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Island was self-published in 1980 with partial funding from the Zellerbach Family Fund and the Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, as well as the assistance of the San Francisco Study Center and Chinese Culture Foundation of San Francisco under the publisher's name—HOC DOI, which stands for "History of Chinese Detained on Island." It went into a second printing in 1983 and was republished by the University of Washington Press in 1991.

In this revised edition sixty-nine poems in the main text have been combined with the sixty-six poems in the appendix into one section. Chinese poems that had been found on the walls of the immigration stations at Ellis Island in New York and at Victoria, B.C. in Canada are also included. Charles Egan, David Chuenyan Lai, Marlon K. Hom, and Ellen Yeung helped with the new translations and corrected any errors in the poems based on a report commissioned by the Angel Island Immigration Foundation. The historical introduction is rewritten to include the new research that has been done since *Island* was first published; excerpts of oral histories are replaced with twenty full profiles and stories drawn from our oral history collection and the immigration files at the National Archives, San Francisco).

Unlike the first edition of *Island*, this revised edition uses the real names of our interviewees and includes photographs of them. Volunteers pored over twenty-seven rolls of microfilm that had been scanned by Ancestry.com in an effort to determine the actual detention time, exclusions, and appeals for Chinese applicants at Angel Island (see tables 1 and 2 in the appendix). The bibliography is updated; a map showing the emigrant districts in Guangdong has been added, as well as a glossary of Chinese names and terms mentioned in the book.

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laborers for ten years and barred Chinese from becoming naturalized U.S. citizens. At the same time, the federal government established the Court of Indian Offenses to prosecute Native Americans for practicing "heathenish rites" and ordered that Indian children be removed from their families and placed in boarding schools designed to strip them of their Indian identity and assimilate them into white society. It was in this oppressive racial climate that Chinese exclusion was legislated into federal law.

The Chinese Exclusion Act heralded a change in the nation's immigration policy, from one that had been free and unrestricted to one of restriction and exclusion. In subsequent years, Congress passed additional laws to bar South Asians, Japanese, Koreans, and Filipinos and to limit immigration from southern and eastern European countries.³ For the first time in U.S. history, members of a specific immigrant group were refused entry on the basis of their race and class. Only government officials, merchants, students, teachers, travelers, and those claiming U.S. citizenship were exempted. The Exclusion Act was extended and revised several times over subsequent years, closing loopholes and becoming stricter in its provisions and enforcement. As one Chinese immigrant remarked in 1904, when Congress extended the law indefinitely, "They call it exclusion, but it is not exclusion, it is extermination."⁴ In 1887, only ten Chinese were admitted into the country.

The exclusion laws, which were not repealed until 1943, had a devastating impact on the Chinese community in America. Its population plummeted from 105,000 in 1880 to 77,000 in 1940, and many men were forced to endure long separations from their wives and children in China. Chinatowns became "bachelor societies" with all the attendant social vices—prostitution, gambling, illegal drugs, and tong wars—and Chinese Americans everywhere were made to feel like social pariahs and second-class citizens.

"TAKING THE CROOKED PATH"

During these same years, however, life in China was becoming increasingly difficult. As political and economic conditions in China continued to decline under the pressures of Western imperialism, and as fighting flared between warlords, followed by internal rivalry between Nationalists and Communists in the 1920s and a full-scale war with Japan in the 1930s, many people were willing to sacrifice their life savings and risk exclusion in the hope of making better lives in America. Some Chinese traveled to Canada, Mexico, or the Caribbean islands and were then smuggled into the United States. Many more took the "crooked path" by falsely claiming to be members of the exempt classes—most often merchants or U.S. citizens. As one

3 The Immigration Act of 1917 denied entry to immigrants from the "Asiatic Barred Zone," which encompassed India, Burma, Siam, the Malay States, Arabia, Afghanistan, Russia, and the Polynesian Islands. The Immigration Act of 1924, which set annual quotas for each immigrant group, was designed to limit arrivals from southern and eastern Europe. It also closed the door on Japanese and Korean immigration by denying admission to all aliens who were "ineligible to citizenship." The Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 changed the status of Filipinos from American nationals to aliens and assigned the Philippines a measly quota of fifty immigrants per year.

4 Chan Kiu Sing, cited in Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, 302.

former detainee put it, "We didn't want to come illegally, but we were forced to by the exclusion laws. If we told the truth, it won't work, so we had to take the crooked path."⁵

A lucrative business in false papers sprang up on both sides of the Pacific. Chinese companies in the United States sold fictitious partnerships to immigrants seeking to claim merchant status. Chinese entering the country for the first time or returning from visits to China often claimed more sons than they had in order to create immigration slots that could be sold to prospective migrants known as "paper sons"—individuals who were offspring not in reality but on paper only.⁶ The 1906 earthquake and fire, which destroyed the city hall and all of San Francisco's birth records, enabled many more Chinese to claim birthright and derivative citizenships. So successful were they at circumventing the Chinese exclusion laws that more Chinese immigrants were admitted into the United States during the exclusion period (303,000) than in the period before exclusion (258,000).⁷ Chinese immigrants and immigration officials both estimated that 80 to 90 percent of these applicants were most likely paper sons or paper daughters.

U.S. immigration officials were aware of the methods used by Chinese immigrants to evade the exclusion laws. According to Luther Steward, acting commissioner of immigration, "If their claims [as natives of Chinese descent] are true, every Chinese woman who had ever resided in the U.S. would have had in excess of fifty children."⁸ They also pointed to the preponderance of claimed sons over claimed daughters as evidence of deception. The Immigration Service reacted with harsh measures. Frequent sweeps through Chinese business establishments, schools, and churches ensnared illegal immigrants. During the 1920s, the Chinese community complained of a "veritable Reign of Terror" against them.⁹ The common sight of immigration officials dressed in green uniforms arresting Chinese gave rise to the Cantonese term *luk yi*, or "green clothes man," which eventually became the colloquial name for a police officer. At the port of entry, immigrant inspectors held all Chinese claims for right of admission suspect until applicants' identities could be verified through cross-examinations. Designed to exclude rather than to admit, routine interrogations of new arrivals became more intensive and detailed.

The Chinese viewed the exclusion laws and regulations as unfair and discriminatory and termed the statutes *kelü*, meaning "tyrannical laws." They addressed numerous complaints to the U.S. government through diplomatic channels, objecting to the harsh treatment of the Chinese in general and protesting in particular the suspicious and discourteous behavior of immigration officials toward women and members of the exempt classes.¹⁰ In 1892, after Congress passed the Geary Act to extend the exclu-

5 Ted Chan interview.

6 In the 1920s, the average cost of a partnership was \$1,000, while the going rate for paper son slots was \$1,500 to \$2,000.

7 Lee and Yung, *Angel Island*, 76.

8 Committee Representing the Down Town Association of San Francisco, "Transcript of Stenographic Notes Taken on the Occasion of a Visit Paid the Angel Island Immigration Station, June 6, 1911," file 52961/24-D, Central Office Subject Correspondence and Case Files, RG 85, NARA-DC.

