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Exclusion Acts

Chinese Women during the Chinese Exclusion Era, 1882–1943

Erika Lee

My grandmother Moy Sau Bik first came to the United States from China in 1931. She immigrated during the Chinese Exclusion era, when U.S. immigration laws excluded all but a few classes of Chinese immigrants. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 changed the course of U.S. immigration history, but little is known about what happened *after* 1882, especially in terms of exclusion's impact on Chinese women and the ways in which they responded. As a child, I was always curious about Paw Paw's (grandmother's) past and her journey to America. But I knew better than to ask too many questions. Like many Chinese Americans, she preferred to keep the years of exclusion buried and refused to talk about the "old days," times that were full of pain and scars that never healed.

The original 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act denied entry to all Chinese laborers.¹ Only Chinese merchants, students, teachers, travelers, and diplomats were considered exempt. Eventually American-born U.S. citizens and the wives and children of merchants and citizens were also allowed to apply for admission.

Immediately after the act's passage, Chinese immigration to the United States dropped dramatically. In 1887, the number of Chinese admitted into the country by immigration officials reached an all-time low of only ten individuals.² But despite the Chinese Exclusion Act's intent, it failed to end Chinese immigration altogether. From 1882 to 1943, an estimated 300,955 Chinese successfully gained admission to the United States for the first time or as returning residents and native-born citizens. In fact, the number of Exclusion era Chinese admissions is greater than during the pre-Exclusion era, from 1849 to 1882, when 258,210 Chinese entered the United States.³ The fact that so many managed to enter the country in spite of the exclusion laws is truly significant. It raises questions about the efficacy of restrictive immigration laws and demonstrates the power of immigrant resistance and agency. The vast majority of these immigrants, however, were men. Of the total number of Exclusion era Chinese immigrants, only ten thousand to forty thousand were women.⁴ The exclusion laws and the gendered ways in which they were interpreted and enforced by U.S. immigration officials created additional *exclusion acts* that further restricted Chinese female immigration.

My grandmother's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were well-established merchants in New York City and Philadelphia.⁵ They were fortunate in that their class status allowed them to migrate freely between China and America. Yet their families were not immune to exclusion. Three generations of Moy women stayed behind in China while their husbands and fathers came to the United States. A number of factors likely influenced the family's decision to allow only the men to migrate abroad, but the exclusion laws and the unequal environment that they created made all women, even those from the exempt classes, especially vulnerable to restriction.

In 1919 my great-grandfather Moy Wah Chung decided to move the entire family to the United States. He prepared and filled out all the necessary immigration forms. He claimed that his family consisted of a wife and two sons, but no daughters. While my grandmother's younger brother was included in this family description, my grandmother was never mentioned. According to the official record filed with the immigration service, she did not exist as a member of the Moy family. In her place, using her rightful immigration slot, was her male cousin, Moy Chong Don, who posed as the eldest child in the family. Reflecting the prevailing patriarchal Chinese attitudes that privileged sons over daughters, my great-grandfather apparently believed that his nephew was more worthy of immigration than his own daughter. While the family traveled on to the United States, my grandmother was left behind to live with relatives. She never saw her mother alive again, and my great-grandfather never sent for her to join the rest of the family in America. Ineligible to enter as an independent immigrant herself, and without the sponsorship of her father, my grandmother was effectively excluded from the country. She eventually immigrated only after she married my grandfather, a Chinese merchant in New York.⁶ As a member of one of the exempt classes, my grandmother should have been able to immigrate to the United States without restrictions much earlier in her life. But gendered biases within her own family combined with the larger restrictions placed on all Chinese immigration served to exclude her anyway.

Historians have just begun to explore the gendered dimensions of Chinese exclusion through analyses of laws and court cases, demonstrating how exclusion became an "ever-tightening noose" to constrict Chinese female immigration.⁷ But laws and court cases tell only one side of the story. A focus on the inequalities created and reinforced through the everyday application of Chinese exclusion reveals the full magnitude of its impact on Chinese women. What soon becomes evident is that Chinese and American conceptions of race, class, and especially gender became enacted, reinforced, and institutionalized in the daily enforcement of the exclusion laws and directly influenced Chinese female immigration.

