important thing was they can't speak English. Apart from these disadvantages, Chinese immigrants had differences from the European immigrants. It was obvious that a Chinese labor received many difficulty changes during that period from east to west, from Confucian culture to Christian world.

Owing to these difficulties, Chinese immigrant had to find jobs required little English facility and required skills could be learned quickly. (Chinese Immigration Par 6) On the other hand, there were almost no women in California in those days. Chinese labors found they could do some women's work such as do the laundry and set up the restaurant for the white

people. These jobs were actually popular during that time because they do meet the needs of white man.

Even now, when people talked about Chinese American in the United States, they always associate them with restaurant and laundries. In 1860s, there were more labors came from China. According to the book Chinese Immigrants written by Mary Coolidge, there were 25000 Chinese in California in 1852 and it reached to 50000 in 1867. Some other scholars pointed out that the number of Chinese in 1860 was 34933. Then it increased dramatically to 62736 in 1870.

(Huang Par 6) Although the number cited above was different, it was an indisputable fact that the rates of the Chinese American growth were high. The number of Chinese immigrants increased so fast because a considerable Chinese were imported as labors for the transcontinental railroads during that period. In February, 1865, the Central Pacific decided to try a new labor pool. Charles Crocker, chief of construction persuaded his company to employ Chinese immigrants, arguing that the people who build the Great Wall of China and invented gunpowder could certainly build a railroad.

(Building the Railroad Par 5) Chinese labors, accounted for nearly 90% of total labors, made great contribution to the railroad. In the first three years, the Central Pacific had only put down less than 100 miles of track.

Obviously, the participation of Chinese immigrants fastened the process of rail road building which was finally completed in 1869. Despite the skepticism that was expressed about their physical strength, Chinese soon became the backbone of the labor not only for unskilled tasks but for highly

demanding and dangerous ones as well. (Chan 31) At the same time, Chinese were paid less than the white labors. In the beginning, a Chinese was paid 1 dollar a work way or 26 dollars a month. Later, pay was raised to 30 and finally 35 a month, achieving the same rate as white. However, the white were give food and housing to their pay whereas Chinese labors had to feed and house themselves.

Also, the company use the Chinese do the skilled labor such as masonry, track-laying, blacksmithing, hand explosives which they should pay white 3 to 5 dollars per day. The Central Pacific saved about 5. 5 millions by hiring Chinese instead of white unskilled labor. (Meltzer 7) In addition, Chinese always did the dangerous work. Only from the winter 1885 to 1886, there were almost 1200 Chinese immigrants died from accidents, avalanches, and explosions. Due to these characters, these workers quickly earned a reputation as tireless and extraordinarily reliable workers-“ quiet, peaceable, patient, industrious, and economical.

” (Building the Railroad par 7) However, when the transcontinental railroad was completed, Chinese immigrants received even more hostility than before. The Central Pacific dismissed most labors which rendering almost 10000 Chinese lost their job. These former employees were not even allowed to ride the trains free of charge back to California. (Chan 32) Thereby, they had to find jobs wherever they could. Meanwhile, more and more Euro-American appeared to California and they had to compete with Chinese for jobs. Due to the less money the Chinese asked for, they were always in the ascendant. Unfortunately the factors also led to the anti-Chinese movement. There were both legal and illegal harassment towards to the Chinese.

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In San Francisco, which became metropolis of Chinese American, a variety of municipal ordinances put special taxes on their livelihood, fined them for living in overcrowd tenement, and even required arrested Chinese to have their heads shaved.(Daniels and Cliffs 22) On the other hand, the other labors found the Chinese immigrants were threaten because of their less pay. The most significant anti-Chinese event was the movement ??? The Chinese must go??? led by Kearney. One of Kearney??™s working??™s party manifestos was: Before the world we declare that the Chinaman must leave our shores. We declared that while man, and women, and boys, and girls, cannot live as the people of the great republic should live and compete with the single Chinese coolie in the labor market. We declare that we cannot hope to drive the Chinaman away by working cheaper than he does. None but an enemy would expect if of us; none but an idiot could hope for success: none but a degraded coward and slaves would make the effort. To an American, death is preferable to life on a par with Chinaman.