9 Erika Lee, *At America's Gates*, 228.

sion law for another ten years and, additionally, to require that all Chinese aliens register for certificates of residence or risk deportation, the entire Chinese community refused to comply, hoping that the U.S. Supreme Court would rule in its favor. Instead, the high court declared the law constitutional. The Chinese lost that legal battle but were able to claim victory in the 1905 boycott of U.S. goods, which started in Shanghai and quickly spread to other Chinese cities and overseas Chinese communities. The boycott succeeded in forcing the U.S. government to relax some of its more objectionable regulations.¹¹

From the late 1880s until 1910, Chinese ship passengers arriving at San Francisco were detained in a two-story shed at the Pacific Mail Steamship Company dock (known to Cantonese immigrants as *muk uk*, or "wooden house"), until immigrant inspectors could examine them and determine the validity of their claims. As many as four hundred to five hundred people at a time were crammed into the ramshackle facility with no access to sunshine, fresh air, or exercise. Chinese community leaders, alarmed at the unsafe and unsanitary conditions of the structure, complained frequently to U.S. officials. According to an editorial published in the *Chinese World* newspaper, "The mistreatment of us Chinese confined there was worse than for jailed prisoners. The walls were covered with poems of anguish; traces of tears soaked the floor. There were even some who could not endure the cruel abuse and took their own lives. . . . Those seeing this cannot help but feel aggrieved and gnash their teeth in anger." Some grew so frustrated that they risked their lives to escape. In the fall of 1908 alone, thirty-two Chinese succeeded in escaping from the shed by cutting a hole in the wall.¹²

Upon investigation, the Bureau of Immigration declared the shed "a veritable fire trap" and the deplorable conditions beyond repair. It recommended that a new immigration station be erected on Angel Island to better accommodate the growing numbers of aliens, chiefly Chinese and other Asians. The subsequent decision to relocate the station to Angel Island was not altogether humanitarian. Officials also felt that the island location would prevent Chinese immigrants from being coached by friends and relatives on the outside as well as protect Americans from contagious diseases that Asians allegedly carried. Moreover, the immigration station, like Alcatraz prison, would be escape-proof.¹³

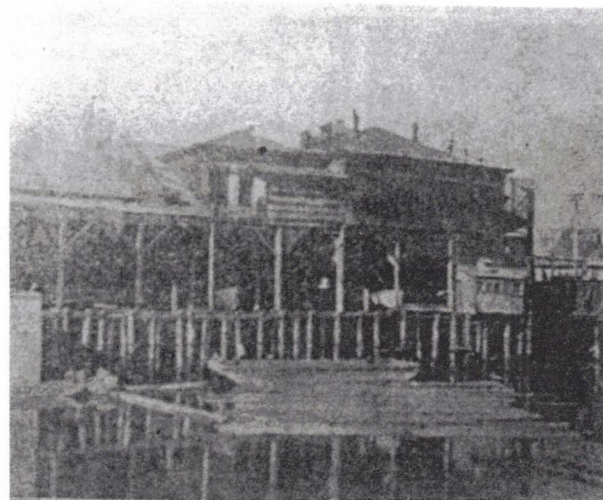


FIG. 1.4

Pacific Mail Steamship Company detention shed at Pier 40. Source: *Chinese World*, January 21, 1913, 3.

- 10 U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, *Annual Report*, 1904-5, 81; *Chinese World*, May 2, 1910, 3.
- 11 Tsai, *China and the Overseas Chinese*, 121-22.
- 12 *Chinese World*, January 22, 1910, 3; *San Francisco Call*, September 9, 1908, 4, and November 29, 1908, 17.
- 13 Richard Taylor to Commissioner-General of Immigration, March 25, 1909, file 52270/21, Central Office Subject Correspondence and Case Files, RG 85, NARA-DC; H. H. North to George C. Perkins, December 7, 1903, box 1, Hart Hyatt North Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

FIG. 1.5

Administration building of the Angel Island Immigration Station, c. 1915. Courtesy of California State Parks, 2014.



- 14 Such lavish praise for the immigration station was published in the local newspapers before it was even opened: "Indeed, the newcomers from foreign shores, will probably think they have struck paradise when they emerge from the steerage quarters of an ocean liner and land at the summer resort which the Immigration Bureau has provided for them." *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 18, 1907, 4.

- 15 M. W. Glover to Acting Commissioner of Immigration, November 21, 1910, file 52961/26F, and Acting Commissioner Luther C. Steward to Commissioner-General of Immigration, December 19, 1910, Central Office Subject Correspondence and Case Files, RG 85, NARA-DC; *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 8, 1920, 52, and November 1, 1922, 8.

- 16 After the fire, the detention center was moved to temporary quarters at 801 Silver Avenue, relocated to Sharp Park in the spring of 1942, and finally settled in the Appraiser's Building at 630 Sansome Street in 1944.

On January 21, 1910, the "finest immigration station in the world" opened at Angel Island, despite complaints by Chinatown leaders that its location was inconvenient for witnesses.¹⁴ The government quickly discovered that the station's insular location was far from satisfactory. Fresh water was scarce, and the station was expensive to operate since all essentials had to be shipped from the mainland. A few months after the facility opened, the authorities already had second thoughts. Surgeon Melvin Glover and Acting Commissioner of Immigration Luther Steward submitted reports highly critical of the many physical and sanitary drawbacks in the design and construction of the hospital and immigration station. In 1920, Commissioner of Immigration Edward White declared that the facility's structures were "virtual tinderboxes" and proposed that the station be moved back to the mainland in order to cut expenses. Two years later, Commissioner-General of Immigration W. W. Husband called the Angel Island buildings "the worst immigration station I have ever seen, . . . filthy and unfit for habitation."¹⁵ But it was not until November of 1940, three months after a fire destroyed the administration building, that the government finally abandoned the site and moved the immigration station back to San Francisco.¹⁶



"HUNDREDS OF DESPOTIC ACTS"

The Angel Island Immigration Station proved to be a global crossroads for immigrants from eighty countries around the world. Two-thirds of the newcomers came from China and Japan, but there were also immigrants from India, Korea, Russia, the Philippines, Great Britain, Germany, Spain, Mexico, Central and South America, the Pacific Islands, Australia, and New Zealand.¹⁷ From the moment that their ships landed in San Francisco, it became apparent that their treatment and their chances of being admitted into the country all hinged on immigration policies that discriminated against individuals on the basis of race, class, gender, and nationality.

The differential treatment began during primary inspection, when immigration and medical officials climbed aboard the ships to inspect the papers and health of all the passengers and crew. First-class passengers, who were mostly white and wealthy, were given a cursory examination in the privacy of their cabins. They, along with returning residents and those traveling in second class, were usually allowed to land directly from the ship. Third-class and steerage passengers, who were mainly Asians and poor, along with sick passengers and anyone whose papers were in question, were

FIG. 1.6

Fire in 1940 that destroyed the administration building. Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

¹⁷ See map and table 2 in Lee and Yung, *Angel Island*, 2–3, 328–29.



FIG. 1.7
People boarding the *Angel Island* ferry, 1920. The building on the left is the baggage shed where the belongings of detainees were stored. Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

all required to take the ferry to Angel Island for a more thorough inspection. Most non-Asians were thus able to avoid Angel Island altogether or had a very short stay there. In contrast, at least half of the Chinese passengers were usually transported to Angel Island and detained there for weeks and months while awaiting decisions on their applications.¹⁸

Upon arriving at Angel Island, passengers deposited their luggage in the baggage shed and were shepherded to the immigration station. From then on, segregation policies were strictly enforced to create spatial distance between the races and to protect whites from the “contamination” of Asians. Men and women, including husbands and wives, were separated and not allowed to see or communicate with each other until their cases had been settled. Children under age twelve were assigned to the care of their mothers. There were also separate living quarters, dining halls and eating times, recreation areas, and hospital entrances and wards—all designed to keep the different classes, races, and genders apart. Superior detention quarters and dining facilities and better food and treatment for whites reflected the racial favoritism embedded in U.S. immigration policies.

18 See table 1 in the appendix.



FIG. 1.8
Chinese detainees on the hospital
steps. Courtesy of National
Archives, Washington, D.C.

