
The mid-nineteenth century was a period with increasing hardships for China; it had to cope with foreign powers, local uprisings, and natural disasters. The dire social circumstances forced many Chinese to seek their livelihood overseas. The arrival of Chinese workers on the Pacific Coast of the United States brought labor competition and gradually increased local antipathy toward the Chinese. In 1882, the US Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, the first federal law to bar all Chinese workers, unskilled and skilled, from entering the US for a period of ten years, and prevent the Chinese from naturalization. *Closing the Gate*, the award-winning classic book by Andrew Gyory revisits the developments of the Chinese Exclusion Act and attempts to penetrate the labor conflicts and reveal the more profound cause of the passage of the Immigration Act of 1882, which, as Gyory claims, permanently altered the country’s image as a beacon of hope and a haven for the impoverished and the oppressed.

The book is carefully structured and divided into twelve chapters, elaborating in detail the origin and development of the Chinese Exclusion Act until 1882. Chapter 1 points out the contributions and weaknesses of earlier claims and studies regarding the Exclusion Act, arguing that American politicians provided the major agency for driving out members of the unwanted race. Chapter 2 describes the rapid increase in Chinese labor imported into the US and the distinction between Chinese immigration and importation identified by the American working class. Chapters 3 and 4 show that local workers/unions, especially those on the East Coast, supported free Chinese immigration but not importation of slaves, and that there was dissension among republicans, slavery abolitionists, and senators regarding the treatment of the Chinese workers. Chapters 5 and 6 reveal how some American politicians started to leverage the Chinese issue for their own aspirations such as resolving strikes...
and class tensions, managing the contest at elections, and spreading attacks on
the Chinese to the East Coast. Chapter 7 mainly features the role of the press in
misrepresenting the opinions of the working class toward the bandwagon
driven by Denis Kearney (the nation's foremost anti-Chinese agitator), turning
their rejection of Kearney into general approval. Chapter 8 turns to the Fifteen
Passenger Bill for restricting Chinese immigration, which was advocated by
the Republican Senator James Gillespie Blaine to defuse class tensions nation-
wide and win votes from California for his bid for the presidency, but that was
ultimately vetoed because it contradicted the Burlingame Treaty that the US
had signed with China in 1868. Chapter 9 discusses the new Constitution of
California that promoted anti-Chinese sentiment and forced the Chinese to
move eastward, as well as the Eastern workers' consistent and enduring views
on Chinese immigration even though the Chinese were presented as menace
to replace jobs. Chapters 10 and 11 describe how the Republicans, in order to
combat the Democrats and win the presidency, plotted Chinese exclusion
through replacing the Burlingame Treaty with the Angell Treaty and thus
thwarted steadfast opposition toward Chinese immigration restriction found
among the working class. The last chapter focuses on the final passage of the
Exclusion Act and reemphasizes the cause of its passage.

The most prominent contribution of the book is that it reveals the polit-
ical forces under the surface of labor competition that successfully diverted
the working-class voters' attention from graver national problems such as eco-
nomic depression, mass poverty, and rising unemployment to a race issue of
much less importance. It also shows how the passage of the Act was attrib-
uted to the demand of American workers when extensive consensus among
the working class toward Chinese exclusion had not yet emerged, especially
on the East Coast. What is particularly noteworthy in this process is that the
Republican Party was gradually transformed from an anti-slavery force and an
icon of freedom to a mere electoral apparatus, and that domestic party politics
could override the nation's ideals of equality and justice in dealing with racial
relationships. With racism legitimized as a national policy in the nineteenth
century, restrictions and prejudice against Asians, as Gyory concludes, have
become a lingering issue in the US up to today.

Another advantage of the book is that it presents a prudent study of the
Chinese Exclusion Act grounded on a wealth of official and unofficial primary
sources. Aside from the Treaties, US congressional records and the Exclusion
Act itself, Gyory also consulted a broad variety of relevant newspapers and
working-class periodicals, as well as memoirs, reminiscences, letters, and
autobiographies. The Republican newspapers examined include the ones that
advocated for Chinese exclusion (e.g., The Cincinnati Gazette) and the ones that
supported the importation of Chinese labor (e.g., *The Boston Commonwealth*), which reveal the dissension and struggle over the Chinese issue within the party. Other crucial sources that Gyory referred to include President Rutherford Birchard Hayes’s diary mentioning his contemplation of the veto of the Fifteen Passenger Bill, and the memoir of James Burrrill Angell who contributed to the conclusion of the Angell Treaty. These unofficial documents provide more balanced insights into the subjects under investigation.