American fears and stereotypes about Chinese prostitution first caused immigration officials to target all Chinese women for special scrutiny during the Exclusion era. As seen in the interrogation and investigation processes, Chinese women faced additional burdens to prove both their standing as "moral" women and their status as exempt-class Chinese. The exclusion laws also reinforced the gender inequalities in both American and Chinese societies and explicitly positioned most Chinese female immigrants as dependents of their male husbands and fathers. This dependent status affected women's immigration opportunities and even their rights to remain in the United States after they were admitted.⁸

Focusing on the Chinese women's everyday experiences at America's gates also allows us to examine their active agency in confronting exclusion. Their daily acts of negotiation and resistance—what Lisa Lowe has called “immigrant acts”—defy popular stereotypes that portray Chinese women as passive, subordinate victims.⁹ Although they often held unequal positions in their own families and communities, as well as in the United States, Chinese women proved to be resilient actors in their own right, finding and using strategies to overcome the barriers erected by the Chinese exclusion laws.

Suspected of Being “Bad Women”

Although the Chinese Exclusion era is often referred to as the sixty-one year period of 1882–1943, American efforts to exclude Chinese immigrants officially began as early as 1875. That year, the U.S. Congress passed the Page Act, specifically targeting Asian contract laborers and women—especially Chinese women—entering for “immoral purposes.” The immigration of Chinese prostitutes had first begun in the mid-nineteenth century, when the number of Chinese women in the United States was extremely small. Imported to work as indentured servants in slavlike conditions, Chinese prostitutes came to be viewed as symbols of social decay and “moral and racial pollution” in America. Social reformers and anti-Chinese politicians alike led the campaign to eradicate the business and immigration of Chinese prostitutes.¹⁰ The 1875 Page Act was the first federal law to restrict immigration, illustrating the extent to which Chinese prostitution was considered a threat to the nation.¹¹ It also paved the way for the eventual passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act seven years later.

The U.S. government's early efforts to stem the immigration of Chinese prostitutes under the Page Law had long-term repercussions. Upon applying for admission into the country, Exclusion era Chinese immigrant women of all classes were routinely suspected of being potential prostitutes by immigration officials. This government scrutiny resulted in further limiting the immigration opportunities open to all Chinese women. Correspondence to and from the immigration bureau in San Francisco in the 1890s, for example, demonstrates that Chinese immigrant men who wanted to bring their wives and children to the United States were explicitly discouraged from doing so. Believing that these applicants and their “alleged wives” were merely dishonest importers and Chinese prostitutes in disguise, immigration officials sought to limit *all* Chinese female immigration. They combined a racialized characterization of Chinese immigrant men as a “cunning,” dishonest group, willing to victimize their own women, with another stereotype that linked Chinese women immigrants directly (and only) to prostitution. In 1895, John H. Wise, the collector of customs and chief of the immigration bureau in San Francisco, warned one inquirer that he would

do as much as I can to discourage Chinese from sending for their alleged wives and children. . . . I am satisfied that . . . many women and young girls [would be] brought for immoral purposes. It is well known that the cunning of Chinese often circumvents the vigilance of the officers.¹²

When pressed to explain what documents Chinese women would need to enter the United States, Wise made it clear that *all* Chinese women would be suspected of being prostitutes until proven otherwise.¹³

The administrative procedures designed to thwart prostitution had profound effects on Chinese women applying for admission throughout the Exclusion era. Routinely suspected of being potential prostitutes, Chinese women were often unfairly detained and/or denied entry. One such case involved Lau Dai Moy, who applied for admission into the country as the wife of a U.S. citizen on June 12, 1917. Her papers were in order, but as part of the regular inspection process at the immigration station on Angel Island in San Francisco, she and her husband, Fong Dai Sing, were brought in for extensive questioning. To immigration officials, Lau Dai Moy's case appeared to be suspicious. She was a wife of a U.S. native—a class suspected of widespread fraud—and she was much younger than her husband. Acting on their suspicion that Lau and Fong were not legally husband and wife (and that Lau was possibly a prostitute), the inspectors grilled the couple about various aspects of their wedding ceremony, their home, and their family. The questions were exacting in their detail, and both Lau and Fong were expected to give specific answers that agreed with one another. Lau's interrogation progressed in part:

Q. What presents or ornaments has your husband given you?

A. The bracelets and rings that I have on now.

Q. When did your husband give you the hair ornament?

A. A few days later [after the wedding].

Q. Did he buy that hair ornament in his home village?

A. No, in the Shek Kee Market place.

Q. Did you really wear the gay head-dress and the bead[ed] veil at your wedding?

A. Yes.

Q. Just when did you wear the head-dress?

A. Soon after I entered the house.

Q. How long did you wear the head-dress?

A. Just for about one hour.

Q. Did you wear it while you served tea?

A. Yes.

Q. Who were the guests that you poured tea for?

A. I don't know all of the gentlemen guests who were there, some of them were friends of my husband.

Such detailed questions reflect not only the gendered procedures of exclusion enforcement—Lau was asked only about strictly feminine activities pertaining to what she was wearing, how she was adorned, and her role as hostess at her wedding—but also the ways in which the government sought to prove or disprove the validity of relationships and marriages. If there were too many discrepancies, immigration officials ruled that the relationship was based on fraud and that the applicant was thus inadmissible. Discrepancies, of course, did not always mean a fraudulent case. In the case of Lau and Fong, the interrogation revolved around minute details of their arranged marriage and wedding ceremony that had taken place a year prior to the interrogation. Other ques-

tions involving Fong Dai Sing's native village, house, and their shared life were even more difficult to answer, because the couple had spent only a few months together before Fong returned to the United States. They had not experienced much of a shared life, house, or family, but they were still expected to provide consistent answers or risk a denial. Because of discrepancies between herself and her husband, Lau was detained at the station for six weeks.

The pressure and intensity of the interrogation apparently traumatized Lau. Immigration inspectors had spent several hours asking her details about the wedding. They also asked her how many bracelets her husband had given her as a wedding present. All of these questions were then asked of Fong. During her part of the interrogation, Lau was unsure about the number of bracelets and responded that she had received from her husband only one pair. When her interrogation was completed, she was taken back to the women's barracks. There, she remembered that she had one additional bracelet packed in her luggage. Believing that such a wrong answer would mean certain exclusion, Lau first panicked, then fought to amend her testimony. She rushed up to an interpreter and tried to give an additional statement. "I have two bracelets!" she explained. "The second [one] is in baggage. I do not know why I had been so stupid!" The interpreter took note of Lau Dai Moy's claims and recorded them in her immigration file. In the final analysis of her case, the government's decision was favorable. After six weeks in detention, Lau was finally allowed to land. Though clearly shaken, she had managed to make the system work for her.¹⁴

Lau Dai Moy's 1917 case reveals how nineteenth-century American presumptions about Chinese women's alleged immorality had lasting consequences. As late as 1940, sociologist Wen-hsien Chen found that "over-suspicion on the part of immigration officers [had] caused great embarrassment to respectable young Chinese women."¹⁵ Chinese women, however, learned to adapt to these biased interpretations and procedures in order to avoid being branded as prostitutes or women of questionable morals. One way was through evidence of "proper character," either through credible testimony, documentation, or clear markers of class. One of the first women to apply for admission through the port of San Francisco after the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed was Leong Cum, a garment maker and U.S. citizen born in Lewiston, Idaho. Applying for readmission in May 1884, Leong distinguished herself as "a woman of excellent reputation and irreproachable character" through affidavits from white acquaintances. One was from Jerome Millian, a Chinese interpreter who likely worked for the immigration service. These affidavits and Millian's endorsement worked in Leong's favor. She was landed two days after her initial arrival.¹⁶

Chinese women applying for admission as wives of merchants found it necessary to go one step further. At stake was not only their status as respectable women but also their membership in the merchant class. When judging merchant cases, immigration officials looked for a number of factors, including the steamship class by which Chinese traveled to the United States. Merchants and their families were expected to travel in the more expensive and elite upper decks. A first-class steamship ticket was thus considered evidence of class, and for women, proper moral standing as well. At the same time, Chinese women who traveled by third-class passage were suspected of being "bad women."¹⁷

Based on these presumptions, many Chinese attempted to conform to immigration officials' expectations and notions of class, gender, and respectability. Lee Chi Yet and Wong Lan Fong, a merchant and his wife, delayed their scheduled immigration to the United States in 1926 until they had saved enough money to pay for first-class passage. Such a strategy, they believed, would help them avoid undue scrutiny during the immigrant inspection.¹⁸