The first stop for the new arrivals was the administration building, which housed the registration rooms, offices, medical exam room, four dining rooms, dormitories for employees, and detention quarters for one hundred people. There they were segregated into waiting areas, given a quick look-over, registered, and assigned to their living quarters. Chinese and Japanese men were kept in separate sections of the detention barracks; all others, including women and children, were housed on the second floor of the administration building in segregated quarters.

The next day, they were taken to the hospital, located northeast of the administration building, for the medical exam. While non-Asians were

FIG. 1.9

Chinese women's infirmary.
Courtesy of National Archives,
Washington, D.C.



given a cursory line inspection and eye exam for any medical defects or signs of trachoma, Asian immigrants were subjected to more intensive and invasive examinations of their blood and waste products intended to detect traces of intestinal parasites that they were known to carry. Before 1910, immigrants could be excluded for having such "loathsome and dangerously contagious diseases" as trachoma, tuberculosis, syphilis, gonorrhea, and leprosy. In 1910, *uncinariasis* (hookworm infection) and *filariasis* (threadworm infection) were added to the list of excludable diseases, and in 1917, *clonorchiasis* (liver fluke infection) was also classified as reason for exclusion. Because of poor sanitation in rural parts of Asia, immigrants from China, Japan, Korea, and India were most commonly diagnosed with these parasitic diseases and denied entry. The men were required to strip naked in order to reveal any abnormalities. Women were not required to disrobe, unless the doctors detected specific signs of disease. However, if there were any doubts about the claimed age of an applicant, both male and female applicants were subjected to a nude inspection of their body parts, which caused great anguish among the Chinese. Unaccustomed to exposing themselves in public, many, like Mr. Leung, felt "red faced and hot eared" during the exam. A group of female students complained bitterly about the rude nurses who demanded they produce stool specimens on the spot.¹⁹

The Chinese reacted strongly to these humiliating and discriminatory procedures. An editorial in the *Chinese Defender* sarcastically accused the Public Health Service of inventing the hookworm diagnosis as a way of barring Chinese entry to the country. "So arriving immigrants now have

19 Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 179–203; Mr. Leung interview; Chen Wen-hsien, "Chinese under Both Exclusion and Immigration Laws," 392–95.

hookworms. Somebody must have stayed awake nights to think that out; it surely was a stroke of genius!"²⁰ After considerable protest from Chinese organizations and among diplomatic circles, the U.S. government reclassified the parasitic diseases and allowed immigrants to seek medical treatment at the immigration hospital, but at their own expense. It is no wonder that Asian immigrants had higher rates of medical exclusion, longer stays on the island, and more added expenses than their European counterparts. Those fortunate enough to pass the medical hurdle returned to their dormitories to await hearings on their applications.

"LAWS HARSH AS TIGERS"

During the early years of the immigration station's operations, this waiting period could stretch into months and became a source of many complaints. By the mid-1920s, however, the delay averaged two to three weeks. Overall, the median days of detention for Chinese immigrants was sixteen days.²¹ The Chinese also complained that the examination procedure for Chinese applicants and witnesses was unfair. In response, the Immigration Service modified regulations to require that Chinese cases be heard by Boards of Special Inquiry instead of by just one inspector. This change put Chinese on the same footing with other aliens. The board was made up of two immigrant inspectors and a stenographer. It was not bound by technical rules of procedure or evidence as applied by the federal courts, but it was allowed to use any means it deemed fit to ascertain the legitimacy of the immigrant's application to enter the United States under the Chinese exclusion acts and general immigration laws.²² For Chinese applicants, this meant longer and more exhaustive interrogations than for any other immigrant group on Angel Island.

Chinese immigrants who claimed merchant status were asked to provide detailed documentation of their business activities and volume of merchandise, a list of all partners, and two white witnesses to testify on their behalf. Their appearance, handwriting, clothing, and hands (whether callous or smooth) were all used as evidence to determine whether they were really merchants or were instead laborers in disguise. Wong Chung Hong, the first recorded person to be admitted into the country through Angel Island, met all of these criteria. He showed immigration officials his "section 6" exempt-class certificate signed by the Chinese viceroy and U.S. consul general in Canton, verifying his status as a merchant. Moreover, he was dressed in richly embroidered robes and had \$500 in U.S. currency that he planned to invest in a grocery business. Inspector Lorenzen noted that the applicant's appearance was "conclusively" not that of a laborer, and

20 *Chinese Defender*, November 1910, 1, as quoted in Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 192.

21 Commissioner of Immigration Luther Seward to the Commissioner-General of Immigration, January 9, 1911, file 52999/44-B, Central Office Subject Correspondence and Case Files, RG 85, NARA-DC; *Chinese World*, November 8, 1913, 3, and March 1, 1916, 3; table 1 in the appendix.

22 *U.S. Immigration Service Bulletin* 1, no. 12 (March 1, 1919); Edward Haff, *Boards of Special Inquiry*, 2nd ser., Lecture No. 24, November 26, 1934; Emery Sims interview.

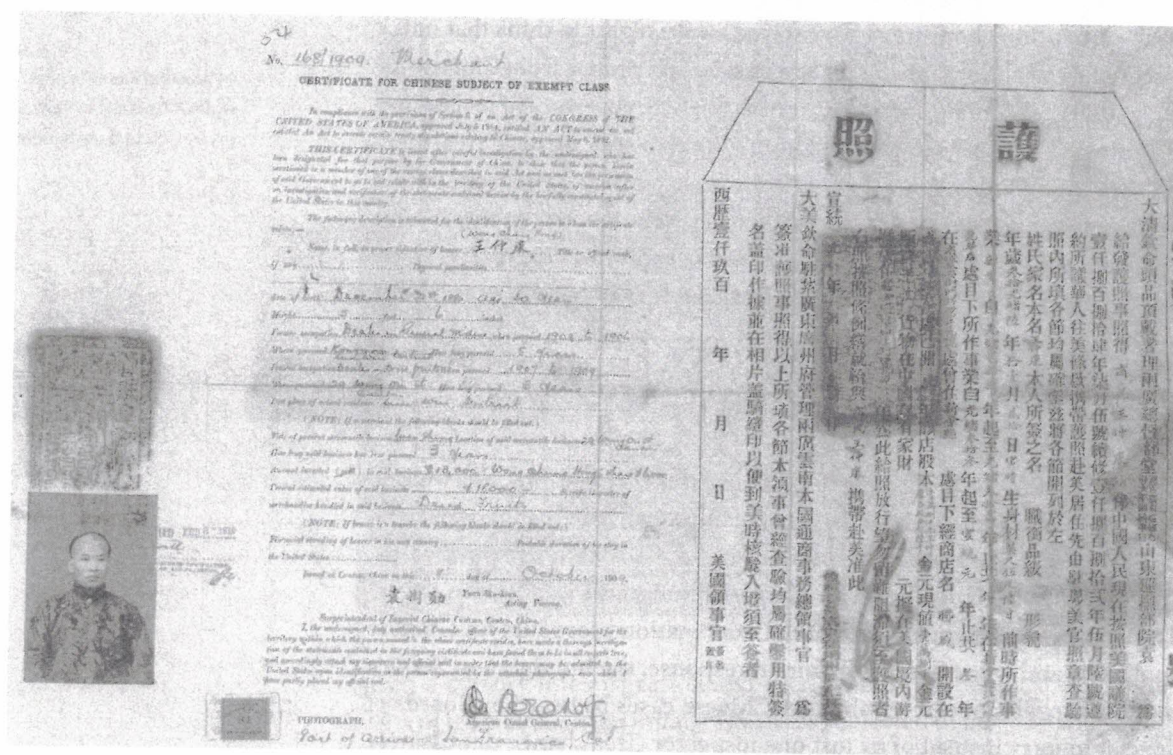


FIG. 1.10
Wong Chung Hong's "section 6"
certificate attesting to his exempt
status as a merchant, September
11, 1909. Courtesy of National
Archives, San Francisco.

