FEATURE

A CENTURY OF CHINESE EXCLUSION ABROAD

A PREFACE TO THE BOOK

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PREFACE – 2005

A new immigration act passed the United States Congress in 1965 and was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson on October 3. This landmark law increased the annual quota for Chinese immigrants to the United States from 105 to 20,000, marking a new chapter in a century of anti-Chinese policy in America. This significant act immediately aroused my interest, motivating me to devote attention to this subject.

The first chapter of this book-"American Immigration Policy toward China"-was first delivered to *Political Review* in Taipei and *Ming Pao Monthly* in Hong Kong on October 23, 1965--published in the letters to the editors--only 23 days after the implementation of the that immigration act. Such were the beginnings of this volume. Five years later, the book was fully developed and was published successfully in Hong Kong (1970), Beijing (1980, 1985) and Taipei (1993). These four editions were very well received.

Many intellectuals at home and abroad, as well as my friends, have suggested in the past few decades that an English edition should be produced so that overseas Chinese who are non-Chinese speakers and western readers can be well informed of the miserable history of overseas Chinese. However, the project has been delayed until 2005, 40 years after the publication of the book's first chapter.

During these four decades, the Chinese nation has risen like a phoenix from the ashes. As a poor and underdeveloped nation, China, with its large territory and huge population, harassed by foreign powers and disturbed by years of social upheaval and later the Cultural Revolution, has rocketed to a strong, prosperous, and modern nation with great potential and with rapid development speed following China's opening to the outside world.

The world is shocked by this miraculous event, one of the greatest in human history. Overseas Chinese feel pride after so many years of struggle against biased host societies, that they are at last shown some respect and gradually able to gain equal status.

History is a mirror. To remember anti-Chinese history helps to remind nations of the need to maintain peaceful relations with others and to give equal treatment to people all around the world. This is the primary consideration and ultimate purpose of this work.

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College Park, MD
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PREFACE

PART I

A century has elapsed since the Chinese people began to suffer imperialistic aggression at home and racial exclusion abroad. Aggression by the industrially advanced nations resulted in the awakening of the Chinese intelligentsia, who in turn urged the rank and file to ask their government to reform or to face revolution. About the same time racial discrimination against Chinese immigrants in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand was embodied in a systematic strengthening and enforcing of laws and regulations which had been made in these countries.

Today, the changing times demonstrate to the world that China will tolerate no more such sovereign and territorial encroachment and that the notion of any racial superiority will not, and cannot, stand up in the torrent of the civil rights movement. As we know, the history of imperialist aggression had strongly attracted the attention of scholars in both the West and the East, but the history of racial exclusion abroad has, as a whole, been completely neglected, so that a study of it is long overdue.

This is a history of Chinese exclusion from the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the discovery of gold in these countries called for thousands of Chinese coolies. They came as contract laborers, mostly from Kwangtung and Fukien, the two provinces of Southern China.

In the beginning they were welcomed because unskilled and inexpensive labor was desperately needed. Later, when mining subsided, the supply of immigrant labor became surplus. White labor, which was then becoming organized, began to complain about the Chinese on the ground that they lowered the standard of living by accepting low wages. Subsequently, they were criticized as dirty in habits, strange in customs and laws, fond of gambling and opium, and threatening to white women because almost all of them were young men. Besides, they were thrifty; they sent all their sayings back to their homeland, showing no intention of staying in these countries. In short, they were thought incapable of assimilation.

ANTI-CHINESE SENTIMENT, SPREADING FROM A LOCAL TO A NATIONAL LEVEL AND FROM THE LOWER CLASS TO THE UPPER, CONSTITUTED PUBLIC OPINION…

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Such anti-Chinese sentiment, spreading from a local to a national level and from the lower class to the upper, constituted public opinion which was finally adopted by legislative representatives. They passed laws and drew up regulations which specifically singled out the Chinese to be restricted and excluded. The Chinese were defined as not only those who were born in China, but also those of Chinese descent all over the world, no matter what nationality they actually possessed.

