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THE FORCED EFFEMINIZATION OF MALE CHINESE IMMIGRANTS AND THE
CONSEQUENCES OF THIS PROCESS

Hailee Brandt

HIST255: American Social History

Fall 2022

“The Chinese were all like a herd of frightened deer that let the huntsmen surround and kill them.”¹

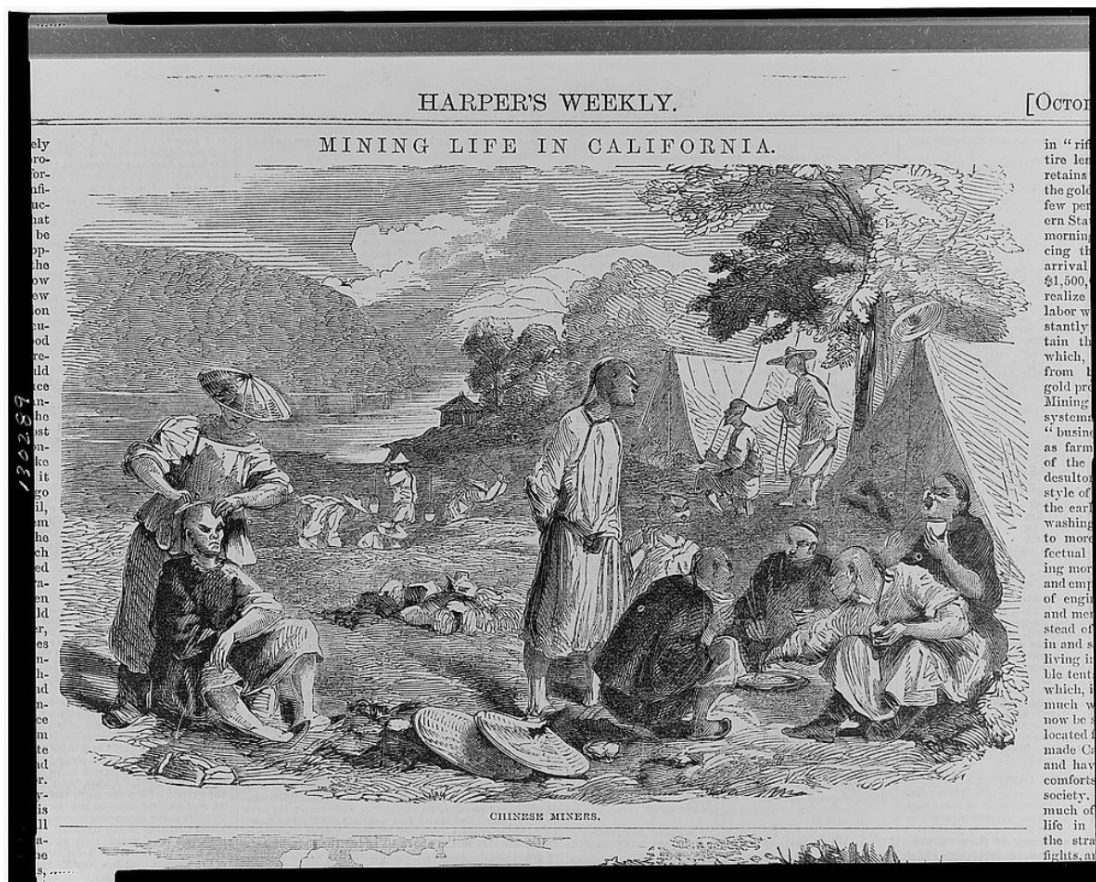
The aim of this paper is to uncover and highlight the forced effeminization of male Chinese immigrants and the consequences of this process during the Chinese Exclusion Act Era. The Chinese Exclusion Act Era is defined by a period of time within American history in which strict and scrutinizing laws were created with the aim of restricting access to the United States for Chinese people. Additionally, these laws aimed to restrict the freedom the Chinese people might have had whilst living their lives in America if they ever were to make it through such oppressive borders. The most notable of such laws was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which was not officially repealed until 1943.² The harsh treatment of Chinese people in America was, regardless, very persistent both before and after this time period. This was neither the first nor last law to target the ethnic group, but was largely only repealed in order to repay China for their assistance as an ally during World War II. This paper will begin by enumerating some of the legislature that made life in America so difficult for Chinese immigrants, and will simultaneously examine how women– or a lack thereof– was used to emasculate men. It will then delve into how examinations and social constructs played a role in further persecution of Chinese men undergoing the selection process at the border, and conclude with a look at how the job market for Chinese men embodied

¹ Judy Yung, Gordon H. Chang, and Him Mark Lai, eds. “Memorial of Chinese Laborers at Rock Springs, Wyoming (1885).” In *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present*, 1st ed., 54. University of California Press, 2006. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pppwn.16>.