Other Chinese women emphasized physical markers. Because immigration officials expected merchant families to possess fine clothing, a respectable manner, and, especially, bound feet, Chinese women and their attorneys learned to highlight these traits in order to achieve their goal of entering the country.¹⁹ The earliest example of this attention to bound feet involved Jow Ah Yeong and Chun Ah Ngon, a merchant's wife and daughter who arrived in San Francisco in 1885. The application of both mother and daughter emphasized that both applicants had "compressed feet," which the affidavit explained "is a mark of respectability."²⁰ In 1901, Gee See, a Los Angeles merchant's wife, submitted a full-length portrait of herself dressed in luxurious silk robes, seated in a richly decorated room, and clearly revealing her tiny, bound feet. To provide further proof, she also included an X ray of her bound feet, which was described as showing "conclusively that the feet of this woman are what is known as 'small' or 'bound,' the position of the bones and their abnormally small size distinctly appearing."²¹ Chinese immigrant women performed such actions consciously and purposefully. They played to the government's definitions of how a "proper" Chinese woman should look and behave with affidavits, witness testimony, photographs, and even X rays. This smart strategizing facilitated the admission of upper-middle-class women but nevertheless did little to challenge the overarching class and gendered stereotypes held and perpetuated by U.S. immigration officials.

Dependent Immigration Status

At the same time that some Chinese women learned how to mark their class and moral standing in order to facilitate admission into the country, others explicitly challenged their exclusion from the country through the American legal system. Like their male counterparts, they learned to hire the "very best attorneys."²² Eventually, judicial rulings affirmed the right of American-born Chinese women and merchant wives and children to apply for admission.²³ These court decisions represented important new opportunities for Chinese female immigration, and the numbers of Chinese women immigrating to the United States began to increase steadily.²⁴ In 1900, women made up only 0.7 percent of the total number of Chinese immigrants entering the country. That figure rose to 9.7 percent in 1910, 20 percent in 1920, and 30 percent by 1930. These statistics do not include American citizens of Chinese descent.²⁵ Despite this increase, the exclusion laws continued to reinforce old barriers as well as erect new ones for Chinese immigrant women. These restrictions were inextricably linked to the ways in which the exclusion laws privileged and duplicated gendered dynamics of immigration both in their enforcement by government officials and in practice by Chinese immigrants themselves.

During exclusion, women could apply for admission as both independent and dependent immigrants. In practice, however, most women entered as dependents of a male merchant or citizen. This dependent status—both reflecting and reinforcing the gendered face of American immigration law and the power relations between husbands and wives, fathers and daughters—served to limit Chinese women's immigration opportunities and even threaten their rights to remain in the country after they had been admitted.

Chinese women's dependent immigration status was neither automatic nor inclusive of all women's immigration opportunities. The class- and profession-based exempt categories as outlined in the original Exclusion Act (merchants, teachers, diplomats, students, and travelers) did not specify that admissible members of these professions had to be male. Chinese women could—and increasingly did—enter and apply for admission as teachers or students. Nevertheless, few Chinese women were actively engaged in the exempted professions for most of the exclusion period and thus were not eligible to enter independently. To claim that the exclusion laws eventually “opened more doors than it closed,” as one scholar has, is to ignore the fact that despite the perceived increase in immigration opportunities, few women were actually eligible to take advantage of those opportunities on their own.²⁶ Instead, most women applied for admission as dependent immigrants. From 1910 to 1924, 2,107 women (27 percent) entered as independent immigrants or U.S. citizens and 5,702 women (73 percent) entered as dependents.²⁷

Dependent immigrant status had clear disadvantages. First and foremost was the fact that most Chinese women derived their right to enter the country only from their male relatives' immigration status. Early Exclusion era court rulings had determined that a woman's right to enter the country was derived from her husband or father.²⁸ Thus, unless they were exempt from exclusion in their own right, Chinese women were almost completely dependent on their husbands and fathers to sponsor them into the United States. Like my grandmother, many may have been left behind without the freedom to immigrate on their own. While a multiplicity of factors contributed to the lower rates of Chinese female immigration to the United States in general (patriarchal cultural values and patterns of male sojourning already favored the migration of males over females), the restrictions of the exclusion laws and the environment that they created further threatened the remaining immigration opportunities for women.