The anti-Chinese movement reached its culmination in the decade when the United States Congress passed its acts of Chinese exclusion, the first

one being in 1882. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, always aware of what the United States was doing, adjusted themselves to deal similarly with the problem of Chinese immigration.

Ironically, the three cooperators, under the guidance of England, took stronger but more diplomatic measures to stop the Chinese from entering by requiring heavy taxes and literacy tests of them. Chinese immigrants were, literally and figuratively, excluded in the period between about 1880 and 1940.

The Chinese who were already in these countries retreated from the mining areas and went to the big cities where minorities were usually treated more generously. Unable to find spouses for themselves, most of them concentrated in isolated Chinatowns, leading an enforced celibate life.

The miserable picture of the overseas Chinese in those days reflected the deep-rooted meaning of those exclusion laws, laws which were totally unjust and inhuman. Not until the last stage of World War II, when the four nations were fighting along with China, did the situation see a hope of change. However, no matter how much was done because of the war, the improvement of the Chinese plight would have been slight were it not for the Immigration Act passed by the United States Congress in 1965. This act gave the Chinese equal rights with other immigrants for the first time.

According to the act, China as well as any other nation, is entitled to send each year as many as 20,000 immigrants to the United States. Almost simultaneously Canada, Australia and New Zealand followed suit to treat the Chinese equally to an extent suitable to their need to accept new immigrants. Thus the principle of Chinese exclusion in these countries ended after a whole century.

PART II

Chinese emigration has a long history, and the history of anti-Chinese incidents-occasional, isolated, or personal-is just as long. But a systematic attempt to whip up anti-Chinese social sentiment, to pass and enact a series of laws and regulations for the exclusion of Chinese that lasted for a whole century was only made in four Western nations, namely, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand

Anti-Chinese movements in these four countries were much the same. North America and Australia are both new continents with only a few hundred years of exploitation history and were both colonies of the British Empire. Native residents in these two continents were forced to retreat from their habitats as the European colonists encroached further into the mainland. Many tribes were exterminated and those who survived were on the verge of distinction.

In the middle of the 19th century, gold was discovered in these countries, which called for a large number of laborers. As slave trade had been banned and few Whites would do the hard and brutal labor-gang work. Chinese coolies were imported. They came from a country that was just defeated by Western powers and the sea ban was just lifted. Some mining companies took advantage of the opportunity to hire Chinese laborers in ports along the southeastern coast of China such as Xiarnen, Shantou, Guangzhou, Macao, and Hong Kong.

However, most Chinese were too traditional to leave their homeland for an alien country, and in addition, few of them could afford the long journey; they were subsequently lured, forced and even abducted onto the steam-boats as "pigs", who had to contract themselves and labor for a few years to pay off the loans for ticket money and the poll-tax before they could gain freedom They were then shipped across the ocean to the two continents, but only a small number of them could survive the long journey because so many of them were crowded in such a small place with poor living conditions and no medical care. Many died on the way.

They would be sent to different mines upon their arrival, and all of them would toil away all day and all year long. Whenever they had any

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spare time, they would stay with their compatriots, gambling or smoking opium to entertain themselves.

In the beginning, they were very welcome so that the first few decades witnessed a great influx of Chinese laborers. But as goldfields began to peter out, the supply of immigrant labor became surplus. White laborers began to complain about the Chinese who were believed to have lowered their wages and living standard They further mistreated Chinese laborers by beating, robbing, killing and even large-scaled expulsion.

Culturally, Chinese laborers were often looked down upon and criticized by the Whites: they distinguished themselves in their physical appearance, ways of dressing and behaving; they refused to learn and speak English; they had no intention to befriend the Whites; they were all young men leading a forced celibate life and were therefore believed to be threatening to white women. In addition, they were thrifty; they sent all their savings back to their homeland and when they acquired enough wealth, they would go back to China, showing no intention of staying in these countries. Chinese were considered as unassimilable aliens in the closing years of the 19th century when the notion of "survival of the fittest" and white superiority was prevailing.