² Chinese Exclusion Acts, repeal., 78 P.L. 199, 57 Stat. 600, 78 Cong. Ch. 344. (December 17, 1943), 600. <https://advance-lexis-com.hollins.idm.oclc.org/api/document?collection=statutes-legislation&id=urn:contentItem:5CBP-FY20-01XN-S31S-00000-00&context=1516831>.

all of this. As a result, the never-ending loop of the effeminization of Chinese Men will be revealed, for no matter where these men turned within American society, it was unavoidable.

Crop failures began forcing Chinese citizens to emigrate in hopes of survival during the 1840s. Following the Gold Rush in the United States in 1848, immigration from China to America started rising rapidly, reaching a high of over 20,000 people in 1852 compared to less than 3,000 people the year prior.³ Pictured below is a depiction of such immigrants, at their collective camp.



³ History.com Staff. "Chinese Exclusion Act." HISTORY. A&E Television Networks, August 24, 2018. <https://www.history.com/topics/immigration/chinese-exclusion-act-1882>.

⁴ Mining life in California--Chinese miners. California, 1857. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2001700332/>.

Immediately they were persecuted. A \$20/month tax was created to specifically target Chinese miners with California's Foreign Miners License Tax.⁵ Though this tax was later reduced to \$4 a month, it is the equivalent of \$154.81 today.^{6 7} Prior to the reduction, it was valued at \$774.06 given today's dollar value.⁸ This was required to be paid by an already poor group, for Chinese workers were both not given the same job opportunities and underpaid when they were hired. Furthermore, the taxes did not make the worksites for Chinese immigrants any safer. They were repeatedly the victims of boycotts against their businesses, verbal harassment, physical assault, and murder.⁹ Despite the mounting crimes and injustices faced by the Chinese in America, they were not permitted to seek legal help. In the Supreme Court Case *People v. Hall* (1854), it was decided that Chinese people were not allowed to testify against or in favor of white people, i.e. anyone of European descent, in court.¹⁰ The means to effectively protect themselves against hatred that sought to destroy their lives was eliminated with this SCOTUS decision.

⁵ "Legislative Harassment: Immigration and Relocation in U.S. History." The Library of Congress. Congress.gov. Accessed December 11, 2022. <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/chinese/legislative-harassment/>.

⁶ "Foreign Miners Tax Documents, 1850-1867.", 1850. https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma990014825450205115&context=L&vid=01CSL_INST:CSL.

⁷ California State Legislature, "Foreign Miner's License," *SHEC: Resources for Teachers*, accessed December 11, 2022, <https://shec.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/1714>.

⁸ "Inflation Rate between 1852-2022." Inflation Calculator. Officialdata.org, 2022. <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1852?amount=20>.

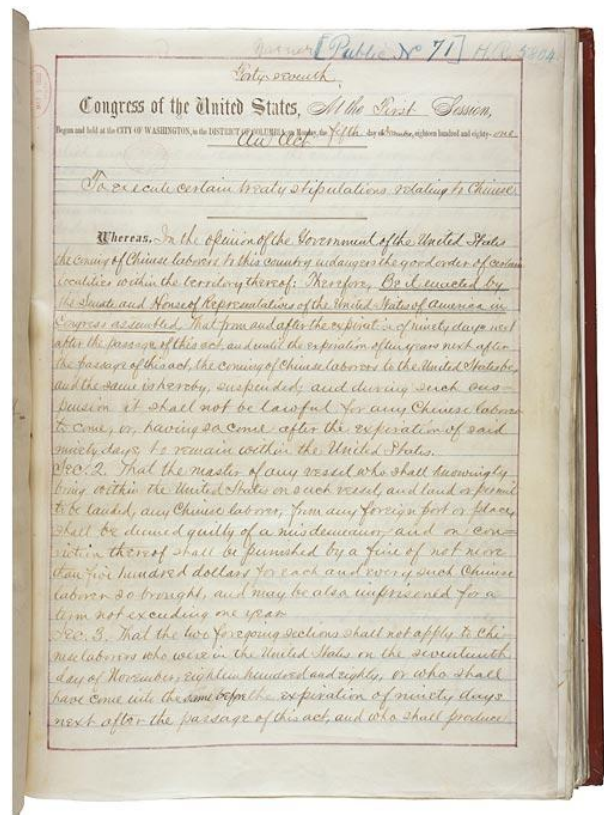
⁹ *Labor Union Flyer. National Archives and Records Administration*. Records of the U.S. Circuit Courts, Record Group 21. Accessed December 11, 2022. <https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/chinese-boycott/images/union-flyer-01.gif>.