The exclusion laws turned immigration into a valuable and precious commodity. Families were forced to choose who would immigrate, when, and under which categories. As economic and political conditions in China worsened in the early twentieth century, the desire and need to immigrate to the United States increased among many Chinese in southern China, the native home to the majority of Chinese immigrants prior to 1965. But not all could immigrate, and women were often the ones to be left behind. The disparity in immigration opportunities available to male and female immigrants is seen most clearly in the so-called paper-son practice. Chinese who were not eligible to apply for admission on their own purchased “slots” or false papers belonging to exempt-class Chinese willing to sponsor them into the United States as their own “children.” Immigration involving fraudulent papers increasingly became the primary means of Chinese immigration by the early 1900s, but the market in false papers was not evenly distributed between male and female applicants. The majority of paper slots

were for male applicants. A 1925 investigation by the San Francisco immigration office revealed that only 49 out of 719 immigration slots recorded that year were for female children.²⁹ Given such statistics, it is not difficult to speculate that many women, like my grandmother, were deprived of their opportunities to immigrate in favor of their male relatives or other males who purchased their family's immigration papers.

Even Chinese women who were able to immigrate remained hindered by their dependent status under U.S. immigration law. Chinese family members applying as dependents were first held responsible for meeting two sets of requirements, while independent immigrants only had to satisfy one. Wives and children of merchants and citizens had to reconfirm the exempt-class standing of the sponsor himself. They then had to prove that the relationship to their sponsor indeed existed. Dependent immigrants were, in effect, tested twice. Chinese men and boys immigrating as dependents (as sons of merchants and citizens, for example) faced similar scrutiny and burdens of proof. But because there were more opportunities for Chinese men to enter as independent immigrants, Chinese women were more adversely affected by the burdens of dependent immigrant status.³⁰

It was not uncommon for problems to arise in the effort to reconfirm the sponsoring immigrant's exempt status or to prove that the marital or parental relationship existed. Even if the exempt-class sponsor was a longtime resident of the United States, the investigations pertaining to immigration status could be lengthy, often causing delays in the cases of exempt-class families. Yong Shee, for example, was detained for two months in 1915 while immigration officials investigated the status of her husband, Lee Kan, a merchant in San Francisco and partner in the Chong, Kee, and Company. Because she was unable to apply for admission independently, Yong Shee's admission was tied to that of her husband. Thus, when immigration officials began to scrutinize the company's holdings in order to determine its qualification as a bona fide mercantile establishment, at stake was not only the status of the business but also Yong Shee's right to enter and reenter the country. The couple hired an attorney, rallied friends and acquaintances to their cause, and were eventually admitted into the country.³¹ In another case, Jung Shee was almost denied entry in 1942 because a recent injury had prevented her husband from working and supporting her. Fearful that the absence of a male provider would make Jung Shee "likely to become a public charge," immigration officials released her only with assurances from relatives and social workers that Jung would be able to support herself.³² Dependent status had severe consequences even for Chinese American women, citizens by virtue of their birth in the United States. Under the 1922 Cable Act, Chinese American women who married "aliens ineligible to citizenship" lost their citizenship and could face problems reentering the country.³³

The Shadow of Exclusion

For some Chinese immigrants, the nightmare of exclusion ended once they were officially admitted into the country and allowed to land. For many others, the shadow of exclusion haunted and followed them for years afterward. Widespread illegal Chinese

immigration and enduring anti-Chinese sentiment motivated U.S. government officials to practice long-term surveillance on suspected Chinese immigrants who had entered or remained in the country in violation of the law. Although they were not the main practitioners of illegal immigration, Chinese women were nevertheless at risk during government crackdowns, because their right to remain in the United States hinged on the legal status and standing of their husbands or fathers. They were also vulnerable to adverse fluctuations in their sponsor's immigration status. For example, immigration laws and regulations established under the 1924 Immigration Act required that Chinese admitted to the United States as students, travelers, or merchants "must maintain the status under which [they were] admitted while remaining in the United States."³⁴ If such an exempt-class Chinese were to lose or change his or her status, that person could be arrested and sent before a deportation hearing. Because Chinese women could remain in the country only as long their husbands and fathers maintained their exempt status, they were also to be arrested and possibly deported.