Wong was landed three days later.²³ Once admitted, however, a merchant's dealings with the Immigration Service did not end. All Chinese businesses were required to send an up-to-date list of their partners to immigration authorities on a regular basis, and investigators were often sent into the Chinese community to ascertain whether merchants were maintaining the exempt status under which they had been admitted. If they were not, they could face deportation.

By the 1920s, more Chinese were claiming to be sons of native-born citizens than any other immigration status. Because there were usually no documents to corroborate or disprove these claims, the scope and method of examination for Chinese cases were different from those for other nationalities. Evidence was often confined to the detailed testimony given by the applicant and his witness concerning family history, relationships, living arrangements, and everyday life in the village. Applicants were sometimes asked to identify family pictures and draw maps of their ancestral villages and the surrounding countryside. Any discrepancies in the answers of the applicant and the witness could mean exclusion and deportation. In the absence of any witnesses, as in the case of a returning native U.S. citizen who claimed to have left for China at a young age, authorities asked questions that tested his English-language proficiency and recollections of life

²³ File 10382/54 (Wong Chung Hong), Immigration Arrival Investigation Case Files, RG 85, NARA-SF.

in America: "Have you ever ridden in a streetcar?" "Does it snow here in winter?" "Do you know of any Chinese restaurants or joss houses in this city?" "Which store was opposite the one in which you lived?" "Do Jackson Street and Dupont Street run in the same direction?"²⁴

Chinese women, who were entering the country primarily as the dependent wives or daughters of a merchant or U.S. citizen, were given a harder time than the men. They had to first prove to immigration officials that their husbands or fathers still qualified as members of the exempt classes. They had to also prove that their identities and relationships were real. Lacking official records of their births or marriages, the women were required to answer detailed and intimate questions about their living environments and marital relations. A wife who had moved to her husband's village only briefly before immigrating to the United States could have difficulty answering these questions. Women suspected of being prostitutes or having committed an act of "moral turpitude" were subjected to longer interviews and asked more intrusive questions about their sexual history than were men.

Aware of the interrogation procedures employed at Angel Island, Chinese immigrants prepared by memorizing information provided to them and their witnesses by immigration brokers months before the voyage. Facts pertaining to family history, home life, and even personal habits were studied from coaching books, which could run several dozen pages. This was particularly true when applicants and their witnesses claimed fictitious relationships. One interviewee told us that her mother, who was illiterate, committed the coaching book to memory by putting it into a song. "She had another woman read it to her, and she would sing it to herself like she would Chinese opera," said Ruth Chan Jang. Coaching papers were frequently taken aboard ship for review and thrown overboard or destroyed as the ship approached the U.S. harbor. Mr. Wong, who was twelve years old when detained on Angel Island in 1933, told us that his father had repeatedly nagged him about studying the coaching book well. He even hid coaching notes in his son's cap for him to review. Wong's worst moment at Angel Island came when other children got hold of his cap and started playing catch with it. "They didn't understand why I was so upset, but I was scared to tears!"²⁵

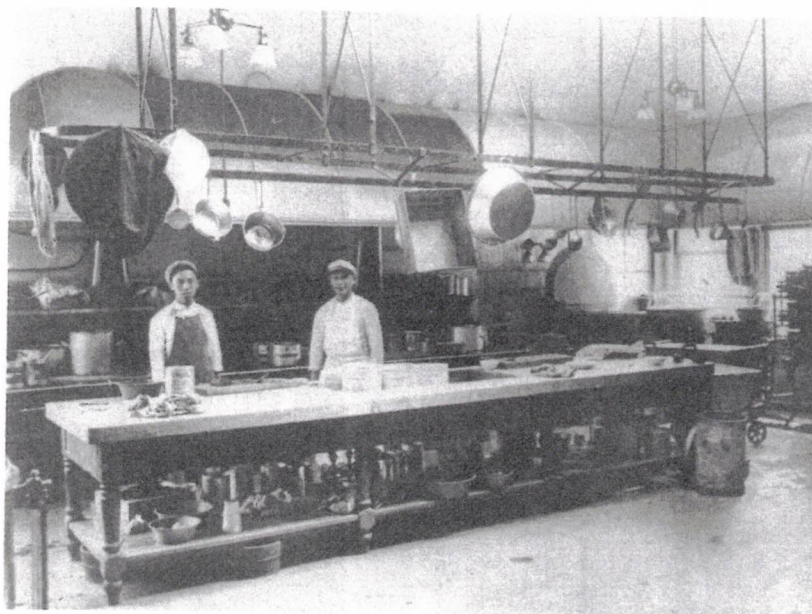
Some inspectors were strict but fair, others delighted in matching wits with the applicant, and still others used intimidation to test applicants. From the perspective of immigration officials, such actions were necessary to ferret out discrepancies and frauds. Chinese, however, viewed the dreaded interrogation process as unreasonable and harsh. Over the years, they persistently complained that the detailed questions asked of them had no apparent relevance to the board's objectives. Some queries would have

24 Jorae, *The Children of Chinatown*, 25.

25 Ruth Chan Jang interview; Mr. Wong interview.

FIG. 1.13

Chinese kitchen staff. Courtesy of National Archives, Washington, D.C.



grand jury exposed a smuggling ring that was netting hundreds of thousands of dollars each year. Employees at Angel Island were caught stealing and manipulating Chinese records in connection with illegal entries. Duplicate copies of records were being sold to Chinese for \$100, and immigrant inspectors were charging \$200 for substituting a photograph in a Chinese file. The grand jury indicted thirty people, including immigrant inspectors, lawyers, and Chinese immigration brokers. Twenty-five employees were dismissed, transferred, or forced to resign as a result of the investigation.²⁶

A typical proceeding usually lasted two or three days, longer if witnesses had to be interviewed in distant cities or if applicants and witnesses had to be recalled and reinterrogated about inconsistencies in their answers. Applicants were asked two hundred to one thousand questions, and transcripts ran between twenty to eighty typewritten pages.²⁷ During these hearings, memories might fail, wrong answers might be given, and unforeseen questions might be asked. Hence, it was often necessary to smuggle coaching information into the detention quarters so that there would be no discrepancies. One method was to hide coaching notes in gift packages sent by relatives in the city. Immigration officials who routinely inspected letters and packages found contraband messages inside hollow oranges, bananas, pork buns, and even peanuts whose shells had been pried apart and glued back together again. A second method involved the Chinese kitchen staff stopping by specified stores in Chinatown on their days off to pick up coaching messages left by relatives of detainees. For a small fee, they would smuggle the messages into the station and pass them at mealtimes to officers of the

²⁶ Erika Lee, *At America's Gate*, 198–200.

²⁷ Wen-hsien Chen, "Chinese under Both Exclusion and Immigration Laws," 107.

Self-governing Association (Zizhihui), a mutual aid organization formed by Chinese male detainees. The note was then taken upstairs to the detention barracks and delivered to the designated person.

In the event that someone was caught passing a note, everyone was instructed to help destroy the evidence. One such incident made the newspaper headlines in 1928. While escorting a Chinese girl to the dining room as the men were leaving, Chief Matron Mary L. Green saw the girl pick up a folded piece of paper dropped by one of the men. As soon as she seized the message from the girl and hid it in her dress, the men quickly turned and pounced on her. According to a newspaper account of the incident, "Fifty Chinese men attacked Mary L. Green. Her arms were pinioned and hands pulled her head back by her ears. They tore at her dress, ripping it away from her chest and body, fingers scratching the flesh, hands pummeling the woman's arms and shoulder—seeking at any cost a mysterious note. . . . The men found the note, tore it to bits. Then the bits disappeared, chewed and swallowed by the Orientals."²⁸ Another riot was reported in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on July 2, 1925, when Chinese detainees beat up a white attendant for being an informer. Soldiers from Fort McDowell were called in to quell the rioters with fixed bayonets.