¹⁰ *People v. Hall*, 4 Cal. 399, 1854 Cal. LEXIS 137 (Supreme Court of California October 1854). <https://advance-lexis-com.hollins.idm.oclc.org/api/document?collection=cases&id=urn:contentItem:3SHB-P8R0-001B-819T-00000-00&context=1516831>.

More harmful legislature was later passed, but perhaps most notable was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, as depicted in the photo on the following page.¹¹ A ten-year ban on the entry of Chinese laborers into the United States was officially introduced. The process of immigrating under the guise of being a non-laborer became increasingly impossible, as well, and a quota of 105 visas to be permitted to Chinese people each year only strengthened the idea that the Chinese were not welcome. The narrowly defined group of individuals who would have qualified as non-laborer were required to gain certification from the Chinese government in order to begin to seek entry.¹² Proving non-laborer status was difficult, given the broad definition of both “skilled and unskilled” workers being included in the definition of a laborer in the Exclusion Act

¹¹ Chinese immigration., 22 Stat. 58, 47 Cong. Ch. 126, pages 58-61 (May 6, 1882). <https://advance-lexis-com.hollins.idm.oclc.org/api/document?collection=statutes-legislation&id=urn:contentItem:5C7R-80G0-01XN-S2NW-00000-00&context=1516831>.

¹² “Chinese Exclusion Act (1882).” National Archives. National Archives and Records Administration, February 17, 2022. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/chinese-exclusion-act>.



itself.¹⁴ Additionally, any Chinese person who left the United States from 1882 onwards would have to reobtain one of these certificates in order to reenter.¹⁵ Due to the difficulty of this task for even those who were non-laborers, and its unattainability for the many Chinese laborers within America, returning home to China if not to return permanently became impossible. Chinese people were cut off from their families in a non-digital age. For those who did choose to remain in the States permanently, they were unable to gain citizenship.¹⁶ Once the projected ten year lifespan of the Chinese Exclusion Act had

¹³ An act to execute certain treaty stipulations relating to the Chinese, May 6, 1882; Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789-1996; General Records of the United States Government; Record Group 11; National Archives

¹⁴ "Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)." National Archives.

¹⁵ "Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)." National Archives.

¹⁶ "Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)." National Archives.

ended, the government ensured the suffering would not end along with it. Instead, the Geary Act of 1892 expanded its lifespan for an additional ten years, and in 1902, an extension made the originally temporary Exclusion Act permanent.^{17 18} It also created the added requirement for Chinese residents in America to carry a certificate of residency, lest they risk deportation.¹⁹ Chinese people were already viewed as alien, and thus, non-male, but an intruding figure.

Isolating the few Chinese permitted to enter and exist in America was only the beginning of a process of forced effeminization.

As may be recalled from the requirements of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, only a maximum of 105 visas were distributed to Chinese people each year, of which was later made permanent with the Magnuson Act.²⁰ This resulted in Chinese women, who were rarely workers let alone the type permitted entry at this time, were entirely excluded from any limited immigration opportunities. The exclusion of Chinese women did not begin with this law, however. In 1875, the United States government enacted the Page Law. As the first restrictive federal immigration law, it was primarily used against Chinese people in order to deny any entry to women. The alleged goal of the law was to restrict the immigration of individuals engaged with or coerced into immoral work such

¹⁷ Geary Act (Chinese Exclusion), USCS Popular Name G-32, 25.
<https://advance-lexis-com.hollins.idm.oclc.org/api/document?collection=statutes-legislation&id=urn:contentItem:66P9-SX81-JJ6S-61PV-00000-00&context=1516831>.

¹⁸ Chinese exclusion., 27 Stat. 25, 52 Cong. Ch. 60. (May 5, 1892), 26.
<https://advance-lexis-com.hollins.idm.oclc.org/api/document?collection=statutes-legislation&id=urn:contentItem:5C8C-P730-01XN-S1NR-00000-00&context=1516831>.

