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The Recent
Historiography on
Chinese
Immigration in the
19th-Century
United States

by

Mengchu Yu

Presented to the Graduate and Research
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in Candidacy for the
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in

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Mengchu Yu

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Mengchu Yu

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List of Committee Members: Shellen Xiao Wu, Nitzan Lebovic

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Abstract

This historiographical essay provides an overview of recent literature on Chinese immigration in the 19th-century United States. Its first part sketches how recent American, Asian American, and Chinese historians investigate the story of Chinese railroad workers and gold seekers using varied primary sources and distinguished perspectives. The second part examines the last three decades of scholars who researched Chinese prostitution in the 19th century America West and how they used Chinese female immigration as a perspective to narrate the gender and racial history of the U.S. The essay argues that Chinese immigration illuminates intersections between global migration and international relations and illustrates the U.S. modern history. The evolution in recent literature on Chinese immigration reveals the rise of micro-histories as a counter to the larger time scale of global history.

Introduction

Long-distance, transoceanic mass migration shaped modern world history.¹ Of the millions who migrated from their homelands, over 65 percent of transatlantic migration from Europe, went to the Americas, including to the U.S., Canada, Argentina, Brazil, and Cuba.² From Qing China, over 19 million Chinese people migrated to Southeast Asia and the lands around the Indian Ocean and South Pacific, most coming from the southern coastal Chinese provinces of Guangdong and Fujian, which had a long tradition of seafaring and trade.³ Chinese migration to the American West was only a small proportion of this wave of Chinese migration. Nevertheless, Chinese immigration contributed to 19th-century U.S. history. For example, Chinese workers built the entire western half of the Transcontinental Railroad, which connected the Eastern and Western American coasts.⁴ Efforts to regulate Chinese immigration influenced American immigration law. During the second half of the 19th century, the U.S. Congress first advocated the regulation of the Chinese coolie trade by assuring that each laborer had voluntarily signed their contract.⁵ Later, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Scott Act of 1888, and the Geary Act of 1892 imposed restrictions on Chinese migration by requiring entrants to abrogate their exempt status of returning laborers and to bear a Certificate of Residence to verify their legal entry.⁶

The history of Chinese immigration illuminates many intersections between global migration and international relations and underscores the development of U.S. diplomacy,

¹ Adam McKeown, "Global Migration, 1846-1940," *Journal of World History* 15, no. 2 (2004): 155, 164.

² *Ibid.*, 158.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Gordon H. Chang, *Ghosts of Gold Mountain: The Epic Story of the Chinese Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019), 2.

⁵ McKeown, "Global Migration, 1846-1940", 174.

⁶ Madeline Y. Hsu, *The Good Immigrants*, ed. William Chafe et al. (Princeton University Press, 2015), 6, 34.

international relations, immigration laws, culture, and racial relations.⁷ The emerging focus on Chinese immigration to the U.S. highlights both U.S. and Chinese scholars' interests in the Chinese diaspora. This historiographical essay traces the recent literature on Chinese immigration to the 19th-century United States. The essay sheds light on the evolution of primary sources and methodologies in the study of Chinese Americans. The essay is divided in two parts. The first part traces how U.S., Asian American, and Chinese historians researched the lives of Chinese workers in 19th-century America, exploring how the Gold Rush attracted male Chinese laborers and also brought thousands of Chinese females to the U.S. as prostitutes and partners of male workers. The second part discusses the last three decades of historical investigation into Chinese prostitution in the late 19th-century American West and Chinese immigration marriage issues through various primary sources.

The recent historiography discussed in this essay fall into several categories: Chinese historians who worked on the Chinese diaspora, U.S. historians of 19th century America, and Asian American historians who attempted to develop frameworks for researching the formation of Asian American communities. In recent years, US historians have increasingly emphasized globalized comparative methodologies to analyze the position of Chinese workers in U.S. history. Asian American historians have turned to study new primary sources, such as photographs and archaeological evidence. Chinese historians have paid far more attention to the diaspora and used material evidence such as remittances to explore the influence of Chinese migration on home villages.

⁷ Ibid., 1.

Part 1: Chinese Laborers and Immigration Laws

During the second half of the 19th century, the pressures of overpopulation in the southern provinces of Guangdong and Fujian drove thousands of Chinese immigrants to the American West as laborers.⁸ Their first destination was California. Chinese immigrants, pioneers in the Gold Rush, became gold miners and built the Central Pacific Railroad, which connected the Eastern and Western U.S.⁹ They chose to emigrate to the U.S. because California was a place of awe and wonder and as a sparsely populated place, California provided a future of enormous possibilities for immigrants.¹⁰

In his book, *The Filth of Progress: Immigration, Americans, and the Building of Canals and Railroads in the West*, Ryan Dearing (2016) studied overseas Chinese non-governmental organizations and analyzed their connection to Chinese immigration. He demonstrated the significance of *huiguan*, known as the Chinese Six Companies to Americans, which was the “coordinating body of the benevolent Chinese sex associations in San Francisco” and contracted with Chinese laborers from Guangdong.¹¹ As the only family contact in a foreign frontier, *huiguan*, organized by emigrant districts, provided job opportunities, offered new arrivals shelters and basic amenities, supplied Chinese workers to the Central Pacific Railroad Company, and advocated for basic workers’ rights, functioning as mutual aid societies responsible for Chinese workers.¹² Chinese merchants and labor contractors also cooperated with the owners of

⁸ McKeown, “Global Migration, 1846-1940”, 158.

⁹ Ryan Dearing, *The Filth of Progress: Immigrants, Americans, and the Building of Canals and Railroads in the West*, First edition (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016), 155.