If the applicant's testimony largely corroborated that of the witnesses, the authorities would render a favorable decision and land him or her. An unfavorable decision, however, would result in deportation, unless the applicant chose to appeal the decision to higher authorities in Washington, D.C., or the federal courts. Of all the immigrant groups on Angel Island, the Chinese were the most adept at taking advantage of the legal channels open to them, sparing no expense in the process. Many hired such well-known immigration attorneys as Joseph P. Fallon, George A. McGowan, Alfred L. Worley, and Oliver P. Stidger to prepare their applications and represent them at Angel Island. Attorney fees ran from \$100 to \$1,000, with an additional \$500 to \$700 if the case was appealed to Washington, D.C.²⁹

From 1910 to 1940, immigrant inspectors on Angel Island rejected 9 percent or 8,672 out of 95,687 Chinese applicants. Of these, 88 percent retained attorneys to appeal the decisions, and 55 percent of the appeals were successful. In many cases, higher authorities found that the interrogation process at Angel Island was unfair. Only 5 percent of all Chinese applicants ended up being deported, but because of the lengthy appeals process, 6 percent of the immigrants languished on Angel Island for more than a year before their cases were finally decided.³⁰

Kong Din Quong, a grandson of a native, holds the record for the longest known detention at the immigration station. He arrived on the *President Coolidge* on November 9, 1938, claiming to have been born on December

28 "Immigrants Fight Matron in Bay Riot," *San Francisco Examiner*, March 20, 1928, 4.

29 Wen-hsien Chen, "Chinese under Both Exclusion and Immigration Laws," 431.

30 See tables 1 and 2 in the appendix.

29, 1921—eight months after his father, a son of a native who was born in China, was first admitted into the United States. Based on its observations and physical exams of the applicant by three doctors, the Board of Special Inquiry concluded that Kong was several years older than he claimed to be and that he had been born before his father came to reside in the United States. Kong was denied admission on grounds that a father cannot transfer citizenship rights to his children until he becomes a resident of the United States. Kong's attempts to appeal his case to the U.S. district court and circuit court of appeals failed, and he was deported on December 4, 1940, after spending 756 days, or twenty-five months, in detention on Angel Island.³¹

Only one other immigrant group, South Asians (mostly Sikhs), had a higher rate of rejection and deportation than the Chinese. From 1910 to 1932, 25 percent of all Asian Indian applicants were rejected, usually on grounds that they had hookworms or were "likely to become public charges," a clause that applied to applicants with little funds or chances of finding employment. Lacking financial resources and the support of ethnic organizations and a home government, most did not appeal the decisions and were sent back to India.³²

At the opposite extreme, Japanese applicants had the shortest stay and the lowest rate of deportations (less than 1 percent), because Japan was a powerful nation at the time, having defeated China and Russia in two separate wars. To forestall Congress from passing legislation against Japanese immigration, in 1907–8 the Japanese government negotiated an understanding with the United States known as the Gentlemen's Agreement, whereby Japan would stop issuing passports to laborers. The agreement permitted all Japanese aliens in the United States to send for their wives and children, a privilege denied Chinese laborers under the Chinese Exclusion Act. Armed with passports issued by the Japanese government and marriage and birth records proving their right to enter, the overwhelming majority, including ten thousand picture brides, were admitted into the country within a day or two of their arrival.³³

Most of the Chinese applicants who were denied entry swallowed their disappointment and stolidly awaited their fate. According to the testimony of former detainees, quite a few committed suicide aboard returning ships or in the detention barracks, but our research turned up evidence of only a handful of suicide cases. On October 7, 1919, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that Fong Fook, who was en route from China to Mexico, hanged himself with a towel tied to a gas fixture after just a few days in detention. Lester Tom and Gerald Won, two boys who were detained on Angel Island in 1931 and 1936, respectively, recalled actually witnessing the suicides of

31 Based on an examination of 95,687 applicants who appeared in U.S. Department of Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Lists of Chinese*; also "In the Matter of Kong Din Quong on Habeas Corpus," file 22974, U.S. District Court, Northern District of California, Admiralty Case Files, 1851–1966, RG 21, NARA-SF; and "Kong Din Quong v. Hall, District Director of Immigration," No. 9250, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, 112 F.2d 96, 1940 U.S. App. LEXUS 4233 (Lexis Nexis Academic Web). According to Chen Wen-hsien, there were two cases of Chinese boys who had stayed in detention for more than three years—one for 1,136 days and the other for 1,635 days—but we were not able to verify her findings (see "Chinese under Both Exclusion and Immigration Laws, 405).

32 See Lee and Yung, *Angel Island*, chapter 4.

33 See *ibid.*, chapter 3.

34 *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 7, 1919, 7; *South China Morning Post*, May 1, 2004, C5; Edwar Lee interview, May 8, 1976; *Chinese World*, May 18, 1926, 4; Lee and Yung, *Angel Island*, 101–2; poems 64, 111, 112, and the suicide poem that Xie Chuang recalled on p. 282. For details of a suicide committed with chopsticks by a Chinese woman at the temporary immigration station in San Francisco, see file 41369/11–29 (Wong Shee), Immigration Arrival Investigation Case Files, RG 85, NARA-SF.

two men who hanged themselves in the lavatory because they could not face the prospect of deportation. Interpreter Edward Lee told us the story of a Chinese woman who was so distraught about being deported that "she sharpened a chopstick and stuck it in her brain through the ear and died." Her two alleged sons were landed immediately upon her death. At least two other Chinese women were known to have attempted suicide, one by jumping from the administration building and the other by trying to hang herself in the women's lavatory. Additional evidence was found in the poems carved into the barracks walls attesting to the deaths and suicides of fellow detainees.³⁴

"IMPRISONED IN THE WOODEN BUILDING DAY AFTER DAY"

At any one time, between two hundred and three hundred males and thirty to fifty females were detained at Angel Island. Most were new arrivals, but some were returning residents with questionable documents. Also