¹⁹ "Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)." National Archives.

²⁰ Chinese Exclusion Acts, repeal., 78 P.L. 199, 57 Stat. 600.

as prostitution.²¹ Immigration officers were allowed to refer to this law and make accusations as arbitrarily as they wished, so despite there often being little or no evidence of the accused actually working within the sex industry, nothing could be done.²² As Chinese people were not allowed to testify in court against the officials to defend themselves as per *People v. Hall*, it was not possible to do anything to fight an accusation of this type. The number of Chinese women entering the United States at this point in history dwindled to nothing.

There were severe consequences on the limited population of Chinese women in America and the perceived manhood of Chinese men. It is mentioned in Margot Canaday's *The Straight State* that having a wife and family were very essential to manhood during the late 1800s through the 1900s.²³ And yet, many Chinese men in America did not have this option. With interracial marriages remaining illegalized until the decision in *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967, and a severe drought of Chinese women in America, many Chinese immigrants found it impossible to obtain this cornerstone of becoming a man.²⁴ As a result, they were viewed as much more feminine than their white counterparts, for a man is in many ways defined by his heterosexuality and the achievements related to it. As for the men who already had obtained such

²¹ Immigration., 18 Stat. 477, 43 Cong. Ch. 141, (March 3, 1875), 477.
<https://advance-lexis-com.hollins.idm.oclc.org/api/document?collection=statutes-legislation&id=urn:contentItem:5C7R-8080-01XN-S52W-00000-00&context=1516831>.

²² Michael Park. "Asian American Masculinity Eclipsed: A Legal and Historical Perspective of Emasculation Through U.S. Immigration Practices." *The Modern American* 8, no. 1 (2013), 10.

²³ Margot Canaday. "The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America." Princeton: Princeton University Press, (2009), 29. muse.jhu.edu/book/61031.

²⁴ *Loving v. Virginia*, 388 U.S. 1, 87 S. Ct. 1817, 18 L. Ed. 2d 1010, 1967 U.S. LEXIS 1082 (Supreme Court of the United States June 12, 1967, Decided).
<https://advance-lexis-com.hollins.idm.oclc.org/api/document?collection=cases&id=urn:contentItem:3S4X-FV50-003B-S3VW-00000-00&context=1516831>.

achievements and did have wives and children, their families usually did not exist in America along with them. Forced to leave their families behind in China, they were legally prevented from performing patriarchy. This forced family separation is embodied by the *Ah Quan* and *Ah Moy* decisions in the 1880s, which permanently disallowed Chinese wives to immigrate to America to join their husbands unless they could prove that they themselves had resided in the States prior to the current attempt at entry.^{25 26} As put concisely by researcher Michael Park, “Such exclusion laws helped to [further] emasculate Chinese men by restricting their access to heterosexual norms and ideals such as nuclear family formations.”²⁷

Experiencing social discrimination regarding manhood in accordance with a lack of a wife and family would only occur after a person managed to succeed against racism and discrimination for being ‘effeminate’ at the United States border. This is an issue largely explored in *The Straight State* and not mentioned much elsewhere, perhaps due to the inability of Chinese men to testify in court as well as language barriers that make any pre-existing sources, if they do exist, unavailable. During the immigration process of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was an attempt from immigration officials to eliminate what was then considered to be “the sexually perverse”, and what is now more commonly known as LGBT people.²⁸ Men at the

²⁵ Christian G. Fritz. “A Nineteenth Century ‘Habeas Corpus Mill’: The Chinese before the Federal Courts in California.” *The American Journal of Legal History* 32, no. 4 (1988), 363. <https://doi.org/10.2307/845742>.

²⁶ *Cheong Ah Moy v. United States*, 113 U.S. 216, 5 S. Ct. 431, 28 L. Ed. 983, 1885 U.S. LEXIS 1671 (Supreme Court of the United States January 26, 1885, Decided). <https://advance-lexis-com.hollins.idm.oclc.org/api/document?collection=cases&id=urn:contentItem:3S4X-HMF0-003B-H2ST-00000-00&context=1516831>.

²⁷ Park, “Asian American Masculinity Eclipsed,” 10.