Such was the predicament in which Ngoon Shee and Wu Wah, a wife and her merchant husband, found themselves beginning in the fall of 1932. Ngoon Shee was eventually allowed to remain in the country, but only after being hunted by immigration authorities who threatened to deport her over a five-year period. Ngoon Shee arrived in San Francisco in October 1930 and was admitted as the wife of Wu Wah, a resident merchant and member of the firm of Sun Tong Chong Company in Oakland, California. Over the next seven years they had six children together, all born in the United States as citizens. Seven months after his wife's arrival, Wu was forced to sell his interests in Sun Tong Chong, most likely because of the economic depression gripping the entire country. He found work doing odd jobs in restaurants and laundries but was unable to find full-time, gainful employment. With no interest in a mercantile firm, Wu lost his merchant's status and placed at risk both his own and his wife's rights to remain in the United States. On September 17, 1932, immigration officials issued a warrant for the arrest of both Wu and Ngoon. The warrant charged the couple with remaining in the country after failing to maintain the exempt status under which they were admitted and thus violating the Immigration Act of 1924.³⁵

The couple took matters into their own hands. Apparently aware of the government's intentions beforehand, they hurriedly left their home in Oakland just a few days before Immigrant Inspector E. C. Benson arrived with an arrest warrant. Benson pursued the couple, attempting to track them down through the U.S. postal system and the California Department of Motor Vehicles. Benson drove northward to Napa and Yountville, California, in an attempt to find them but had no success. Meanwhile, instead of succumbing to the wrath of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), Ngoon and Wu began a fugitive life underground, moving from place to place, keeping their locations secret from all but a few trusted relatives and friends. They never stayed in one location for very long. A frustrated Inspector Benson concluded his March 1933 report with this warning: "Every effort will be made to locate Wu Wah and his wife, Ngoon Shee, and in the event this office should locate this woman, she will be immediately taken into custody."³⁶ Ngoon remained insistent in her right to remain in the country and stayed one step ahead of immigration officials. One year later, she and her husband were still missing. District director Edward L. Haff responded by sending out

a request to all local police departments that they apprehend the suspects. The notice featured the warrant of arrest and photographs of both Ngoon and Wu.³⁷

The couple continued to elude arrest for five years. Finally, in July 1937, the persistent Inspector Benson received information leading him to Ngoon and Wu.³⁸ On July 22, 1937, Benson went to Seventh Street in Oakland to serve Ngoon with the long-awaited arrest warrant. He found his prisoner-to-be in fragile condition, suffering from complications due to childbirth. Her doctor convinced Benson to return another day, and one week later, the inspector successfully served the warrant. A \$500 bond was placed on Ngoon until her appearance before the Bureau of Immigration.³⁹ In September, husband and wife were interrogated concerning their right to remain in the country. They automatically challenged the government's case to deport Ngoon Shee and hired attorney W. H. Wilkinson, a former law officer in the Bureau of Immigration. Wilkinson shrewdly countered the government's claims by pointing to both legal precedent and the service's own regulations which nullified the charges in this case. He first pointed to a 1933 case in which the Northern California Circuit Court of Appeals had ruled against the deportation of a merchant's son following his father's change in status. The court chastised the "absurdities and hardships" of a rule of law that required deportation of the "hapless" and perchance "helpless" family of a merchant who, "because of illness, mishap, economic condition, or other misfortune," has been compelled to change his employment as a merchant and seek other employment.⁴⁰ Later in 1933, the Bureau of Immigration eliminated its rule that Chinese must maintain their exempt status in order to remain in the country.⁴¹ These rulings should have provided legal protection to individuals like Ngoon Shee. Nevertheless, she became caught up in a larger government assault on Chinese Americans that ignored not only the immigration service's own regulations, but also a federal court ruling. In October 1937, Ngoon Shee's deportation case was finally closed, five years after it had first been filed.⁴² She and Wu Wah had lived through years of hardship imposed by the INS, but they had refused to give up their rights to remain in the country with their American-born children. In the end, they emerged victorious and on the right side of the law.

Conclusion

The Chinese exclusion laws created an unequal environment that affected all Chinese immigrants, but Chinese women were vulnerable to the race, class, and gender biases explicit in the laws in ways that their male counterparts were not. The laws attacked the women along all three lines and created and reinforced unequal immigration patterns. The harsh realities of life under exclusion cast a long shadow over the lives of Ngoon Shee, Lau Dai Moy, my grandmother, and countless others. The U.S. government's efforts to control the immigration of Chinese prostitutes placed all Chinese women under suspicion and had long-term consequences. Chinese women's dependent immigration status, reinforced and institutionalized by exclusion, affected both their opportunities to immigrate and their abilities to remain in the country.