The anti-Chinese public opinion was finally adopted by legislature representatives that drew up laws and regulations for the final expulsion of Chinese. The culmination of anti-Chinese movement was embodied in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act enacted by the American Congress. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand soon followed the lead and worked out similar acts to stop the influx of Chinese by imposing poll taxes and literacy tests. Ironically, Chinese were defined as a race rather than merely citizens of China. Chinese born in China as well as those of Chinese descent all over the world were all restricted and expelled. The Chinese who were already in these countries migrated from their working places to join their compatriots in big

cities, where they took up unobtrusive occupations such as operating restaurants or laundries, or working as fruit and vegetable dealers.

Many of them had to concentrate in enclaves called Chinatown and live a single and lonely life as they could not find Chinese females to marry. A11 the unjust and inhuman anti-Chinese laws had forced Chinese laborers into a fix, which lasted until the end of World War II when China was regarded as the ally of these nations. The Chinese government took the opportunity and proposed to the government of the United States that the Chinese exclusion laws be abolished. After a whole years debate, the abolition of the Chinese exclusion laws was agreed upon and the act passed Congress in 1943. Canada, Australia and New Zealand soon followed suit. Chinese thereupon trickled into these countries and gradually acquired the right to be naturalized.

However, great improvement could not have been made but for the Immigration Act passed by the United States Congress in 1965. The act ruled that the principle of first-come first-served was to apply so that all the applicants from all over the world would have equal opportunities. Canada and Australia were also taking measures to abolish the traditional discriminatory immigration laws, to take into account the considerations of a humanitarian nature to unite the immigrant families, and to attract educated and skilled immigrants. In short, these countries had started to treat the Chinese equally.

Chinese immigrants to these countries in this period of history also experienced a fundamental change. Many of the earlier immigrants were laborers from poor villages .in China, while the new immigrants were well-educated and with special skills except those who had relatives in the countries concerned. The adaptation of new Chinese immigrants and the tolerance of the new immigration laws have, in this era of outer space exploration, formed a new situation in which the conservative belief that "a person should ultimately return to his ancestral home" will be discarded, and in which overseas Chinese will carry forward the traditional Chinese values and take roots in the host countries.

By now there is no overall and systematic study on the history of Chinese exclusion abroad as a whole, or perhaps no one has tried from this perspective. But there are indeed some attempts made by Western scholars. Perhaps the most sweeping exercises are Mary Collidge's *Chinese Immigration* published in 1909, which did a profound survey of the Chinese immigration history to the United States during the latter half of the 19th century, and Fred W. Riggs's *Pressures on Congress* appeared in 1950, which probed into the details of the enactment of the 1943 act. Chinese works include the review and critique written by Dr. Tse-tsung Chow in the preface of this book, which, we see no need to recount it here. In this way, this book is a daring attempt as it covers all the Chinese exclusion practices in the four countries-the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand - during the past century.

It is not my purpose to give readers a detailed recount of the history. I will be satisfied if my effort to present to the academic world a neglected history and make its significance clear can offer a commonplace remark so that others may come up with more valuable research.

Some chapters of the book were published in article form in the past five years. The critiques they received varied. Those who think well of them are mostly over-seas Chinese who have some personal experiences of living in an alien society; and those who think ill of them are, in most cases, chauvinistic patriots who have been staying in China without any overseas experience.

I see no need to comment on these critiques because I did this research for academic purpose and I have expressed my own opinions on the grounds of a profound study of history and

AS TO THE MOTIVATION FOR WRITING THIS BOOK, I WANT TO TELL A STORY. I WAS A NATIVE OF GUANGDONG WHERE ALMOST EVERY FAMILY SENT ONE OR SEVERAL OF THEIR MALE MEMBERS TO GO ABROAD. MY GRANDFATHER HAD FIVE SONS AND ALL OF THEM WENT ABROAD. BUT THREE OF THEM LOST CONTACT AND NO ONE KNEW WHERE THEY HAD GONE. MY FATHER WENT TO SOUTHEAST ASIA TO SEEK FORTUNE IN MINES BUT HE DIED SEVERAL YEARS LATER WHEN I WAS JUST ADMITTED INTO THE JUNIOR MIDDLE SCHOOL. I REMEMBER IT WAS A BRIGHT SUMMER MORNING WHEN A DISTANT UNCLE RETURNED FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA AND BROUGHT BACK SOME THINGS LEFT BEHIND BY MY FATHER. HE TOLD ME EVERYTHING ABOUT MY FATHER'S DEATH.

facts. I have nothing to feel guilty of no matter what the critiques think of this book. Here I want to say that a whole century's Chinese exclusion abroad has ended, so shouldn't the traditional belief that China is the center of the whole world be ended someday?