²⁸ Canaday, “The Straight State”.

border were scrutinized for any indication of the stereotype of what a “sexually perverse” man looked like, the process of which is shown in the photo below.²⁹



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The stereotype is most simply defined as a man who was rather on the small-side as opposed to being muscularly built, and was duly equipped with smaller genitalia.³¹ Men who had long hair, a traditionally female trait in American culture, were also stereotyped to be in this category. This description unfortunately matched that of many Chinese men immigrating to America during this time period. They were, naturally, smaller than the ideal image of a traditional American man.³² Throughout history, Chinese men have

²⁹ Canaday, “The Straight State,” 33-36.

³⁰ *Asian Immigrants Being Examined*. n.d.. Photograph. Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation.

³¹ Canaday, “The Straight State,” 33-36.

³² Scott Alan Carson. “The Biological Living Conditions of Nineteenth-Century Chinese Males in America.” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 37, no. 2 (2006), 209. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4139546>.

generally always been smaller than American men.³³ However, rather than having an understanding that people of different cultures have always had different appearances and measurement averages, American immigration officials viewed Chinese men as having incredibly effeminate bodies. This misconception was exacerbated by the queue.



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The queue, as shown above, was a hairstyle worn by men in which the hair must be grown as long as possible and braided. The hairstyle, first popularized during the Qing dynasty, was legally enforced in China.³⁵ Thus, men immigrating to America would avoid cutting it off at all costs lest they entirely give up hope of ever returning to China

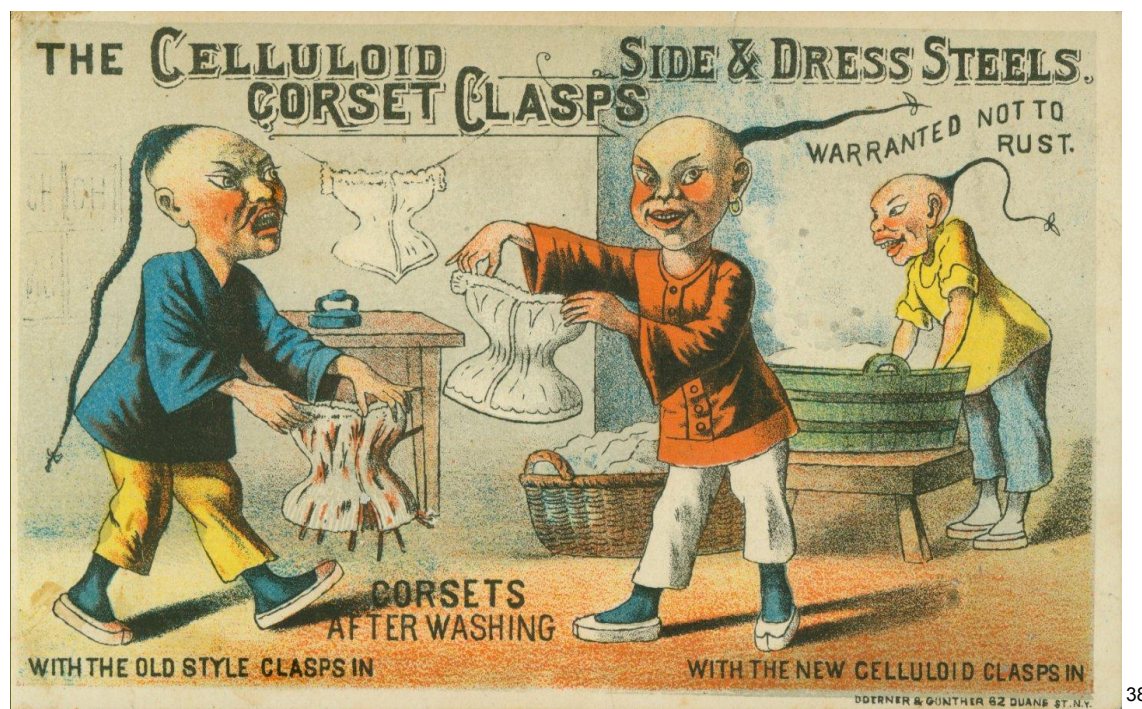
³³ Guogang Lu, Yi Hu, Zhihui Yang, *et al.* Geographic latitude and human height - Statistical analysis and case studies from China. *Arab J Geosci* 15, (2022), 335. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12517-021-09335-x>

³⁴ Lai Afong. *Chinese Meal*. n.d.. Photograph.