¹⁰ Chang, *Ghosts of Gold Mountain*, 25-26.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹² *Ibid.*

the Central Pacific Railroad Company and construction bosses to form what Dearing named the “work-gang” system that was predominant in the Central Pacific Railroad Company.¹³

Dearing primarily focused on three main groups of wage laborers in railroad construction: Irish people, Chinese people, and Mormons. He presented a comparative dimension, “long missing, in which Irish workers are considered with the Chinese, Mormons, and native-born American citizens who helped build transportation networks in the nineteenth century”.¹⁴ Using a comparative approach, he investigated the struggle between immigrant and native-born construction workers. He compared case studies of Irish railroad laborers in the U.S. Midwest to Irish, Chinese, and Mormon workers on the Transcontinental Railroad in the America West, revealing that “canals and railroads were not ends of progress but moving spaces of conflict and contestation.”¹⁵ Chinese workers were not constantly oppressed; their changing relationship with other races reflected their ability and status. Irish workers’ demand for higher wages led Central Pacific managers to consider importing Mexican workers. However, some managers criticized Mexicans for being discussed and discarded as railroad builders because they were too indolent to work. Plus, the wage dispute with Irish workers made managers hire Chinese workers.¹⁶

In 1866 and 1867, Chinese workers initiated massive strikes because they “were unsatisfied with their raise to thirty-five dollars a month and demanded forty dollars and their days shortened from eleven hours to ten.”¹⁷ After the long winter in the Sierra Nevada, Chinese workers threw down their picks and shovels and returned to camps. They had the right timing since local mining companies were facing a labor shortage.¹⁸ However, Charles Crokers, the

¹³ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8–9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 157–158.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

manager from the Central Pacific Railroad Company, refused to improve the payment. He used the “Negro labor force” to “keep the Chinese steady, as the Chinese have kept the Irishmen quiet.”¹⁹ Dearinger attributed the failure of resistance to the struggle between labor forces from different countries. The hostility towards immigrant workers from native construction workers resulted from their ideological baggage “as they trekked westward before and after the Civil War.”²⁰ Dearinger believed that Chinese workers became an indispensable enemy that united Whites for generations.²¹

Dearinger paid attention to illustrations. The young illustrator Joseph Becker participated in a railway sketching tour and conveyed the moment of the Pacific Railroad’s completion to the American public.²² Dearinger’s research was based on Becker’s illustrations. He argued that the Chinese, “depicted in their baggy homespun garments with long queues dangling down their backs, look more like tourists than actual workers, though some carry tools.”²³ Dearinger interpreted that another Becker illustration, *Railroad Pass with Chinese Workers*, reflected how “railroad progress distanced its immigrant workers and even rendered them invisible.”²⁴ While Becker’s illustrations recognized the contribution of Chinese workers in the history of the construction of the American West, they depicted immigrant workers as a “static, archaic, and evocative reminder of the now-receding landscape” and as “stagnant and miniature compared to the natural environment,” who were “overwhelmed by the technological power and industrial velocity of railroad progress.”²⁵ Dearinger suggested that these famous illustrations and sketches

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 180.

²³ *Ibid.*, 181–182.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 182.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 182, 186.

of the railroad eliminated the status of Chinese laborers by rendering them as part of the passing scenery and the background of American history, rather than being active participants.²⁶

Greg Robinson (2019) identified travelogs as a valuable and untapped data source of the Chinese railroad workers' daily lives and work experiences. Many foreign witnesses, especially French travelers who passed through the Pacific West, wrote travel narratives, letters, and diaries to record information about Chinese workers.²⁷ These U.S. historians underscored the significance of overseas organizations, such as *tongs*, *huiguan*, and *huishe*, which were established by Chinese migrants played an important role in forming new Chinese communities in the U.S. They tended to include Chinese immigration in the larger scope of U.S. migration culture by comparing Chinese workers to other ethnicities. Also, their research perspectives on Chinese immigrants were more globalized; they focused on the relationship between Chinese workers and workers from other countries, not merely the relationship between Chinese workers and Americans.

The following American historians, Kathryn Gin Lum (2019), Gordon H. Chang (2019), and Mae Ngai (2021), considered the Chinese immigration as principle subject in the research of global migration and emphasized how migration effected Chinese communities. Lum (2019) noted in her essay, *How Chinese Migrants Adapted Popular Religion to an American Context*, that Chinese railroad workers reconstructed the religious atmosphere in the U.S.²⁸ *Guan Di*, the god of war and brotherhood, and *Tian Hou*, the Empress of Heaven and goddess of the sea, were two deities popular among overseas Chinese laborers. Gin Lum found that “migrants used San

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 186.

²⁷ Greg Robinson, “European Travelers’ Accounts of Chinese Railroad Workers,” in *The Chinese and the Iron Road: Building the Transcontinental Railroad*, Asian America (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019), 218.

²⁸ Kathryn Gin Lum, “How Chinese Migrants Adapted Popular Religion to an American Context,” in *The Chinese and the Iron Road: Building the Transcontinental Railroad*, Asian America (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019), 159.

Francisco temples as social gathering places and temporary dwelling places.”²⁹ She also depicted the interesting confrontation between missionaries and immigration: missionaries touched the Chinese deities in temples to show that “they had no sacred power”; the Chinese reacted to American Protestant emissaries coolly and with respect.³⁰ Besides traditional religion, Chinese immigrants also brought Chinese funerary culture to the U.S., Lum argued. Chinese immigrants were afraid of dying in the U.S. and “not having enough money to have their bodies back to China, where their bones could rest with their ancestors and be properly cared for and worshiped by their families.”³¹

Chang (2019), a pioneering scholar in the study of Chinese railroad workers, brought a fresh perspective to the reasons for immigration in his monumental work, *Ghost of Gold Mountain: The Epic Story of the Chinese Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad*. It is the first book attempt to fully address inadequacy have relegated Chinese workers to the margins of history. He not only considered the terrible devastation caused by endless wars but also the European intrusion into China in the 1830s, which “hit the southern region with special force, disrupting long-standing patterns of life, social relations, and the economy.”³² He corrected the previous bias about the relationship between Chinese railroad workers and Chinese merchants and contractors: “The most vociferous and hostile forces against the Chinese in America often unfairly described them as servile and slave-like, exploited by Chinese merchants and contractors who used the hapless Chinese workers as coerce.”³³ According to payroll sheets, Chang found that Chinese business and contractors were more likely responsible for “handling money, making transactions, supervising labor, and interacting with management,” rather than

²⁹ Ibid., 162–163.

³⁰ Ibid., 164.

³¹ Ibid., 171.

³² Chang, *Ghosts of Gold Mountain*, 24.

