

PREFACE

Immigration policy has a one hundred year history rooted in the debate in American society over whether, and on what basis, people from other countries should be excluded from living in the United States. The first legislation of this type identified criminals and people with communicable diseases as undesirable, but a not-so-subtle message emerged in the mid 1800s that, because they were an inferior race, Chinese people should be prevented from entering the United States.¹ Hence, the term “yellow peril” was born.

In the early 1900s, U.S. courts no longer were charged with dealing with immigration cases and instead the U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor administered an array of immigration regulations. The Immigration Service (now called the Immigration and Naturalization Service, or INS) established a Chinese Bureau separate from other immigration departments to administer the so-named exclusion laws. By 1924, Congress established a quota system per geographic region, and the numbers of immigrants from all around the world seeking entry to the United States declined significantly.² In 1943 sixty years of Chinese exclusion laws were repealed, and subsequently the wives and children of immigrants living in the United States were allowed entry. Next, in 1965, an act of Congress abolished the quota system that had been based on national origins, and Chinese people were permitted to enter the United States on an equal basis with other immigrants.

In the present day scholars have begun to reexamine the extra-legal aspects of immigration. They reason that immigration is a complex process, spanning many years and involving much more than the letter of the law in the United States.³ For example, McKeown notes that “an understanding of Chinese migration and of ethnic Chinese needs to incorporate an historical perspective other than just those shaped by nation states.”⁴ Thus, tracing the settlement patterns of the midwestern Chinese community involves multiple stages. Beginning in the 1800s, the majority of Chinese immigrants migrated to the Midwest from the West Coast and, at the same time, maintained vital kinship

¹ Carlson and Colburn (1972).

² Higham (1975), pp. 20-28.

³ Schelbert (1976), pp. 15-148.

⁴ McKeown (1999), p. 331.

relationships in a variety of places, including California, Mexico, Hawaii, Hong Kong, and Canada.

In this book I focus on what happened to Chinese immigrants who wanted to settle in the Midwest during the so-called exclusion period (1882-1943). While many of the points I make about Chinese immigrant life in the Midwest during this period can be applied to Chinese communities across the United States, it is also true that the midwestern lifestyle has a character of its own. As in other Chinese communities in America, the U.S. Immigration Service in the Midwest was an aggressive force in Chinese exclusion. In 1882, when the first Chinese exclusion act was established, the United States had few immigration restrictions: Within the roughly sixty years in which the exclusion laws were enforced, however, American attitudes toward immigration, and specific types of immigrant groups, crystallized. In this book, I point out that the relative uniqueness of the Chinese immigrant experience in the Midwest is in the way its lawyers, notary publics, medical doctors, politicians, missionaries, journalists, private citizens, and Chinese interpreters influenced the way the Immigration Service office both developed as a bureaucracy and implemented the laws. The Immigration Service was responsible for determining which Chinese immigrants, among the population defined by the service's immigration inspectors, were deportable. At first glance, it appears that the exclusion laws would have been easy for the Immigration Service to implement. However, political theorists such as Karl Deutsch, who in 1963 wrote a classic book titled *The Nerves of Government*, point out that in politics, the simple task often and quickly becomes complicated.

Tracking the "Yellow Peril": The INS and Chinese Immigrants in the Midwest identifies Chinese families who employed one of seven specific strategies for dealing with Chinese exclusion—strategies here called *autonomous, grounded, assimilated, intermediary, pluralistic, bicultural, and boundary spanning*. It examines the ways women and their children entered and departed the United States; students and professionals worked and adjusted to American schools; and public charges were showcased by the Immigration Service to affirm its upholding of the exclusion laws. Within each of these population groups, I address the plight of Chinese laborers, who were the explicit targets of Chinese exclusion. In so doing, I aim to bolster these themes as avenues for further study.