³⁵ Alexander Jesus Serrano, "THE MANCHU QUEUE: A COMPLEX SYMBOL IN CHINESE IDENTITY" (2022), 2-3. Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations. 1496. <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd/1496>.

someday.³⁶ As a result of not cutting it, they were seen as even more effeminate at the border, and many men were not granted entry.³⁷

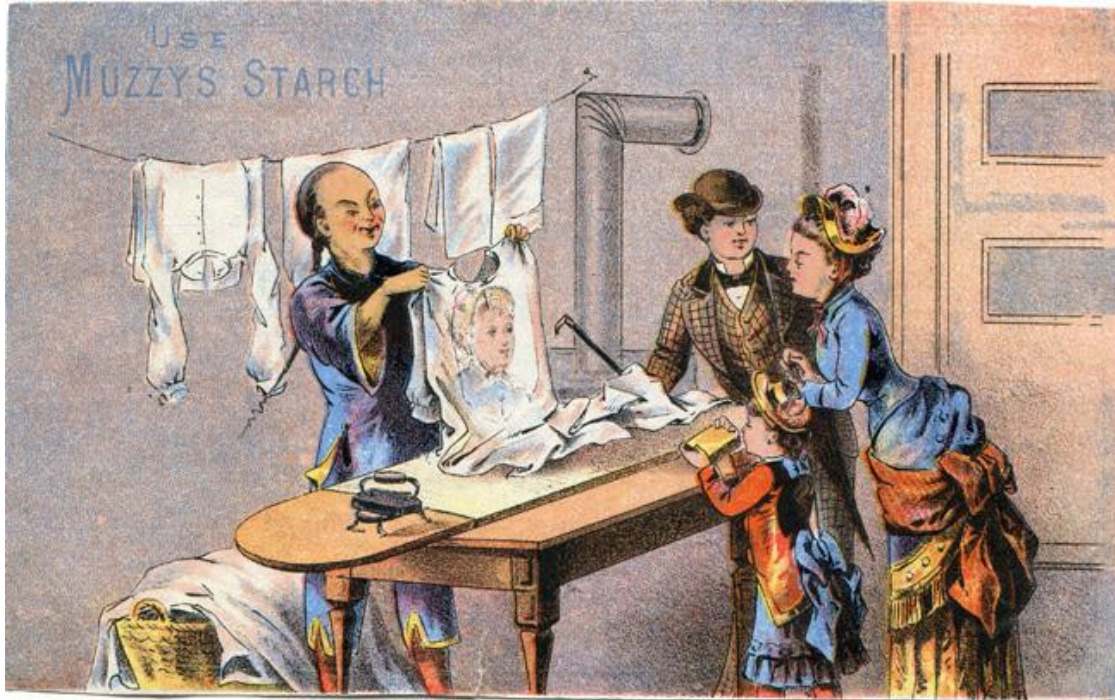
For the few Chinese men who were able to successfully immigrate, stereotyping was, sadly, a common way to advertise oneself for work. In Chinese Exclusion Era America, a typical example of this and very popular icon within the laundry industry was that of the Chinese laundryman.



³⁶ Serrano, "The Manchu Queue," 78.

³⁷ Canaday, "The Straight State," 28.

³⁸ Doerner and Gunther's , "The celluloid corset clasps. Side and dress steels, warranted not to rust," *Chinese Immigration in the Late 19th Century*, accessed April 18, 2023, <https://digital.librarycompany.org/islandora/object/digitool%3A106880>.