³³ Ibid., 31.

exploiting poor Chinese workers.³⁴ Each Chinese labor contractors provided a team of twenty-five or fewer workers and worked with them.³⁵

While both Dearinger and Chang focused on the resistance movements of Chinese railroad workers, Chang held different views about Chinese workers' resistance to American managers. While Chinese workers received lower pay than white workers in the same job categories, Chang noted that they realized they had received more wages than they could earn in South China.³⁶ Chang credited the strike of 1867 which was the mass collective action taken by thousands of Chinese workers in California with more meaning because it was the largest workers' strike against a private employer in the U.S. to that date.³⁷ Though the company did not satisfy all of strikers' demands, the coordination of the workers defied the company and deeply shook their principles. The company leadership increased payments following the strike, faced a negative backlash in the press, and eventually realized they could not take Chinese labor for granted. Moreover, the strike could be considered a "clash of cultural logics rather than an incident seen in standard Western labor-management terms."³⁸ More importantly, Chinese workers expressed their free will and demonstrated self-respect.³⁹

Chang's major contribution to the scholarship was his introduction of various new primary sources. Primary sources were limited in previous Chinese immigration research because it was difficult to recover the experiences of Chinese immigrants and laborers who were silent in the historical record.⁴⁰ Previous scholarship used primary sources such as newspapers, illustrations, autobiographies, federal government documents, magazines, and population

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 84–85.

³⁵ *Ibid.*,

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Dearinger, *The Filth of Progress*, 152.

censuses. Lew-Williams, the author of *The Chinese Must Go*, gave one explanation for the deficiency of primary sources: most working-class Chinese were illiterate, and their transiency made them particularly elusive.⁴¹ Chang also recognized the absence of extant documentation. He argued that “no text generated by any Chinese railroad worker on the Transcontinental Railroad in Chinese or English has ever been found.”⁴² However, he refuted the claim that Chinese workers were illiterate; many observers at the time noted that many Chinese workers could read and write in their language. The reasons for the lack of written records are the “arson, pillaging, and willful destruction of Chinese belongings by hostile 19th-century mobs in America,” “ruin from earthquakes and fires at San Francisco in 1906,” and “the cruel devastation wrought by the many wars and civil upheavals.”⁴³

Chang relied more on material evidence, working with archaeologists to study “objects, food remnants, fire pits, and other site landscapes found at the former living encampments and work areas of Railroad Chinese.”⁴⁴ The material evidence preserved the remains of daily life in the Chinese camps, which later informed historians about Chinese workers’ quotidian existence. The abundance of material culture left by the Chinese showed that Chinese railroad workers in California used the same objects that they produced and used in their home villages; Chang, thus, argued that a “well-functioning network of commodity production” and a “system of distribution in America” existed in the Chinese workers’ communities.⁴⁵ Also, the segregated residence areas demonstrated that Chinese and non-Chinese typically lived separately from each other; Chinese workers always lived in less desirable sections and were more exposed to pests.⁴⁶ Chang also

⁴¹ Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*, 12.

⁴² Chang, *Ghosts of Gold Mountain*, 6–8.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

used the archaeological evidence found in the living sites of Chinese and Native people to highlight the trade that occurred between them.⁴⁷

In his research on Chinese railroad workers in the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad, besides archaeological evidence, Chang also cited extensive business documentation, including payroll records and private correspondence among the company management. Those written documents recorded workers' names, job categories, pay rates, organization, and their relationships with the company.⁴⁸ For example, by tracing two surviving passenger lists of ships from China to San Francisco in 1875 and 1876, Chang collected the identity information of Chinese workers. Since 80 percent of passengers traveled with others from the same village and many shared the same family name, Chang supposed that Chinese migration was a collective activity closely connected to families and clans.⁴⁹ Many male laborers came to the U.S. with their male cousins. Also, through business receipts, shipping manifests, and the observations of writers, Chang noted that Chinese immigration formed a sophisticated trade network that imported various foodstuffs to satisfy workers' eating habits.⁵⁰

Another less discussed Chinese-language primary source in previous literature is *muyu ge* (wooden fish songs), a popular art form in the folk culture of Guangdong. Chang argued that folk songs reflected the complex relationship between Chinese migrants and their families. Many songs revealed the anxiety, fears, and joys of both migrants overseas and their families staying in their home villages.⁵¹ Unlike government archives and business documentation, folk songs gave personal voices to silent groups.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 184.

Mae Ngai (2021) applied a global historiographical approach by tracking the migration of Chinese people to California, Australia, and South Africa in her book, *The Chinese Question: The Gold Rushes and Global Politics*. She answered a core question: Are the Chinese a racial threat to Anglo-American countries, and should Chinese be barred from them? She explored “the origins of Chinese communities in the Anglo-American world, locating their beginnings in the three largest gold-producing regions of the 19th century” and argued that “Chinese exclusion was not extraneous to the emergent global capitalist economy but an integral part of it.”⁵² Chinese migrants were agents of change rather than slavish coolie or passive victims of discrimination. She examined the racism against Chinese people in the U.S. and expanded it to the enormous geographical scope of the Anglo-sphere. She also integrated the global migration of the gold rushes into the emergence of capitalism worldwide. Global migration did not only involve population and race but also the circulation of money.⁵³

Ngai focused on local and regional market networks. She found that most Chinese gold prospectors paid for their passage to the U.S. with family funds. However, she further realized the significance of clan or district associations. Since poor families could not afford the travel expenses of young men, people would borrow or seek assistance from clans and local associations.⁵⁴ The connection among individuals, families, and communities constructed a stable social network for Chinese laborers overseas.

Moreover, she argued more about the functions of *huiguan*. First, besides serving as an organization of social control, *huiguan* was also responsible for solidarity by negotiating disputes among members, caring for sick or indigent members, and dealing with funeral affairs. *Huiguan*

⁵² Mae M. Ngai, *The Chinese Question: The Gold Rushes and Global Politics*, First edition (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2021), 2

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 34

also provided translation and legal services. Ngai emphasized the benign relationship between Chinese workers and *huiguan*, as she argued, the “Chinese themselves considered their membership in *huiguan* not as enslavement but as integral to the networks of trust forged through native-place and clan lineage.”⁵⁵ Ngai mentioned another two organizations, *huishe*, and *tongs*. Distinct from *huiguan*, which were secret brotherhood societies, *huishe* were “fictive kinship groups that organized without regard to clan lineage or native place” and “embraced socially marginal men who were orphaned, estranged from their families, or otherwise cut off from the villages of their birth”.⁵⁶ *Tongs* controlled the trades of vices, such as gambling, opium, and prostitution, while they functioned similarly to *huiguan* by providing mutual aid for members.⁵⁷ Ngai proposed a new explanation for the Chinese adaption of American life: “They needed to establish cordial relationships with Americans, not just with individuals but with the power structure;” therefore, they would find an “advisor, an American who could serve as a culture broker.”⁵⁸