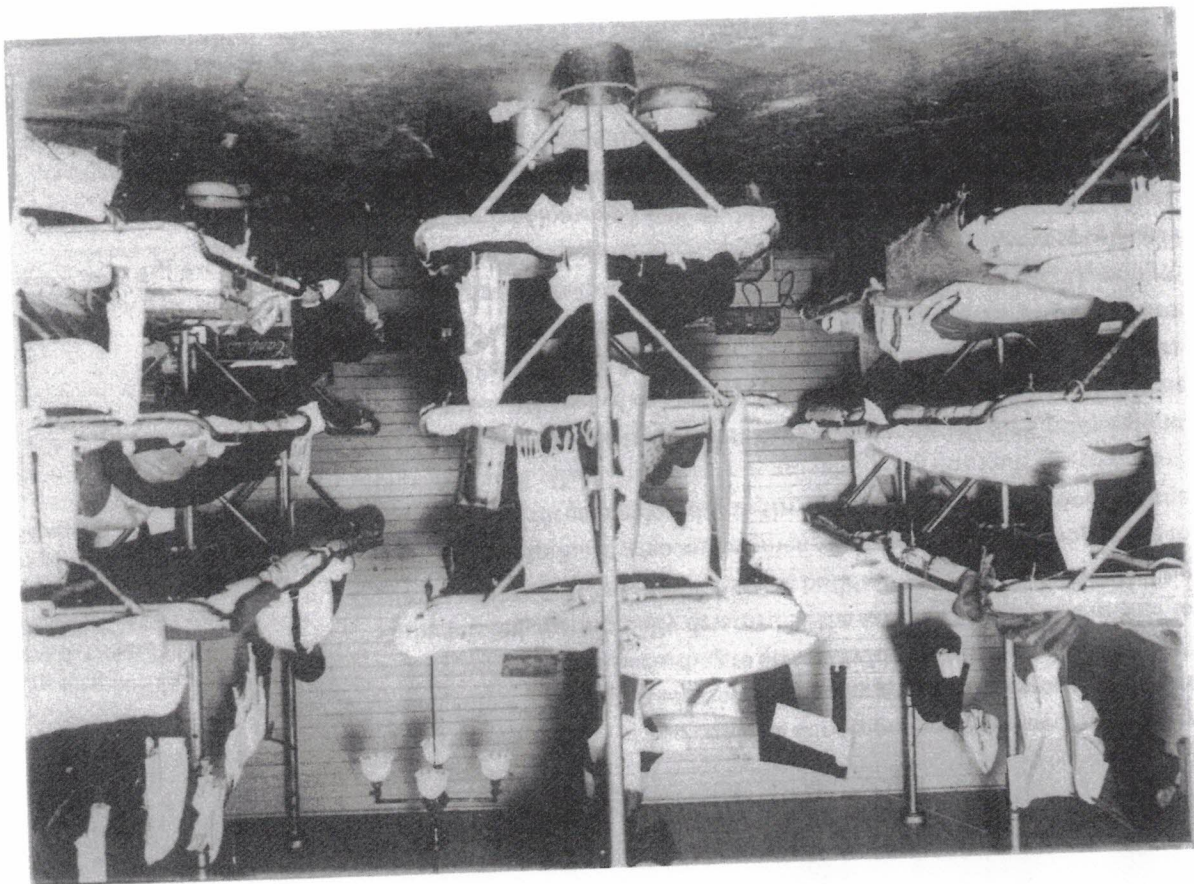


FIG. 1.14

Chinese men's dormitory, 1910.
Courtesy of California State Parks,
2014.



FIG. 1.15
Charles Schulze, immigrant
inspector, and Tye Leung,
interpreter and assistant matron,
1912. Courtesy of Theodore F.
Schulze.

confined were earlier arrivals whose applications had been denied and who were waiting decisions on their appeals, Chinese residents who had been arrested and sentenced to be deported, and transients en route to and from countries neighboring the United States, especially Mexico and Cuba. In 1932, for example, the detention center held more than four hundred Chinese refugees from Mexico waiting to be deported to China because of Mexico's Expulsion Order of 1931.³⁵

Men and women lived in separate, sparsely furnished communal rooms filled with rows of double-deck or triple-deck metal bunks. Each bunk had a blanket, mattress, and pillow. The rooms were dark, overcrowded, poorly ventilated, and fire hazards. Privacy was minimal. Chinese men generally were kept in two large rooms in the detention barracks under lock and key, with wire-meshed windows and barbed-wire fences to prevent escapes. Each room contained 192 beds, each measuring six feet long and two feet wide, and set two feet apart. The crowded conditions were deemed unsanitary and conducive to the spread of communicable diseases like meningitis, according to one study by the Public Health Service.³⁶

Chinese women, originally detained in the same building, were moved to the second story of the administration building sometime before 1911. The daily routine for both men and women was marked by "wake-up" calls in the morning, three meals a day in the dining hall, and "lights out" in the evening.

Guards sat outside the dormitories and generally left the Chinese alone. During the first year of operation, Tye Leung, an American-born Chinese from the Presbyterian Mission Home in San Francisco, was hired as interpreter and assistant to the matrons. The home was well known for rescuing Chinese prostitutes and abused slave girls, and Leung came highly recommended by its superintendent, Donaldina Cameron. She was specifically instructed by Commissioner H. H. North to look out for prostitutes attempting to enter the country. While working on Angel Island, Tye Leung met and fell in love with immigrant inspector Charles Frederick Schulze. Because of California's anti-miscegenation law, they had to go to the state of Washington to get married. In the prevailing racist atmosphere of the times, the two were soon forced to resign their positions. No Chinese-speaking

35 Camacho, *Chinese Mexicans*, 86.

36 Bolten, "Cerebrospinal Meningitis at Angel Island."



matron was ever hired to replace Tye Leung at Angel Island, but under pressure from the Japanese community, Fuku Terasawa was employed as a Japanese interpreter and matron from 1912 to 1925, during a period of the greatest influx of Japanese women to the United States.³⁷

Confined inside the dormitory, the men languished on their bunks, spending their waking hours daydreaming or worrying about the future. Some passed the time gambling, but stakes were usually small because inmates had little pocket money. The literate read Chinese newspapers sent from San Francisco and books brought from home. They must have also spent a great deal of time writing and carving hundreds of poems and pictures on the walls, usually under cover because of the stern regulations posted in the barracks: "This building belongs to the United States government. It is unlawful to write on or disfigure the walls or to destroy any property on these premises."³⁸ The signs evidently failed to deter them. By the late 1920s, a phonograph, Chinese opera records, and musical instruments purchased by the Self-governing Association were also available for their amusement. A separate, fenced, outdoor recreation yard that was open for most of the day except during the rainy season afforded the men some fresh air and exercise. Once a week, they were

FIG. 1.16
Chinese men's recreation yard.
Courtesy of California State Parks,
2014.

37 Lee and Yung, *Angel Island*, 81–82, 120–22; Yung, Chang, and Lai, *Unbound Voices*, 282–88.

38 Frank Hays, Inspector in Charge, to Edward White, Commissioner of Immigration, March 4, 1916, file 12030/24, Central Office Subject Correspondence and Case Files, RG 85, NARA-SF.



FIG. 1.17
Women out on a walk with
missionary worker Eleanor
Schoeraff (far right), c. 1930.
Courtesy of California State Parks,
2014.

escorted to the baggage shed at the dock, where they could select needed items from their luggage.

Women marked their time in detention differently. Many lacked formal education and were unable to read Chinese newspapers and books sent from San Francisco. Some knitted or did needlework. A few attended English-language and Americanization classes organized by social workers. Women and children were periodically allowed to walk the grounds in a supervised group—a privilege denied Chinese men. Although they did not form an organization as did the men, women told us that they supported one another in their own ways—by sharing food that had been sent by relatives in the city, reading and writing letters for those who were illiterate, consoling the aggrieved, and accompanying one another to the lavatory because they were afraid of seeing the ghosts of women who had committed suicide there. Chinese women were kept in the administration building that was destroyed in the 1940 fire, so we have no record of poems written by women, but more than one detainee recalled seeing many sad and bitter poems on the walls of the women's lavatory and dormitory.³⁹

Unlike the other nationalities, Chinese were not allowed visitors for fear they would collude on interrogations. Other than immigration officials,

39 Lee Puey You interview; Lee Suk Wan interview; and Connie Young Yu, "Rediscovered Voices," 134.



the outsider they saw most often was Deaconess Katharine Maurer, who had been appointed in 1912 by the Women's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church to tend to the welfare and needs of all immigrants on Angel Island. Her work was also supported by funds and gifts from the Daughters of the American Revolution. Maurer, who became known as the "Angel of Angel Island" and who was called "Ma" by the Chinese women, helped detainees write letters, taught them English, organized Christmas parties, and provided women and children with toiletries, clothing, sewing and knitting materials, books, and toys. Until she retired in 1951, she also distributed Bibles and promoted Christianity at the immigration station.⁴⁰

The San Francisco Chinese Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), at Maurer's request, also made regular visits to the men's detention barracks. From the 1920s until the station closed in 1940, visitors from the YMCA showed movies, taught English, brought newspapers and recreational equipment, and prepared the immigrants for life in America. Chinese clergymen often came on these visits to preach to the inmates.⁴¹ Sometimes staff from the Chinese Young Women's Christian Association would visit the women. However, neither Maurer nor these visitors could change the basic prison-

FIG. 1.18
Deaconess Katharine Maurer with women and children on rooftop of the administration building, c. 1930. Courtesy of California State Parks, 2014.