The book would have been further strengthened if its limitations had been considered. One major weakness of the study is its weighty focus on mainstream social groups—politicians and local workers, which reflects an American perspective for perceiving and discussing the historical event. Because of this, insufficient attention has been granted to the relatively voiceless Chinese laborers. E.g., how exactly did the Chinese laborers or community leaders react to the labor conflicts? What were individual Chinese laborers’ attitudes and sufferings in the shadow of these racial and political tensions? Another limitation is the description of politicians’ winning votes through promoting Chinese exclusion. It was unclear how the votes had exactly changed over the course of the campaign. Gyory could have involved some quantitative analysis of the votes to visualize the change, as found in the work of Fisher and Fisher who conducted regression analysis to reveal a strong correlation between one’s party/region and their vote on the bill for the Exclusion Act of 1882 in the House of Representatives.\(^1\) Moreover, the book concentrates on the attitudes and actions of the workers on the East Coast in contrast to those on the Pacific Coast; hence, the large nation seems to shrink to the states on the two coasts. Some more detailed discussion of the state of Chinese exclusion in less-represented inland states between the coasts could further gratify readers’ curiosity and paint a more comprehensive picture of the Chinese issue at a national scale.

On the whole, despite the limitations of the book, it has challenged earlier interpretations of the Chinese Exclusion Act by showing that there were not nationwide labor movements fueling the exclusion of Chinese immigrants, and revealing that the Chinese Exclusion was to a large extent a political action to resolve domestic class conflicts via a side race issue. It underscores the importance of the Act as a key source of subsequent racial challenges in American history and provides a vital perspective for understanding Sino-American relations. The book’s contributions to the scholarly discussion of the Act inspired a host of ensuing studies. For instance, aligning with Gyory’s main

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argument, Fisher and Fisher also concentrate on the conflicting attitudes and actions of politicians and local workers as a driving force behind the Chinese Exclusion.\textsuperscript{2} In response to Gyory’s argument about the differing attitudes of local workers toward the Chinese in the eastern United States, Rhoads presents a more detailed case study of economic tensions among low-wage Chinese workers moving eastward to Pennsylvania, European American workers in Pennsylvania, and their common employers, and claims that the opponents of Chinese labor, who turned to the federal government for dismissing the “coolies,” did contribute to the eventual passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in a possibly minor way because they increased the cacophony of voices calling for a federal response to the issue.\textsuperscript{3} Inspired by Gyory’s national politician thesis, Lee discusses a “gatekeeping” framework for understanding how race, class, and gender were instrumental in the formation of the American nation.\textsuperscript{4} According to Lee, Americans learned to define American-ness and preserve a “white man’s frontier” through controlling the country’s geographical borders and closing its gates to unwanted foreigners. This gatekeeping was also linked by Lee to America’s imperial expansion when these immigration laws were extended to the country’s new territories (e.g., Hawaii, the Philippines). Lee further sheds light on the process of the enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Act by “gate-keeping” officials until 1943, describes how Chinese immigrants attempted to circumvent the measures of exclusion, and supports Gyory’s claim that the Act paved the way for future American immigration policies.\textsuperscript{5} Similarly, Chung and Wong also examine the Chinese migrants’ reactions to the Exclusion laws such as creating “paper relatives” or launching a boycott of American products.\textsuperscript{6} These studies have made the response of the Chinese to the escalating exclusion more explicit as compared with Gyory’s narration. Furthermore, critiquing the American perspective assumed by scholars such as Gyory, Qin advocates the viewpoint of the Chinese, develops a cultural clash concept, and considers the native-place sentiment (the cultural loyalty of the


Chinese migrants to their native place) brought by the Chinese to the US as the pivotal cause of the Chinese Exclusion Act.\(^7\) It can be seen that all these subsequent studies have either developed from Gyory’s major claim in his book or further complemented it by providing the Chinese voice and perspective to the Act as well as extending the explanation of the cause of Chinese exclusion and relating it to Sino-American cultural conflicts and America’s imperial expansion.

In regards to the scholarly development of the topic, future research concerning the Chinese Exclusion Act could further concentrate on the role of racial exclusion in the state formation and imperial expansion of the United States. It may also follow the trend of investigating the influences of the Act and assume a microscopic approach to tap into the personal experience of individual Chinese men and women during the exclusion period. Moreover, researchers could further explore the role of international trade between the United States and China in the life of the Act. In light of the influence of Gyory’s book on other studies reviewed above, it is certain that the book will remain a seminal reference for historians who hope to interpret the history of the United States or the history of Sino-American relations.

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