Ngai analyzed how translation shaped Chinese interactions with the American legal system using the records of court hearings.⁵⁹ Chinese workers spoke a pidgin, similar to that used in Guangzhou and Hong Kong, but with more of an influence from English, which consisted of local word forms and importations from other vernaculars.⁶⁰ The court hearing records that documented interactions between Chinese immigrants and English-speaking officials indicated the limitations of the Chinese American pidgin English. The pidgin spoken by Chinese

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 51–52.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

immigrants could not express complex ideas or “address the contingencies of a trial-court examination.”⁶¹

Recent works by American historians have underscored the importance of Chinese immigration to global history. Asian American historians constructed a more complex model for Chinese migration, which included families, clans, and social organizations. Those historians, as well as researchers in disciplines ranging from Asian American studies to archaeology and cultural anthropology, have researched archives, family collections, government documents, business records, and archaeological reports in various languages to locate more relevant primary sources. They also contacted the living descendants of railroad workers to record the oral histories of their ancestors’ stories.⁶²

In 2019, Chang edited a volume called *The Chinese and the Iron Road: Building the Transcontinental Railroad*, which contained new broad and micro-historical essays regarding Chinese railroad workers, together with other pioneering historians in Asian American studies, including Shelly Fisher Fishkin, Hilton Obenzinger, and Roland Hsu.⁶³ He invited multiple Chinese historians to investigate Chinese migration. One of the essays, *Dreams of Chinese Railroad Workers Across the Pacific*, by Zhang and Hsu, considered “altered designs for family home architecture” as material evidence of the influence of returning Chinese workers to their home villages.⁶⁴ They noted that “the layout and model of the new houses blend traditional forms with Western influences, such as the consistent layout of rooms and built-in ventilation, including windows.”⁶⁵ They also found evidence of changes in the local dialect, such as the

⁶¹ Ibid., 70.

⁶² Chang, *Ghosts of Gold Mountain*, 9.

⁶³ Gordon H. Chang et al., eds., *The Chinese and the Iron Road: Building the Transcontinental Railroad*, Asian America (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019).

⁶⁴ Ibid., 66.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

introduction of the simple English words yes and no. The local population began to use greeting words like hello and bye-bye due to the impact of returning Chinese workers from English countries. Other various words, like chocolate, taffy, and cracker, tended to replace the corresponding Chinese words. Besides material evidence, they introduced Chinese-language primary sources, as Chang did in his book, *Muyu Diao (Ballads Accompanied by a Wooden Knocker)*, which described “the emotive state of the Chinese laborers at the beginning of their journey overseas” to get “insight into the emotional impact of the decision to migrate.”⁶⁶ In addition to folk songs, they also analyzed loan documents. They drew three conclusions: first, most Chinese gold miners and railroad workers came from the same home region; second, documents provided details of private financial relationships that could not be traced in official government documents; third, Chinese laborers had multiple sources to collect the cost of travel overseas, such as personal funds and borrowing credit from agents.⁶⁷

Gregor Benton and Hong Liu (2018) wrote a study of a rare collection of letters (*Qiaopi*) of Chinese migrant workers in their book, *Dear China: Emigrant Letters and Remittances, 1820-1980*. Benton and Liu completed the first book-length study to introduce its characteristics, transformation, forms, contents, and role as a crucial link between Chinese migrants and their families in home villages. *Qiaopi*, comprising both a letter and a remittance, usually of money, was an “institutionalized and cross-national mechanism” that helped sustain family connections and contributed to the sending regions’ economic development.⁶⁸ Ding and Hsu (2019) focused on overseas remittance, *qiaohui*, which “refers to the money transferred by expatriate Chinese back to China through a variety of public and private organizations and individuals in foreign

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 59–62.

⁶⁸ Gregor Benton and Hong Liu, *Dear China: Emigrant Letters and Remittances, 1820-1980* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018), 1–3.

and Chinese currencies.”⁶⁹ They explored how these remittance mechanisms developed and operated, which constituted a significant source of foreign exchange in Chinese history.

Jin Liu and Roland Hsu (2019) continued to investigate Chinese railroad workers’ remittance networks. They developed the historical details of the flow of remittances based on recently discovered *qiaoxiang* (hometown) documents, such as work and travel contracts.⁷⁰ They could not find enough personal writings from the remittance documentation because, in the second half of the 19th century, the Qing government was incapable of regulating migration; unskilled Chinese railroad workers left limited records in the railroad company’s publications, while conditions did not favor the preservation of paper documents. However, among the *qiaoxiang* documents, they found letters that connected the later evidence to the earlier history and demonstrated Chinese migrants’ initiatives to “obtain loans to venture abroad to pursue wealth.”⁷¹

Steve Miles (2020) wrote *Chinese Diasporas: A Social History of Global Migration*; he assumed that “dislocation caused by warfare and natural disasters might explain short-term migration patterns, but is less likely to be the key factor behind a sustained diasporic trajectory, one that can be traced across decades or longer.”⁷² Thus, he suggested that immigration decisions were often made at the family level and emphasized the diasporic networks and local cultures of migration.⁷³ Building on previous scholarship, he introduced the diasporic Chinese institutions

⁶⁹ Yuan Ding and Roland Hsu, “Overseas Remittances of Chinese Laborers in North America,” in *The Chinese and the Iron Road: Building the Transcontinental Railroad*, Asian America (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019), 76.

⁷⁰ Jin Liu and Roland Hsu, “Chinese Railroad Workers’ Remittance Networks,” in *The Chinese and the Iron Road: Building the Transcontinental Railroad*, Asian America (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019), 90.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 91–93.