40 Lee and Yung, *Angel Island*, 64–66; Sakovitch, "Deaconess Katharine Maurer."

41 Among the most frequent visitors were the Reverend Daniel Wu of the Episcopal Mission, K. Y. Tse of the Presbyterian Mission, and B. Y. Leong of the Congregational Mission.



FIG. 1.19
A Chinese minister talking to
detainees in the recreation yard.
Courtesy of Chris K.D. Huie.

like conditions created by discriminatory exclusion laws, and, despite their persistence, they converted few inmates to Christianity.

"TO REDRESS GRIEVANCES AND AVENGE WRONGS"

The Chinese held at Angel Island understandably resented their long confinement, particularly because they knew that immigrants from other countries, like Japan and Russia, were processed and released within a day or two. Their disgruntlement was fueled by the enforced idleness and dismal conditions at the station. Unable to change or improve their situation, they frequently petitioned the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, Chinese Chamber of Commerce, and Chinese consul general for help. The first petition charging mistreatment was sent only a few days after the station opened in 1910.⁴²

The detainees' major complaint was the poor quality of food that they were served. The government awarded concessions for providing meals to private firms based on competitive bids, with the stipulation that less money be spent on meals for Asian detainees than for Europeans or employees.⁴³ In

42 *Chung Sai Yat Po* (Chinese American Daily), January 27, 1910, 2.

43 In 1909, concessionaires were allotted 14 cents per meal for Asian detainees, 15 cents for European detainees, and 25 cents for employees. See Architectural Resources Group and Daniel Quan Design, "Final Interpretive Plan," C5-C7.

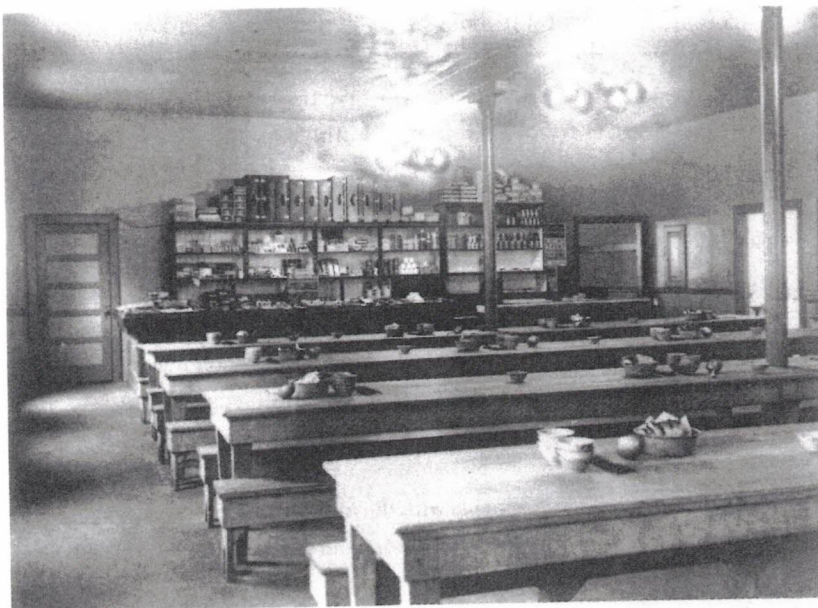


FIG. 1.20
Chinese dining hall with
concession in back, 1929. Courtesy
of San Francisco History Center,
San Francisco Public Library.



FIG. 1.21
Meals were noisy, crowded affairs
in the Chinese dining hall in the
administration building. Courtesy
of California Historical Society,
CHS2010.307.

1916, the average cost per Chinese meal dropped from 14 cents to 8 cents, and the quality of food got worse as a result. In response, male detainees protested by staging a disturbance in the dining hall, turning over their bowls and throwing utensils and food at the guards. There were enough of these disturbances to precipitate the posting of a sign in Chinese warning diners not to make trouble or spill food on the floor. In 1919, a full-fledged

riot broke out, and federal troops had to be called in from Fort McDowell on the east side of the island to restore order. A year later, authorities in Washington, D.C., finally decided to improve the situation, and the station began to serve better food. As reported in the *Chinese World* newspaper, the new menu after the riot was as follows:

BREAKFAST—Tea and rice with the following dishes: Pork with preserved stem cabbage, greens (Mon.); pork and mustard greens soup, fermented bean curd (Tue.); pork with greens, salted fish (Wed.); pork with dried bean sticks, plum sauce (Thur.); pork and winter melon soup, bean curd with soy sauce (Fri.); beef steamed with sweet pickles, greens (Sat.); bean vermicelli with pork, fermented bean paste (Sun.).

LUNCH—Biscuits, bread, and tea with the following: Pork congee (Mon.); sweet tapioca soup (Tue., Thur., Sat.); pork and fish congee (Wed.); pork congee (Fri.); pork noodles (Sun.).

DINNER—Tea and rice with the following: Bean vermicelli with pork, salted fish (Mon.); fish with dried lily flowers, preserved olives (Tue.); beef with potatoes (Wed.); beef with bean sprouts, salted fish (Thur.); codfish with dried lily flowers, preserved olives (Fri.); pork with white beans, preserved olives (Sat.); beef with turnips or cloud fungus, beef with onions, salted fish (Sun.).⁴⁴

44 *Chinese World*, March 19, 1920, 3-4. The newspaper published the following menu before the riot:
 "BREAKFAST—Tea, rice, pork with bok choy, winter melon, dried lily flowers, Chinese cabbage, mustard greens, or dried bean sticks, plus one small dish.
 LUNCH—Congee with pork and dried shrimps, congee with beef and dried bok choy, sweet congee with green beans, sweet congee with red beans, coffee and bread, or sweet tapioca soup.
 DINNER—Tea, rice, beef cooked with cabbage, dried bamboo shoots, potatoes or turnips, plus one side dish (salted fish, preserved olives, fermented bean curd, sweet pickles or plum sauce). On Friday, fresh fish or bean vermicelli with dried shrimp." See *Chinese World*, February 28, 1910, 3.

The men were better organized than the women. In 1918, they formed the Self-governing Association with the purpose of providing mutual aid and maintaining order in the barracks. Its Anglicized name, ironically, was Angel Island Liberty Association. Officers generally were elected from the people who had been detained the longest, particularly those whose cases were on appeal, and, on occasion, respected intellectuals. The scope of the association's activities varied from one administration to another. As new immigrants arrived, the officers welcomed them and oriented them to life on the island and the rules in the dormitory. With the meager funds collected from membership dues, the association bought records, books, school supplies, and recreational equipment for the detainees. When talent was available, it scheduled weekly skits, operas, or musical concerts for evening diversions. At times, officers organized classes for children, curtailed gambling, and arbitrated fights that broke out in the dormitory. If immigrants had complaints or requests, the organization's spokesman, who usually knew some English, negotiated with the authorities. For example, when Tet Yee was chairman of the Self-governing Association in 1932, he



FIG. 1.22

Drawing of a Chinese ancestral altar with stele in basket that was found on the second floor of the men's barracks. Chinese flags, a butterfly, and the following Chinese inscriptions appear in the drawing: Long live the Republic of China; China; Guangdong; Remember the 6th day of the 4th month (Qingming Festival); Society for Love of the Multitude (on stele); and Prosperity in bloom. Courtesy of Architectural Resources Group and Charles Egan.