Contrary to popular stereotypes, Chinese women were not passive victims. Instead, they were active agents. Merchant wives used their class status and bound feet as tools

to facilitate their admission into the country. Others, like Ngoon Shee, refused to give up even under the most daunting circumstances. Even my grandmother, whose opportunity to come to the United States had been taken away, eventually managed to immigrate and raise a family in America. In her last years, she finally broke her silence. Perhaps believing that she no longer needed protection from the past, she found power and comfort through telling.

NOTES

1. Act of May 6, 1882, 22 Stat. 58.

2. U.S. Bureau of Immigration, *Annual Report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration* (Washington, D.C., 1903), 32 (hereafter cited as U.S. Bureau of Immigration, *Annual Report*).

3. Pre-Exclusion era statistics taken from Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 22. The figure for the Exclusion era includes immigrants only from 1882 to 1891 and immigrants and returning citizens from 1894 to 1940. Statistics for the years 1892–1893 and 1941–1943 are not available. U.S. Bureau of Immigration, *Annual Reports* (1898–1943); Helen Chen, “Chinese Immigration into the United States: An Analysis of Changes in Immigration Policies” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1980), 181; Fu-ju Liu, “A Comparative Demographic Study of Native-born and Foreign-born Chinese Populations in the United States” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1953), 223.

4. U.S. government statistics for Chinese immigrant admissions are highly inconsistent. When categorizing by sex, the U.S. Bureau of Immigration recorded 127,012 total Chinese immigrants (9,868 Chinese women) admitted during 1882–1943. When categorizing by immigration status, the Bureau recorded the total number of Chinese admitted for the same period as 422,908. From 1910 to 1924, when the number of Chinese immigrants were broken down by both sex and immigration status, Chinese immigrant women averaged 9.4 percent of the total Chinese immigrant pool. Based on these calculations, the actual number of Chinese immigrant women who entered during the Exclusion era was probably closer to forty thousand. See tables titled “Immigrants Admitted” and “Summary of Chinese Seeking Admission to the U.S.” in U.S. Bureau of Immigration, *Annual Reports* (1898–1943); H. Chen, “Chinese Immigration,” 201, 181.

5. Moy Dong Kee, File 14/643, and Moy Shai Quong, File 13/322, Chinese Arrival Files, RG 85, Records of the U.S. I.N.S., New York, RG 85, National Archives—Northeast Region, New York; Moy Wah Chung, File 35100/177, Chinese Arrival Files, Records of the U.S. I.N.S., Seattle, RG 85, National Archives—Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle, Washington (hereafter cited as Chinese Arrival Files).

6. Interview with Gladys Huie, Sept. 9, 1993.

7. Sucheng Chan, “The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1870–1943,” in Sucheng Chan, ed., *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 95, 97; Yung, *Unbound Feet*, 18–24. Adam McKeown offers a different perspective in “Transnational Chinese Families,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 18:2 (Winter 1999): 74, 78, 83, and in *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900–1936*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 30–32. On Chinese exclusion’s impact on U.S. immigration law in general, see Lucy Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers: Chinese Immigrants and the Making of Modern Immigration Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