⁷² Steven B. Miles, *Chinese Diasporas: A Social History of Global Migration*, New Approaches to Asian History (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 14.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 14–16.

that organized and facilitated migration.⁷⁴ His primary emphasis was another kind of *huiguan*, known in China as *Zhonghua Huiguan*, the main community-wide institution interacting with the Qing government and diasporic Chinese.⁷⁵

Huping Ling (2022) is another prominent Chinese scholar in the realm of Chinese immigration. Her book, *Chinese Americans in the Heartland: Migration, Work, and Community*, took a unique approach by studying Chinese immigrant communities in the American Midwest from the 1870s to the 1960s. While most research on Chinese Americans focused on the American West, where most early Chinese immigrants worked to build the railroads and came for the Gold Rush in the late 19th century, Ling argued that immigration to St. Louis and Chicago demonstrated the connection between the hinterland and the coasts and the relationship between Chinese immigrants and local urban development. Owing to restrictive policies in coastal cities and the lower cost of living in the Midwest, Chinese immigrants chose to settle and build their communities in St. Louis and Chicago.⁷⁶

Ling further investigated the funerary and burial culture among Chinese immigrants. Wesley and Valhalla cemeteries, as resting places for Chinese who could not return to China, and burial ceremonies, such as the throwing of paper money, reflected the sojourning nature of Chinese immigrants. She attributed the sojourning nature to the Chinese agricultural tradition, which encouraged stability, and the hostile environment of American society. Chinese culture emphasizes the cultural importance of burial in one's hometown with deceased family members after death. However, the Chinese people who migrated overseas in the late 19th century could not return home for several reasons, such as inconvenient transportation and the Chinese Exclusion Act, which made their burial problem increasingly prominent. The appearance of

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁷⁶ Huping Ling, *Chinese Americans in the Heartland* (Rutgers University Press, 2022), 2–7.

Wesley and Valhalla demonstrated the obstacles to preserving the traditions of the migrated Chinese and reflected the internal cohesion of the Chinese American community and a tolerant attitude toward the Chinese in St. Louis. Mortuary records supported Ling's primary sources, revealing the nature and transition of immigrant life.⁷⁷ The emergence of Chinese historians introduced a rising number of Chinese-language primary sources and also revealed the rise of micro-histories as a counter to the longer timescale of global history.

While most historians integrated Chinese laborers into the larger discussion of global migration history, the following historians demonstrated how Chinese laborers reflected the immigration laws and restrictions in the 19th century U.S. Elliot Young (2021), in his book *Forever Prisoners: How the United States Made the World's Largest Immigration Detention System*, noted that a group of 19th-century Chinese detainees in a remote prison island near Seattle, called McNeil Island, were barely mentioned in government documents. Young argued that “the criminalization of immigrants and migration began long before our present era of mass immigrant detention.”⁷⁸ Despite the lack of direct records, the Chinese involvement in immigration history provides rare primary sources; for example, exchanges between U.S. and Canadian officials demonstrated how incarceration for non-citizens operated outside of the law.⁷⁹ Additionally, Young noted that the “Chinese were the first group to be required to have a residency certificate with a photograph documenting the bearer’s identity” due to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882; therefore, many photographs exist, such as the McNeil Island Penitentiary photographs from 1899 to 1906, that depicted almost all of the prisoners in pairs.⁸⁰ Names, facial expressions, mental states, health status, and outfits can be shown through

⁷⁷ Ibid., 171–121.

⁷⁸ Elliott Young, *Forever Prisoners: How the United States Made the World's Largest Immigration Detention System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 23.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 31.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 39.

immigration photography, which depicts the Chinese immigrant community. Through these photographs, Young concluded the importance of the smuggler network in early Chinese immigration. Chinese immigrants' experiences of being detained two hundreds years ago reflected the long history of U.S. immigration detention.

Madeline Hsu (2015) investigated why anti-Chinese sentiment rose in the U.S., how the U.S. formed anti-Chinese exclusion policies, and how Chinese immigration affected U.S. immigration policies in her book, *The Good Immigrants*. Previous scholarship always focused on the goal of these restrictions, which was to restrict the unwanted growth of specific populations, but neglected the selective aspects of immigration laws. Hsu underscored the selective aspects of immigration laws that restrict entry to unwanted persons and permit admission to people deemed assimilable.⁸¹ Chinese coolie laborers who were restricted to entry were distinct from students from Chinese Education Mission who were exempted from the strict immigration restriction.

During the 1870s, 70 percent of Chinese emigrants in America lived in California. Hsu argued that California, as a swing state in razor-close presidential elections, became the spearhead from which the anti-Chinese movement could be expanded nationwide. Both Democratic and Republican presidential candidates in 1876 and 1880 declared the inferiority of the Chinese by defining their status as unfree, heathen, and coolie. Chinese laborers were criticized because they were seen undermined white working-class families' benefits; there were fears that they might take over the American West without any restrictions.⁸²

Hsu found that the subsequent restrictive laws enact from the 1860s to 1880s were much stricter; for example, Congress passed An Act to Prohibit the 'Coolie Trade' by American Citizens in American Vessels on February 19, 1862, which prohibited Chinese coolies from

⁸¹ Hsu, *The Good Immigrants*, 8.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 6.

being transported on ships to the U.S.⁸³ However, when railroad construction companies demanded Chinese workers, the federal government signed the “Burlingame–Seward Treaty in 1868, which contravened Chinese prohibitions against emigration to secure American access to Chinese workers.”⁸⁴ The Page Act of 1875 otherwise targeted unfree Chinese workers and prostitutes, ensuring that any immigrant from East Asia was free and voluntary without any lewd and immoral purposes.⁸⁵ The Fifteen Passenger Act of 1879 was a more general restriction that limited the number of Chinese arriving per ship.⁸⁶ The Scott Act of 1888 and the Geary Act of 1892 imposed further restrictions on Chinese entry by requiring Chinese to have Certificates of Residence to verify their legal status when they returned to the U.S.⁸⁷

On the other hand, Hsu argued that students were exempt from racialized restrictions and examined the process of immigration selection based on the case study of Yung Kuai (1861–1943), a Chinese Education Mission student who graduated from Yale and remained in America for the rest of his life.⁸⁸ Chinese students like Yung Kuai were welcomed, even at the height of the anti-Chinese movement.⁸⁹ Hsu challenged previous scholarship by stating that, during the Chinese exclusion period, China and the U.S. still cooperated in facilitating certain kinds of migration “to strengthen relations through diplomatic, cultural, educational, and economic exchanges.”⁹⁰

Beth Lew-Williams (2018) focused on violence in the anti-Chinese movement in her book, *The Chinese Must Go*. In the 1850s, Chinese migrants were targets for harassment and