negotiated successfully with immigration officials to provide Chinese detainees with toilet paper and soap as they did for other immigrant groups. The organization also maintained communication with the Chinese community in San Francisco and helped smuggle coaching notes into the barracks. It reflected the united and collective spirit of the male detainees and helped make life on the island more bearable for them.⁴⁵

Many other discouraged applicants vented their frustrations and lodged their complaints by writing poems on the walls as they waited for the results of their appeals. "There are tens of thousands of poems com-

45 Information about the Self-governing Association comes from interviews with Ted Chan, Tet Yee, Ja Kew Yuen, and Lee Show Nam.

posed on these walls. They are all cries of complaint and sadness." Some poems dwell on wives and families left behind and debts incurred in making the voyage. "My parents wait at the door but there is no news. / My wife and child wrap themselves in quilts, sighing with loneliness." Others reflect a strong sense of national consciousness, decrying the unjust exclusion laws and bemoaning a weak motherland incapable of intervening on their behalf. "I thoroughly hate the barbarians because they do not respect justice. / They continually promulgate harsh laws to show off their prowess. / They oppress the overseas Chinese and also violate treaties." There are also angry poems that speak of revenge. "The day our nation becomes strong, / I swear we will cut off the barbarians' heads." And farewell messages offer advice and encouragement to fellow travelers. "Let this be an expression of the torment that fills my belly. / Leave this as a memento to encourage fellow souls."⁴⁶ As the earliest literary expressions of Chinese immigrants, these poems not only bear witness to the indignities they suffered in coming to Gold Mountain but also serve as a reminder of the futility and folly of the exclusion laws themselves.

"ALWAYS REMEMBER THE TIME THEY SPENT HERE"

The irony of exclusion was that it did not improve the white workingman's lot. In reality, the Chinese were never a threat. At the peak of their immigration, they numbered about 1 percent of California's population. Unemployment remained high, and the wage level did not rise after the "cheap" competition had been virtually eliminated. In 1943, Congress repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act as a goodwill gesture to China, a U.S. ally in World War II. Chinese immigration resumed, albeit at the slow rate of 105 Chinese per year, and Chinese aliens were finally granted the right to naturalization. But the ordeal of interrogation and detention did not come to an end until 1952, when the burden of screening prospective immigrants shifted from U.S. immigration stations to U.S. consular officials overseas.

The irreparable damage of Chinese exclusion and incarceration was deep and long-lasting. Paper sons and paper daughters had to live out their lives under pseudo-identities, in constant fear of detection by immigration authorities. Unpleasant memories as well as their shaky legal status led many Chinese to fear the law, to avoid political activities, and to hide the truth about their immigration past from their children. Moreover, the feeling that they were allowed into this country only at the sufferance of the dominant white majority worked to foster alienation and delay their assimilation into the larger society. Most damaging were the psychological

46 Lines of poetry from poems 42, 65, 92, 118, and 114.

wounds inflicted by exclusion upon generations of Chinese Americans—the implication that they were racial inferiors, unwanted immigrants, and unassimilable aliens.

In 1956, in an effort to clear up the backlog of paper son cases and end the practice once and for all, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) established the Confession Program, whereby Chinese who admitted their fraudulent entry could have their status adjusted and their real names restored. The program wreaked havoc in the Chinese community, as those who confessed were asked to provide the names and addresses of their real and fictitious families as well as those of other illegal immigrants. The government also attempted to force confessions and deport those known to be “pro-Communists” by conducting immigration raids in Chinatown and subpoenaing family and district association records. In the end, only 11,336 people confessed to being paper sons or paper daughters, but the illegal status of an additional 19,124 people was exposed in the process.⁴⁷

It was not until Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1965 that the last vestige of racism was removed from U.S. immigration laws and Chinese immigration was put on a par with that of other nations. The floodgates opened, and thousands upon thousands of Chinese immigrants were admitted based on a system favoring family reunification, skilled and professional workers, and refugee resettlement. As a result, the Chinese population in the United States doubled every decade, growing from 237,000 in 1960 to 3.3 million in 2010, families were reunited, and a second generation of Chinese Americans emerged to realize the American Dream.

On the 130th anniversary of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the House of Representatives joined the Senate in passing a resolution introduced by Judy Chu, the first Chinese American woman elected to Congress, “expressing regret” for the Chinese Exclusion Acts. Senate Resolution 201 not only acknowledges that the discriminatory laws had “resulted in the persecution and political alienation of persons of Chinese descent, unfairly limited their civil rights, legitimized racial discrimination, and induced trauma that persists with the Chinese community today”; it also reaffirmed Congress’s commitment “to preserve and protect the civil rights of all people.”⁴⁸ The apology came too late for those who had been most directly affected by the exclusion laws, and it did not erase past wrongs or their effects. But by acknowledging a legislative mistake in retrospect, Congress has made it possible for Chinese Americans to reconcile with the dark secrets of their immigration past.

Discriminatory immigration laws are now a part of the past, but the lonely hulk of the Angel Island detention building, with its carved walls

47 Lau, *Paper Families*, 118.

48 Senate Resolution 201, 112th Congress, in 157 *Congressional Record*, S6352–54, October 6, 2011.

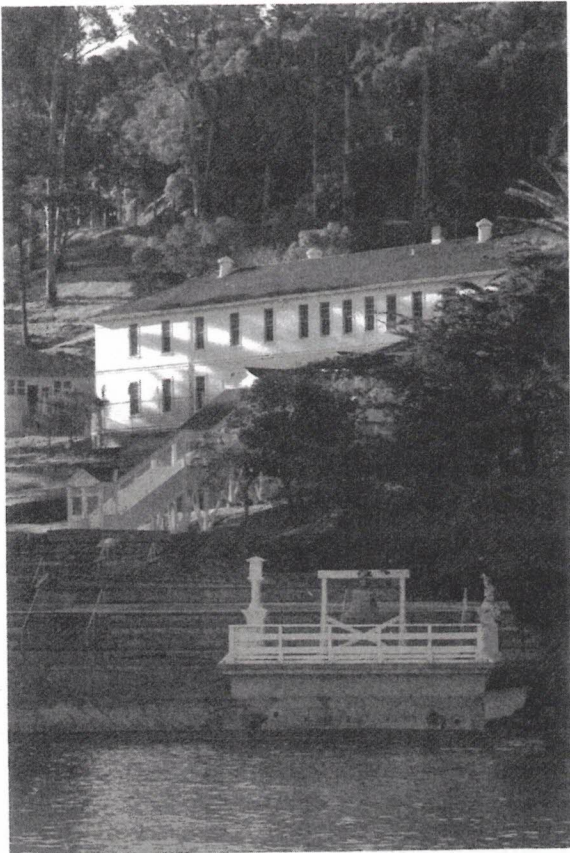


FIG. 1.23
Newly restored detention barracks
at Angel Island, 2009. Courtesy of
Angel Island Immigration Station
Foundation.

expressing the hopes and sorrows of nameless Chinese immigrants, stands as a stark reminder of America's history of racial exclusion. It further serves as a cautionary tale of the tragic consequences that befall a civilized society when it shuts its doors to outsiders by erecting an immigration system that fosters racism and intolerance and, ultimately, compromises its own moral ethics and humanity.

Today, as our country suffers the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, and as Americans are once again stoking the flames of xenophobia by blaming immigrants for taking away jobs and being a drain on the American economy, we should not forget that, with the exception of Native Americans, we are a nation of immigrants, exiles, refugees, and transplants who together built this great nation. As we search for a way to fix our broken immigration system, we would do well to heed the lessons of Angel Island and remember to uphold the founding principles of our nation—a democracy based on the ideal of liberty and justice for all.