In addition to criticism, the readers of these articles also raised two questions which I would like to take advantage of the opportunity to make some explanations. The first question concerns the Southeast Asian countries that have a large Chinese population. I saw two reasons why I did not give a systematic review to overseas Chinese in these countries. Firstly, the records about the history of Chinese in the Southeast Asian countries are isolated and scarce. They are dispersed in different records of local histories that it would be a great task to pick them all out Secondly--also the chief reason--Chinese exclusion movement in these countries were not so systematic as that in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Anti-Chinese agitation did not appear until the end of World War II after the independence of these countries. Due to the above two reasons, the author only gives a very brief review of the history of Chinese immigration in the Southeast Asian countries. The second question from the readers concerns the adaptation of overseas Chinese. As the author learns, not a few scholars have contributed to the study of this topic, but it is a sub-field of sociology and therefore should not be mixed up with historical study that this book is engaged in.

Sociologists put forward that immigrants usually experience three stages after their arrival in the host country. The first stage is acculturation which usually happens to the first generation who have to accommodate themselves to the new environment in order to survive but are in a dilemma as the host culture is often in contradiction with their own customs and beliefs. The second stage is assimilation which usually happens to the second generation who have acquired some traditional values from their

parents but are more easy assimilated by school education in the process of socialization. But to eliminate all the differences and prejudices between different ethnic groups and to integrate into one-that is called integration by sociologists-needs a long time of intermarriage which is what will happen in the third stage.

As to the motivation for writing this book, I want to tell a story. I was a native of Guangdong where almost every family sent one or several of their male members to go abroad. My grandfather had five sons and all of them went abroad. But three of them lost contact and no one knew where they had gone. My father went to Southeast Asia to seek fortune in mines but he died several years later when I was just admitted into the junior middle school. I remember it was a bright summer morning when a distant uncle returned from Southeast Asia and brought back some things left behind by my father. He told me everything about my father's death. Of all the five sons of my grandfather, only one of my father's elder brothers returned lonely in his old age who went straight to a temple and became a Buddhist monk.

So to write something about the overseas Chinese, to some extent, is to memorize my own family history. This book is also motivated by my personal experience in the United States. More than ten years ago, when I first came to this land to study in Columbia University, I saw many Chinese students wondering and hesitating about their future as they could not return back to China due to the warfare in the country. They wanted to remain in the United States but were restricted by the immigration laws. Those who stayed could not find a job except a few. Many of them were waiting, wondering, feeling depressed and anxious.

I heard several cases about the sorrows of distraction and about perfectly sensible students who went off one day and killed themselves. The above two kinds of personal experiences and the loneliness and distresses that accompanied me during the decades I passed in the United States as a member of a minority group provoked in me the interest in the neglected history and motivated me to have a profound study of the numerous materials and present a systematic analysis to the readers.

The idea of this work was gradually developed from articles which were published on the front pages of *Ming Pao Monthly*. At the urging of readers, these articles have now been gathered in book form. Little revision has been found necessary except in the first chapter, to which some new material had been added in order to draw together the major events, a chronology is included.

The author is deeply indebted to Dr. Tse-tsung Chow, of the University of Wisconsin. He wrote the extensive preface commending the work as the first account of a significant but neglected problem in the study of modern Chinese history. Reading most of the work in manuscript and again in proof, he made meticulous corrections and valuable suggestions. However, any failings and errors this work may have are the fault of the author, and his alone is the responsibility for the views and interpretations presented

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Editor's Note: Professor Shen's book will be published by the Chinese American Forum in segments, starting January 2010.