(qtd. in Daniels and Cliffs 23)What was worse, Chinese immigration underwent sometimes violence attacks. From Settle to Los Angeles, from Wyoming to the small towns of California, immigrants from China were forced out of business, run out of town, beaten, tortured, lynched, and massacred, usually with little hope of help from the law. (Chinese Immigration par 10) The root cause of these problems was money.

Euro American thought Chinese asked for so little money that they had no way to compete with them. However, considering that almost all the Chinese immigrants were from the rural area of China, the wage was quite a lot of

money for them. That's why they could tolerate all of these unfair treatments.

As a Chinese farmer said, " I work on four-mou land [less than one acre, a larger than average holding] year in and year out, from dawn to dusk, but after taxes and providing for your own needs, I make \$20 a year. You make that much in one day. No matter how much it cost to get there, or how hard the work is, America is still better than this." (The Chinese Par 10) Nevertheless, the anti-Chinese voices culminated in 1882. In that year congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which is the first significant restriction law on free immigration in United States history. All Chinese people- except travelers, merchants, teachers, students, and those born in the United States" were forbidden to enter the country. Also, the Act prohibited the Chinese residents from naturalized citizens. The Act lasted for ten years, and in 1892 the Geary Acts extended these exclusion laws for another decade, and in 1902 the exclusion of Chinese immigration was extended indefinitely.

(Daniels and Cliffs 11) The implement to the Chinese Exclusion Act not only made the Chinese immigrants had a harsh time in the United States, but also made the number of Chinese population declined steadily. Chinese in the US 1890-1920| Year| Number| 1890| 107. 620| 1900| 89. 863| 1910| 71. 531| 1920| 61. 639| Source: United States Bureau of Census The situation didnt ameliorate until the year of World War II. In 1943, considering the allied relationship between China and the US, congress repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act. President Roosevelt also admitted, "???" By the repeal of the

Chinese exclusion laws we can correct a historic mistake??? (President par 10) However, the 1943 maintained racist elements.

Though it allowed 105 immigrants from China annually, a Chinese born in Canada would still be charged to the Chinese quota whereas a white native Canada could enter as a non-quota immigrants. There were several subsequent policies relaxing immigration restrictions. In 1946, congress approved a law that placed Chinese wives of American citizens on a non-quota basis.

In 1952, congress passed McCarran-walter Act, making all national origin groups eligible for naturalization and eliminating race as a bar to immigration. Even though, the construction of the American population won't be changed without the promulgation of the Hart-Cellar Act in 1965, which was also known as immigration law. The main reasons for promoting immigration act could be summarized in the follow sentences. In the post-world-war II era, global and domestic forces moved the nation toward liberalizing its immigration laws. (Paul and John 155) Internally, the civil right movements made state-support racism less tenable than before. It was impossible and dangerous to continue the discrimination on the immigration area.

On the other side, the global forced the United States to make change on the immigration policy. To maintain the world hegemony against the Soviet Union, and to present U. S image as leader of ??? free world???, it was high time to eliminate racial barriers and accept large numbers of immigrants. Moreover, in the context of the Cold War period, The United States required

lots of foreign experts and technical personnel, especially in the field of military and economy.

Meanwhile, the decline of the European immigrants also led to the shortage of labor market. Hence, the U. S government intended to expand the number of eastern immigration to compensate.

The basis of Immigration Act 1965 was family reunion and technological priority. Although the Chinese quota was the same as the western countries, the U. S government didn't expect the number of Chinese immigrants would increase so rapidly. From 1965 to 1978, most of Chinese immigrants were from Tai Wang and Hong Kong because the U.

S didn't accept China Mainland as an independent country. In 1979, China and The United States established the diplomatic relation. U. S government added quota of 20000 immigrants to Chinese Mainland. Thus, the total quota of Chinese immigrants was enviable 60000, 20000 for Chinese Mainland, Tai Wang, and Hong Kong respectively.

In addition, the parents and children of American citizen can enter United States as non-quota immigrants. As Chinese people emphasis on family relationship at all time, they took full advantage of the immigration law to go to America. As for the technical personnel, there also a large number of students immigration. Most students chose to stay in United States after they graduated. Moreover, once they became American citizen, they began to apply immigration for their parents, spouses, sibling, and children. As a result of so-called ??? family migration???, Chinese formed a tremendous immigration wave. Works cited Chan, Sucheng.

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