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 8, 17.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 13–17.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

assault, and in the 1880s, expulsion became a systematic choice.⁹¹ By taking a transcalar approach, which takes a single phenomenon in a specific place and keeps multiple layers simultaneously in view, she shifted across “traditional scales of analysis to unearth” anti-Chinese violence’s roots and sprawling ramifications.⁹² She pointed out that the violent anti-Chinese movement was a distinct phenomenon from other racial violence elsewhere that “the principal method of anti-Chinese violence became expulsion”.⁹³ Chinese migrants, anti-Chinese vigilantes, and white elites made bids for power, whether enacting violence or resisting it. Local racial violence expanded deep within the domestic interior and became an international crisis. Based on the violent vigilantism in the Washington Territory, she challenged the long-held belief that the 1885 removal of Chinese from Tacoma was a nonviolent action. Also, she traced “the contested politics and geopolitics that gave rise to the Chinese Restriction Act” and argued that “Americans’ views on Chinese migration were determined by the scale in which they viewed their world”.⁹⁴

Previous historians overlooked the distinction between the Restriction Period (1882-1888) and the Exclusion Period (1888-1943), suggesting that Chinese exclusion successfully excluded the Chinese. Nevertheless, Lew-Williams argued that while exclusion acts slowed Chinese migration, there were more than three hundred thousand Chinese arrivals between 1882 and 1943.⁹⁵ The territorial boundary did not ban all Chinese. “Chinese migrants continued to carry their alienage with them along with its legal and social disadvantages”, as she noted.

⁹¹ Lew Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*, 6.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

Part 2: Chinese Female Immigration and Marriage

With the discovery of gold along the Sacramento River, the American West attracted nearly 300,000 Chinese male laborers to California, who then formed Chinese communities.⁹⁶ Most male sojourners, who came from the economically undeveloped areas of Guangzhou, were miners.⁹⁷ Since only a few men brought their families to the male-dominated working site, the scarcity of women created a demand for prostitution.⁹⁸ According to the official census data, the number of Chinese sex workers dramatically increased between 1860 and 1870 and then dramatically decreased between 1870 and 1880. A tabulation of the manuscript census for San Francisco in 1880 demonstrated that 21 percent of Chinese women were recorded as prostitutes.⁹⁹ As early as the 1970s, several scholars studying the history of immigration to the U.S., modern Chinese history, and women's rights explored Chinese prostitution in the 19th-century American West. They analyzed the reasons for the occurrence of Chinese prostitution and its decline from the perspectives of patriarchalism, racism, and sex ideology differences; they also researched the living conditions of brothels in Chinatown and sex workers' lives after exiting prostitution.

Lucie Cheng Hirata (1979), Peggy Pascoe (1989), Judy Yung (1986), and Huping Ling (1998), provided detailed and comprehensive explanations of why increasing numbers of Chinese prostitutes entered San Francisco in the 19th century. Hirata first discussed the role of prostitution in maintaining "the labor force of single young men" and providing cheap labor for

⁹⁶ Lucie Cheng Hirata, "Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 5, no. 1 (1979): 5; Benson Tong, *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 15.

⁹⁷ Hirata, "Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America," 4.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6; Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 26.

⁹⁹ Hirata, "Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America," 24.

the white population.¹⁰⁰ American capitalists needed Chinese men to construct the newly developing California; however, conversely, they were afraid of the establishment of a permanent Chinese community. As a result, they “paid low wages to Chinese men to deter their women from crossing the Pacific.”¹⁰¹ Also, Chinese prostitution could satisfy Chinese men’s sexual demands and thus “lessen the threat they perceived to white womanhood.”¹⁰² Profit was another major factor in creating and maintaining the smuggling of prostitution. Hirata divided the development of Chinese prostitution into two periods corresponding with two types of relations in profit making: the initial period of free competition during 1849–1854 and the secondary period of organized trade during 1854–1925. In the initial period, Chinese sex workers, as individual owners of their bodily labor, did not depend on any owner and could make enough money to leave the profession or stay in America to do other work. Nevertheless, in the period of more organized and institutionalized trade, sex workers became semi-slaves. They were exploited by brothel owners, such as highbinders in Tong who monopolized underworld businesses, including prostitution, gambling, and opium. The significant profit attracted Chinese entrepreneurs and yielded a considerable sum of capital.¹⁰³

Hirata investigated the cultural factors behind Chinese prostitution from the perspective of the patriarchal Qing dynasty of China. The traditional Chinese patriarchy weighed heavily on men, rather than women; women were viewed as a resource that was dependent on men. Once families faced economic difficulties, they would sell female family members to brothels. Patriarchy also prohibited decent women from traveling abroad because men needed their wives to live at home to fulfill their filial duties and foster male descendants. Finally, the earnings of

¹⁰⁰ Hirata, “Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America,” 3.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 7–8.

Chinese prostitutes in America were large enough to support families in China.¹⁰⁴ Hirata criticized the selfish and male-dominant traditional Chinese ideology, which objectified and exploited women.

Pascoe supplemented some explanations of Chinese patriarchy in her paper discussing how the gender system was reflected in Chinese prostitution. Pascoe argued that Chinese women were subordinated in the traditional gender system by analyzing Wong Ah So's letter to her family. Wang Ah So was forced by her family to sell sex in San Francisco, but it was hard to find any opposition in her letters. Instead, she wrote, "Daughter is not angry with you."¹⁰⁵ However, Pascoe demonstrated that "by the late 19th century, when Chinese immigration to the U.S. was in full swing, the traditional patriarchal control system was beginning to lose some of its power in China." For example, in Canton, few young women could find jobs in the sericulture industry and received relative freedom. The emigrant Chinese women who encountered Victorian gender ideology were less able to challenge the traditional Chinese patriarchal gender system.¹⁰⁶

Yung wrote several books on the history of the migration of Chinese women to America. Her books, *Chinese Women of America: A Pictorial History*, published in 1986, and *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*, published in 1995, further discussed the influence of Confucian ideology on Chinese women. The Confucian ideology that governed China for nearly 2000 years reached its climax in the Qing dynasty; it dictated that decent women should be subordinate to men and be separated from men in public spheres. The Three Obediences prescribed that a Chinese woman should obey her father, husband, and son; the Four

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰⁵ Peggy Pascoe, "Gender Systems in Conflict: The Marriages of Mission-Educated Chinese American Women, 1874-1939," *Journal of Social History* 22, no. 4 (1989): 632–633.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 633.

Virtues required her to be submissive in behavior, speech, demeanor, and household duties.¹⁰⁷

The Confucian restrictions on women could partially explain why Chinese women could not revolt against prostitution and discrimination in both China and the U.S. besides the factor of sexism society and imperfect legal environment.