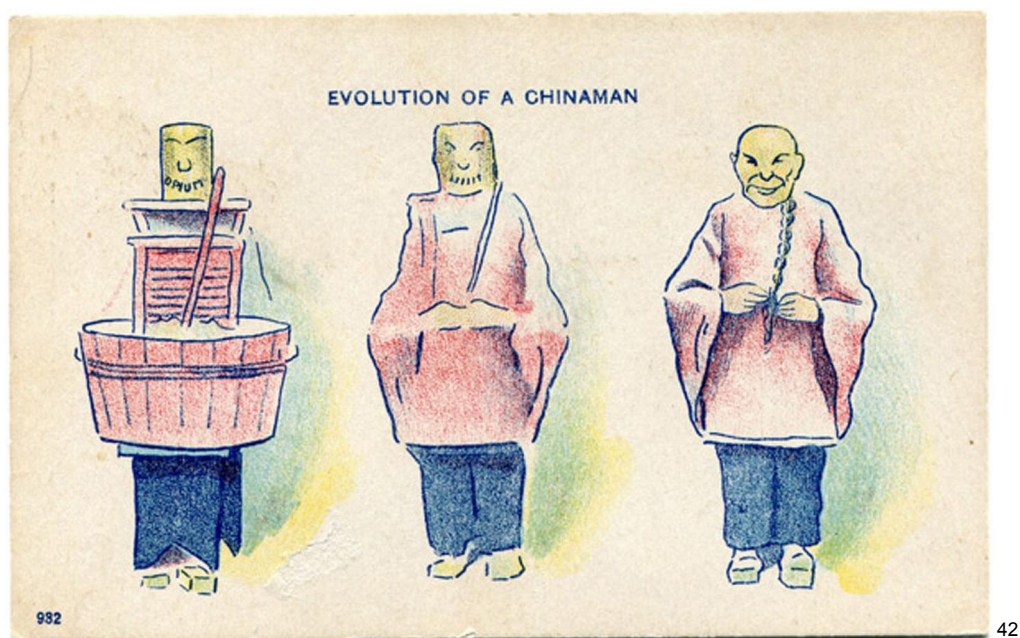


As shown above, a caricature of a Chinese man and his laundry business was used as a form of marketing. What this largely gives insight to is the issue of labor market segmentation and the disproportionate amount of Chinese men working in female dominated industries. Chinese men were largely confined to jobs that were traditionally viewed as only being for women.⁴⁰ For a man to do a woman's job at this point in history was exceptionally noteworthy, and signifies yet another sacrifice of traditional manhood made in the pursuit of survival. Admittedly, the economic exclusion was not total. Chinese men did still work traditionally masculine jobs such as mining and railroad building. However, what is significant here is that any men, especially such a large percentage of Chinese men, were working laundry-related jobs. They did this so

³⁹ Muzzy's Laundry, "Muzzy's Corn Starch," *Chinese Immigration in the Late 19th Century*, accessed December 12, 2022, <http://projects.leadr.msu.edu/progressiveeraimmigration/items/show/5>.

⁴⁰ Joan S. Wang. "Race, Gender, and Laundry Work: The Roles of Chinese Laundrymen and American Women in the United States, 1850-1950." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24, no. 1 (2004), 60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27501531>.

extensively that they became the icon of the laundry industry for the Western United States, and according to a census report in 1880, made up 3/4ths of the industry.⁴¹ Though very racist in nature, an example of just how much Chinese male laborers shaped the American laundry industry in the 1800s is exemplified in the cartoon below.



Though Chinese men did exist in some traditionally masculine jobs, these career options were not very open to them. It is within these jobs that Chinese men experienced the most persecution and backlash from their non-Asian peers. Infamously, the riot at Rock Springs, Wyoming, exemplified this attitude. This riot, which took dozens of lives, is only one of many.⁴³ When Chinese men were capable of finding masculine work that was available to them, they risked their lives in the process of showing up each day. The only jobs that were truly open to Chinese men in America at

⁴¹ Wang, "Race, Gender, and Laundry Work," 61.

⁴² "Evolution of a Chinaman," *Chinese Immigration in the Late 19th Century*, accessed April 18, 2023, <https://www.lookandlearn.com/history-images/M695014/Evolution-of-a-Chinaman>.

⁴³ Yung, "Memorial of Chinese Laborers at Rock Springs," 48.

this time were stereotypically feminine jobs.^{44 45} In these jobs, they were chased out and attacked less often by white men, who no longer felt their jobs were at risk. This describes the “yellow peril” phenomenon, in which Chinese men were viewed as sneaky, cunning, and existing in America only to steal jobs from white workers.⁴⁶ Though the excuse of being concerned about losing jobs to a foreign entity was more than anything just an excuse to be racist, Chinese men could indeed avoid some persecution by working elsewhere. Many Chinese men, beyond laundry work, took on feminine jobs such as becoming a cook, tailor, and maid.⁴⁷ Most of these feminine jobs were in fact self-employed ones.⁴⁸ These industries were easier to enter and begin a business in, for they were not as desirable as a workplace by white males and were thus less competitive.⁴⁹ This holds especially true in the Western United States, where the Gold Rush was occurring.^{50 51} The lack of white women, says Professor Gary Okihiro, made it so “work such as cooking, cleaning and washing were open to Chinese men, who according to a prevalent idea, were lesser men belonging to a feminized

⁴⁴ Wang, “Race, Gender, and Laundry Work,” 60.

⁴⁵ Park, “Asian American Masculinity Eclipsed,” 11.

⁴⁶ Stanford M. Lyman. “The ‘Yellow Peril’ Mystique: Origins and Vicissitudes of a Racist Discourse.” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 13, no. 4 (2000), 687. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20020056>.