8. See also Jennifer Gee (chapter 5) and Judy Yung (chapter 7) in this book.

9. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 9; See also Judy Yung, *Unbound Voices: A Documentary History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
10. Robert Lee, *Orientalism—Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1999), 88–89; George A. Peffer, *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here: Chinese Female Immigration before Exclusion* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 28–42; Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874–1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 14.
11. Act of March 3, 1875, 18 Stat. 477.
12. John Wise, Collector of Customs, to W. F. Thompson, Feb. 26, 1895, "General Correspondence from the Office of Collector of Customs," RG 36, Records of the U.S. Bureau of Customs, Port of San Francisco, National Archives—Pacific Region (hereafter "General Correspondence").
13. John Wise, Collector of Customs, to R. R. Swain, Esq., Feb. 14, 1895, in "General Correspondence."
14. Lau Dai Moy, July 17, 1917, File 16327/3-3, Chinese Arrival Files, San Francisco, National Archives—Pacific Region.
15. Wen-hsien Chen, "Chinese Immigration under Both Exclusion and Immigration Laws" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1940), 201.
16. Leong Cum, 5-12-84/SS *Oceanic*, Chinese Arrival Files, San Francisco, National Archives—Pacific Region.
17. W. Chen, "Chinese Immigration," 201.
18. Interview with Mary Lee, Feb. 20, 1990.
19. John P. Jackson to the Secretary of the Treasury, March 30, 1899, File 53108/9-B, Subject Correspondence, RG 85, Records of the U.S. I.N.S., National Archives, Washington, D.C.
20. Jow Ah Yeong, File 10-23-85/180, Chinese Arrival Files, National Archives—Pacific Region.
21. File 4098, Oct. 15, 1901, Chinese Segregated Records, Chinese General Correspondence, RG 85, Records of the U.S. I.N.S., National Archives, Washington, D.C.
22. Oscar Greenhalg to Walter S. Chance, March 11, 1899, File 52730/84, Subject Correspondence, RG 85, Records of the U.S. I.N.S., National Archives, Washington, D.C.
23. *Ex parte Chin King; Ex parte Chan San Hee*, 35 Federal Reporter 354 (C.C. D. Ore. 1888); *In re Chung Toy Ho and Wong Choy Sin*, 42 F. 398 (D. Ore. 1890); Chan, "Exclusion of Chinese Women," 114–20.
24. In 1910, 344 Chinese women were admitted. In 1924, 1,284 women were admitted. See U.S. Bureau of Immigration, *Annual Reports* (1910, 1924).
25. Liu, "A Comparative Demographic Study," 233; H. Chen, "Chinese Immigration into the United States," 201.
26. McKeown, "Transnational Chinese Families," 74, 78.
27. U.S. Bureau of Immigration, *Annual Report* (1910–1924).
28. Chan, "Exclusion of Chinese Women," 114.
29. U.S. Bureau of Immigration, *Annual Report* (1925), 23.
30. On the gendered character of U.S. immigration law in general, see Donna Gabaccia, *From the Other Side—Women, Gender, and Immigrant Life in the U.S., 1820–1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 26.
31. The case continued in 1916. See Donaldina Cameron to Commission of Immigration, Jan. 26, 1916, File 14894/2-2, Chinese Arrival Files, San Francisco, National Archives—Pacific Region.

32. E. J. Sims to I.N.S. District Director, April 21, 1942, File 38813/7-16, Chinese Arrival Files, San Francisco, National Archives—Pacific Region.

33. Act of Sept. 22, 1922 (42 Stat. 1021); Chan, "Exclusion of Chinese Women," 128-29.

34. Section 15, Immigration Act of 1924, 43 Stat. 153, Rule 18, "Maintenance of Status," U.S. Department of Labor, *Treaty, Laws, and Rules Governing the Admission of Chinese*, Rules of October 1, 1926 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1926), 75; W. Chen, "Chinese Immigration," 236.

35. E. C. Benson, Immigrant Inspector to Commissioner, Oct. 17, 1932, File 12020/21693, Chinese Departure Files, San Francisco, RG 85, Records of the U.S. I.N.S., National Archives—Pacific Region (hereafter Chinese Departure Files).

36. E. C. Benson to Commissioner, March 17, 1933, File 12020/21693, Chinese Departure Files.

37. Edward L. Haff, "Request to Apprehend," April 11, 1934, File 12020/21693, Chinese Departure Files.

38. The record does not indicate how Benson finally tracked down the couple, but it appears the lead was related to news of the birth of their sixth child in 1937. E. C. Benson to District Director, July 29, 1937, File 12020/21693, Chinese Departure Files.

39. *Ibid.* Interestingly, Benson appears to have taken pity on the couple and recommended that the bond be reduced from its normal \$3,000 to a more reasonable \$500.

40. *Haff v. Yung Poy*, 68 Federal Reporter (2d series) 203 (9th Cir. 1933), as cited in "Brief for Defendant *In re Ngoon Shee*," Sept. 20, 1937, File 12020/21693, Chinese Departure Files.

41. Order No. 22, Nov. 8, 1933, "Chinese General Orders," File 55853/354, Records of the U.S. I.N.S., I.N.S. History Office, Washington, D.C. My thanks to Marian Smith, I.N.S. historian, for access to this file.

42. W. W. Brown to District Director, Oct. 22, 1927, File 12020/21693, Chinese Departure Files.