Ling refuted previous arguments that attributed the appearance of Chinese prostitution to the Chinese patriarchal society or traditional ideologies by stating that “Chinese prostitution in 19th-century America, like any commercialized sex industry throughout the world in the past and present, was more a product of global capitalist development than a result of the Chinese patriarchal society.”¹⁰⁸ She underscored the role of global capitalism in exploiting Chinese prostitutes and blamed advanced industrial nations for demanding cheap Chinese laborers for their economic and industrial development. She argued that “geographical discovery and industrial revolution enabled capitalism to exploit the resources and markets throughout the world”.¹⁰⁹ Industrialism countries lured and attracted people from the less developed countries. The female victims of prostitution were “indispensable for the maintenance of this army of cheap laborers.”¹¹⁰

Scholars hold different ideas on the decline of Chinese prostitution in the American West in the 1880s. Through official census data, Hirata defined 1870 as the zenith of Chinese prostitution.¹¹¹ She attributed the decline of Chinese prostitution to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the decrease in the female population in South China, the change in the psychology of

¹⁰⁷ More discussions about the influence of Confucian social order are seen in Yung, *Unbound Feet*, 26; Judy Yung, *Chinese Women of America: A Pictorial History* (Seattle: Published for the Chinese Culture Foundation of San Francisco by University of Washington Press, 1986), 10.

¹⁰⁸ Huping Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives* (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1998), 54.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Hirata, “Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America,” 25.

Chinese male laborers, and the introduction of the Puritan ideology in the U.S. In the 1880s, since “Chinese prostitution corresponded with the period of mounting agitation against Chinese labor in general” and politicians condemned the threats of Chinese prostitution, the U.S. government “restricted the importation of Chinese women for prostitution” by introducing the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which only permitted women who were “native-born, married, or born overseas to domiciled merchants to immigrate to the United States” and enforced codes directly against Chinese brothels.¹¹² Additionally, the female population of South China, from which thousands of Chinese women migrated abroad, dwindled because of turmoil in the late Qing dynasty.¹¹³ Chinese male labor also changed, from sojourning to settlement or return, and the sex ratio of the California population became more balanced, which made the demand for Chinese prostitution decline.¹¹⁴ The arrival of white Victorian women and the prevalence of Puritan morality from the East Coast, which defended the preservation of the family, also supported the abolition of Chinese prostitution. Moreover, Chinese female immigrants had more alternatives for work. Another significant factor mentioned by Hirata was the conflict between “the Six Companies led by Chinese merchants and the secret societies.” Secret societies, such as the Tongs, who ran Chinese brothels, challenged the authority of Chinese merchants who had shops in Chinatown. Hirata argued that the more money laborers spent in brothels, the less they spent on the merchants’ ships or sent back to China.¹¹⁵

Before the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Chinese immigration was restricted by the Page Act of 1875. The Page Act required all Chinese immigrants to be examined by American consuls at their port of departure, which meant that consulates had extreme power in deciding

¹¹² Ibid, 25–27.

¹¹³ Ibid, 25.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 26.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 26–27.

whether Chinese people could enter the U.S. Hirata believed that, although “the traffic in women became more difficult after the passage of code which allowed the commissioner of immigration to prevent certain classes of people,” people traffickers could still bribe U.S. consulates and customs to import women.¹¹⁶ Therefore, the Page Act of 1875 was less important than the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and its immediate effectiveness was not apparent. However, George Peffer (1986) refuted Hirata’s theory, stating that “historians have dismissed the Page Act as an unimportant factor in Chinese American history.”¹¹⁷ By analyzing three consuls’ works in different periods, namely David H. Bailey, H. Sheldon Loring, and John S. Mosby, Peffer concluded that “the Page Act may have exerted a much stronger prohibitive force” rather than being ineffective due to the widespread corruption like Hirata supposed.¹¹⁸

Bailey, employed between 1875 and 1877, subjected each female immigrant to a rigorous interrogation by questioning her multiple times after boarding the ship and requesting her to submit an official declaration of the purpose of immigration. Peffer researched his work recordings, finding that he cooperated with different people and groups, including secret detectives who exposed imposters and the British consul and Tung Wah Hospital Committee, who formulated a plan to halt the emigration of Chinese sex workers.¹¹⁹ Analyzing Bailey’s letters, Peffer found that “he utilized every branch of his examination network.”¹²⁰ Peffer accepted the existence of a bribe; however, he argued that “the bribe was not offered at the close of the examinations but at the time of application.”¹²¹ In other words, consuls were not involved in bribes or people trafficking. Loring was not as responsible as his former consul but was

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 10.

¹¹⁷ George Anthony Peffer, “Forbidden Families: Emigration Experiences of Chinese Women under the Page Law, 1875-1882,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 6, no. 1 (1986): 30.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 31.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 32–33.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 33.

¹²¹ Ibid, 34.

suspected of frequent association with illegal activities; however, he continued to execute an “effective system of cooperative examination by American, British, and Chinese leaders” and built a more detailed examination of documents. Mosby otherwise focused on searching for abuses with relentless determination.¹²² Peffer used the experience and policies of these three American consuls to emphasize the effectiveness of the Page Act in reducing Chinese immigration and sex workers.

Eithne Luibhéid supported Peffer in his book *Entry Denied: Controlled Sexuality at the Border*, published in 2002. She affirmed that “the Page Act was a harbinger not only of sexual, but also of racial, ethnic, gender, and class exclusions codified by subsequent immigration laws.”¹²³ The Page Act “transformed the immigration control apparatus into a system that constructed and regulated sexuality and constituted Chinese women as objectified in gender, racial, and class terms.”¹²⁴ Previously theories supposed that, because it was hard for American consuls to differentiate “real” wives from “women posing as wives but bound for sex work,” they implemented the law so harshly that all Chinese women were prohibited from entering the U.S. The problem with the Page Act was the consuls’ racist behaviors, not the strategy of differentiating among women based on sexuality. However, investigating how the Page Act was implemented, Luibhéid insisted that exercising power and operational immigration control underscored the discrimination.¹²⁵

Examining why Chinese prostitution declined, we can easily find the historiographical trend of understanding Chinese prostitution within the broader narratives of U.S. history, as well

¹²² Ibid, 36–38.

¹²³ Eithne Luibhéid, “A Blueprint for Exclusion: The Page Law, Prostitution, and Discrimination against Chinese Women,” in *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002): 31.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 32.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 38.

as a focus on more diverse primary sources. From scholars in the late 20th century to contemporary scholars, historians have tended to integrate different factors in both the U.S. and China and considered the effects of ideologies. Official archives, like census data, and private documents, like working records and letters, provided a better understanding of the Page Act from different perspectives.