⁴⁷ Park, “Asian American Masculinity Eclipsed,” 11.

⁴⁸ Park, “Asian American Masculinity Eclipsed,” 12.

⁴⁹ “Struggling for Work: Chinese Immigration and Relocation in U.S. History.” The Library of Congress. Congress.gov. Accessed December 12, 2022. <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/chinese/struggling-for-work/>.

⁵⁰ Nancy J. Taniguchi. “Weaving a Different World: Women and the California Gold Rush.” *California History* 79, no. 2 (2000), 142. <https://doi.org/10.2307/25463691>.

⁵¹ Judy Yung, Gordon H. Chang, and Him Mark Lai, eds. “Anti-Asian Violence and the Vincent Chin Case.” In *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present*, 1st ed.,. University of California Press, (2006), 347. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pppwn.57>.

race.”⁵² The advertisement shown below gives insight into the feminization of Chinese men through work, for it is due to the man’s career that he is drawn with make-up and pictured in an ad revolving around laundry, a ‘feminine’ job, to begin with.



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Such extreme persecution and misery for any Chinese person who sought out a life in America may make it difficult to understand why so many people still tried to immigrate. In many ways it was because they had no other choice. Around the same time as the California Gold Rush made the United States a vision of opportunities for economic independence, China was undergoing irreparable damage from the Opium Wars.⁵⁴ Overpopulation in the face of crop failures also posed a significant threat to the

⁵² Gary Y. Okihiro. *Common Ground: Reimagining American History*. Princeton University Press, (2001), 76. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv15r57rk>.

⁵³ C.t. Raynolds and Cos., “C.T. Raynolds and Cos. patent bluing bag is the best ,” *Chinese Immigration in the Late 19th Century*, accessed April 18, 2023, <https://digital.library.cornell.edu/catalog/ss:550437>.

⁵⁴ James L. Hevia. Review of *Opium, Empire, and Modern History*, by Alan Baumler, Timothy Brook, Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, Glenn Melancon, and Carl A. Trocki. *China Review International* 10, no. 2 (2003), 323. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23732550>.

lives of Chinese citizens.⁵⁵ Remaining in China for many families meant certain death by starvation.⁵⁶ Thus, a life of injustice was favored over no life at all.

Chinese men in America during the 19th and 20th centuries were unable to escape the social stigma of being effeminate regardless of where they turned. They were effectively trapped in a never-ending loop of effeminization. Chinese men were discriminated against at the border for their “effeminate” bodies. For those who were able to make it through this barrier, they were oftentimes forced into feminine jobs, unable to appear as a man in working society. Unable to perform patriarchy with a lack of a present wife and family, they again did not have access to the traditional American man’s ways of achieving manhood. They were further seen as feminine. Ideas perpetuated by Chinese men leading “feminine lives”, i.e. no families or masculine jobs, further incited immigration officials to perform discriminatory practices at the border. Chinese men were not given an opportunity to prove the effeminate stereotype otherwise.⁵⁷

To this day, the Chinese government appears to be very sensitive over the portrayal of Chinese men as feminine. Recently, they have issued a ban on effeminate and “sissy men” from appearing on television and other media.⁵⁸ They have gone as far as to say there is a masculinity crisis within China, and education reform has been

⁵⁵ Yong Chen. “The Internal Origins of Chinese Emigration to California Reconsidered.” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (1997), 525. <https://doi.org/10.2307/969884>.

⁵⁶ June Mei. “Socioeconomic Origins of Emigration: Guangdong to California, 1850-1882.” *Modern China* 5, no. 4 (1979), 481. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/188841>.

⁵⁷ C. Hwang. “Feminization of Asian (American) Men in the U.S. Mass Media.” *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 20(2), (1996) 112-113. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019685999602000204>

⁵⁸ “China Bans Effeminate Men From TV.” NPR. The Associated Press, September 2, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/09/02/1033687586/china-ban-effeminate-men-tv-official-morality>.

discussed in order to address the issue.⁵⁹ Racial injustices, regardless of occurring in the past, are again shown to leave behind scars that prevail throughout history.

⁵⁹ Zixu Wang, Xin Chen, and Caroline Radnofsky. "China to Teach Masculinity to Boys Because of Changing Gender Roles." NBCNews.com. NBCUniversal News Group, March 5, 2021. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/china-proposes-teaching-masculinity-boys-state-alarmed-changing-gender-roles-n1258939>.

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