Chinese prostitution in the American West was a historical event that affected Chinese immigration in the 19th century and can also be regarded as a cultural phenomenon that reflected the image of Chinese people in the U.S. More scholars have begun to concentrate on the cultural properties of Chinese prostitution and related it to rising anti-China ideas, orientalism, and conflicts between different sex ideologies by analyzing how the press and mass media portrayed Chinese prostitution. Chinese historians like Wei (2011) argued that the popular press promoted the Orientalist perspective by publishing “lurid stories ascribing to the Chinese array of attributes demeaning their intelligence and character.”¹²⁶ His study was based on a news report in *The Daily Denver Tribute*, published in 1874, called *A Chinese Romance*.¹²⁷ The highly stylized story about the Chinese American community centered on two orphaned sisters from Canton who were enslaved by the international prostitution network as sex workers and were tortured by sadistic Chinese brothel owners, but finally escaped from their misery with the assistance of white Americans.¹²⁸ Wei concluded that the reporter provoked “laughter at the peculiar Chinese, calling attention to their racial features and exotic customs” by depicting the Chinese brothel owners’ torture by referring to Chinese vengeance.¹²⁹ The two orphaned girls, the King sisters, were also portrayed as models of Oriental women: “passive victims whose fates are determined

¹²⁶ Wei, “Representations of Nineteenth-Century Chinese Prostitutes and Chinese Sexuality in the American West,” 70.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 69.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 71–73.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 71–72.

by men.”¹³⁰ European Americans in the report represented the “forces of law and order and occupied a dominant position of power in U.S. society.”¹³¹ While the press served the popular audience, it influenced the popular thoughts of the Chinese in the 19th century. Chinese sex workers, like all Chinese immigrants, were objectified as passive victims and sly people who might threaten white society’s purity.

Recent scholars such as Erika Lee (2015), Steven Miles, and Mae Ngai chose more diverse perspectives and larger scales; they took Chinese prostitutes as a starting point to research American gender ideology and Chinese society. Lee compared the percentage of women in the total number of Chinese admitted into the U.S. at the end of the 19th century to the total number of Chinese admitted to Hawaii, “where plantation owners encouraged Chinese immigrant women to come as a way of tying down the Chinese labor force in the islands.” Lee concluded that Chinese women’s right to remain in the U.S. was based on men’s legal immigration status and local attitudes.¹³²

Both Miles’s and Ling’s latest books considered the family and marriage perspectives of Chinese immigration. Miles’s emphasis on family practices revealed how migration was gendered.¹³³ Patterns of intermarriage varied depending upon the policies in different states; Miles stated that some Chinese men could marry Irish, German, or Italian women before the first exclusion law of 1882. Besides race, economic status was another factor in marriages with Chinese immigrants. Miles suggested that the poorest migrants would never marry.¹³⁴ Ling studied the marriage patterns that emerged among Chinese families in Chicago: transnational

¹³⁰ Ibid, 72.

¹³¹ Ibid, 73.

¹³² Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History*, First Simon & Schuster hardcover edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 47.

¹³³ Miles, *Chinese Diasporas*, 17.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 130.

split marriages, traditional Chinese marriages, and American urban marriages. Transnational split marriages consisted of a man who had both a wife who remained in China and a concubine who accompanied him in America. She argued that “life in America elevated the position of most Chinese women to that of female family heads, co-providers, and joint decision makers.”¹³⁵

Ngai reassessed the role of the Confucian patrilineal family in Chinese feudal despotism. She refuted Westerners’ imagination of Chinese coolies being traded as enslaved people and Chinese women being sold into servitude as slavery. In fact, “within status constraints, both men and women in subordinate positions acted in their interests,” and gender relations were not as static as Confucian stereotypes.¹³⁶ She also assessed the queerness of Chinese workers; white men ascribed Chinese workers a normative queerness, not in terms of homosexual relations but in the sense that they were the third sex that did not adapt to Western binary sex stereotypes. In the all-male living environment and secret brotherhood societies, same-sex relations might have been prevalent among Chinese gold prospectors and members of secret brotherhoods, she argued.¹³⁷

Conclusion

The transnational and global history turn in recent decades have led a proliferation of scholarship on Chinese immigration in 19th-century America. First-hand accounts in Chinese have gradually become the focus of scholarly narratives, especially primary folk culture sources. Folk songs and ballads authentically record Chinese immigrants’ private spiritual worlds and emotions and shed light on their families’ views on migration. Such first-hand accounts provide far more details than official documents. Owing to the absence of written sources, more and

¹³⁵ Ling, *Chinese Americans in the Heartland*, 9.

¹³⁶ Ngai, *The Chinese Question*, 43.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 62–62.

more scholars collaborate with archaeologists to analyze material evidence and speculate on the living conditions of Chinese railroad laborers. These collaborations study the food, commodities, daily necessities, and other objects found in their camps to understand how they set up a solid commercial network with the help of social organizations and were still able to enjoy Chinese goods far away in the U.S. At the same time, various American publicity illustrations, photographs, railroad company payrolls, and steamship company passenger lists depict the details of Chinese immigrants' lives and identities. Scholars have, thus, offered new interpretations and perspectives on some clichéd issues. Some scholars have found exceptions in the anti-Chinese exclusion period.

However, there are still many research gaps in the field; for example, previous research on gender has focused on Chinese prostitutes and there has been little discussion of other women. While women left fewer written records than men, scholars should find material evidence of women's lives for further study, since they can infer from the details of male laborers' lives from material evidence. More work could be done on the Chinese women who came to America with the laborers. Despite the number of female Chinese immigration was relatively smaller than it of male, Chinese women also had important roles in forming Chinese American communities by working in laundries or Chinese restaurants. Additionally, Mae Ngai mentioned the possibility of same-sex sexual behavior among Chinese gold miners. This perspective deserves to be examined in depth, as their same-sex experiences overseas may have influenced their ideas about traditional families and gender. White society had deliberately weakened the masculinity of Chinese laborers to demean their race, and I think that same-sex behavior can be considered as one of their opportunities to belittle Chinese immigrants.

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Author: Mengchu Yu

Mengchu Yu received B.A. in history from University of Connecticut and M.A. in history from Lehigh University. Her interests include Chinese diaspora, Chinese immigration in the 19th century U.S., Sino-U.S. relations in late Qing, global migration, and gender study.