

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE CHINESE IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES AND TO AUSTRALIA IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In the second half of the nineteenth century due to many reasons, Chinese emigration increased rapidly; and the United States and Australia were the favored destinations for Chinese immigrants. The immigration pattern of the Chinese to the United States and to Australia had many similarities. This article explores the similarity of the process of Chinese immigration to these two countries. During their immigration to the United States and Australia, the Chinese had to encounter resistance from both governments and citizens. Despite this discrimination they contributed to the economic development of the two countries. In contrast they adversely influenced the socioeconomic circumstance of the two countries because of their trading and using opium.

1. An outline of the Chinese immigration to the United States and to Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century

Prior to the nineteenth century, some Chinese immigrants had come to the United States and Australia. In Australia, the first Chinese man mentioned in various diaries and papers of early colonists was Mak-Saiying, who arrived in Sydney in 1818¹. Chinese immigration continued with the aid of the Australian Government. The first large scale immigration was the ship, Nimrod, transporting 120 passengers in 1848². In the United States, some Chinese sailors and traders had gone to ports on the west coast in the late eighteenth century³.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, Chinese immigration to the United States and Australia flourished. Between 1848 and 1851, 1,742 Chinese arrived in Australia⁴. By 1860 there were 38,258 Chinese in Australia, accounting for about 3.3 percent of the total Australian population⁵. In the United States, between 1855 and 1867, approximately 2,000 to 8,000 Chinese immigrated annually to the country⁶.

During their first three decades of immigration to the United States, the Chinese concentrated almost entirely on the Pacific Coast, especially in California. After 1882, they began to disperse to the rest of the country⁷. However, the Chinese population in the United States was unstable. Many Chinese came and then left because they considered the country was not a suitable destination for their own lives. The number of Chinese in the United States in 1883 was about 136,000, and was at the zenith of the nineteenth century⁸. The Chinese immigration process to the United States and to Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century can be illustrated on the table below.

Immigration process of the Chinese to the United States and to Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century

Unit: Person

Year	United States		Australia	
	Chinese immigrants	Population percent	Chinese immigrants	Population percent
1860	34,933	0.11	38,258	3.3
1870	63,199	0.16	28,351	1.8
1880	105,465	0.21	38,533	1.7
1890	107,488	0.17	35,821	1.1
1900	89,863	0.11	29,627	0.8

Source: Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich, *Labor Immigration under Capitalism: Asian Workers in the United States before World War II* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 62; Melvin Ember, Carol R. Ember, Ian A. Skoggard, *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures around the World* (New York: Springer Science and Business Media, Inc., USA, 2005), 635.

The table above shows that, the immigration of the Chinese to Australia was also unstable through many decades due to the immigration quotas of Australian government. In contrast, the Chinese immigration process to the United States was firmer than that of Australia. The Chinese population in the United States increased constantly and only decreased between 1890 and 1900 when the “Chinese restricted” policy was promulgated.

The Chinese immigration process to the United States and to Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century was due to a variety of causes:

First, the socioeconomic chaos in China during the second half of the nineteenth century motivated the Chinese to emigrate. During that period, the Chinese people were suffered from a series of wars caused by peasant uprisings and foreign invasions. The most serious was the Taiping Rebellion, which started in Guangxi, spread over 18 provinces along Yangtze River and lasted from 1851 to 1864. There were severe floods and famine over most of China between 1849 and 1878. The significant rise in population between 1830 and 1850 also increased pressure on those in south China to seek a better life overseas⁹.

Second, the circumstance in the United States and Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century was advantageous to the Chinese immigration. The tales of gold discovery in Australia and in the United States spread rapidly, encouraging many people in all over the world, including Chinese, to come to the two countries’ gold fields to find their fortune. Besides the gold rush, there was an urgent demand for labor in the United States and in Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century. Specifically, the United States government needed labor to build the Central Pacific Railroad in the West in 1865; while Australian government required many laborers in the wool industry for exportation of woolens. Therefore, the governments of the two nations offered the advantageous environment to attract foreign laborers. For instance, the government of Australia paid the foreign laborers’ transportation fee to help them immigrate¹⁰. Moreover, contracts signed by Australian government and the Chinese or European traders between 1847 and 1898 further facilitated immigration.

In the United States, the government established a regular steamship service by the Pacific Mail Steamship Company from Hong Kong and Shanghai to San Francisco in 1867; and signed the *Burlingame-Seward Treaty* in 1868 providing the Chinese with the “most favored nation” rights, and formalizing the Chinese central government’s recognition of the legality of Chinese immigration to the United States¹¹.

Third, the great progress of maritime transportation since the nineteenth century. Chinese immigration occurred in an era when ocean transportation had been greatly developed and improved. In the seventeenth century, British emigrants had typically waited for three months to come to the United States. But in the nineteenth century, an average trip from China to San Francisco took 35 days¹². Similarly, during the early colonial period in Australia, it took British emigrants 8 months to come from Britain to Australia. But by the nineteenth century, it took them only 3 months for the same journey¹³. With improved and cheaper transportation, travel back and forth between countries by ship was normal, helped many laborers in general and Chinese laborers in particular to immigrate easily and rapidly to Australia and the United States.

The Chinese immigrants in the United States and Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century had these main characteristics: *First*, the majority of them was from the two southern provinces of Guangdong and Fukien¹⁴. *Second*, many of them were not only the poorest and lowest people of China society with few options for earning a living

besides leaving their homes but also were skilled workers and ambitious businessmen who immigrated to improve their social standing¹⁵. *Third*, they usually concentrated on the destinations that offered them the advantageous environment for their living and working as well as getting support from their relatives and friends¹⁶. *Fourth*, most of them were men and more than 90 percent of Chinese men in the United States and Australia remained unmarried. In 1890 for example, there were nearly 27 Chinese men for every Chinese woman in the United States¹⁷.

2. Some similarities of the Chinese immigration to the United States and to Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century

Besides the different geographical and historic circumstances of the United States and Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century¹⁸ the Chinese immigration to the two countries also had these similar characteristics:

First, during their immigration to the United States and Australia, the Chinese had to encounter the interference of the two countries' authority and people.

In the United States, in order to deal with the rapid immigration of the Chinese, the government promulgated the *Foreign Miner Tax* in 1850. By the new law, the Chinese immigrants were deprived of their rights of possessing houses and lands, marrying white women, going to public schools, approaching some cities and towns, working for public construction plans, fishing in rivers and lakes, and participating to European groups¹⁹. Since 1852, every Chinese had to pay \$5 in tax for their immigration to the United States; by 1855, the tax increased to \$50²⁰. Furthermore, the money that the Chinese immigrants, who had settled before had to pay in tax, increased from \$3 in 1852 to \$5 per month in 1855²¹. In addition to the restrictive policy of the authority, the Chinese immigrants also faced aggressive attitude and action of European groups. The situation went from bad to worse when the European groups broke the peace in Los Angeles in 1871 with murder, robbery and arson directed against the Chinese and their property. The restrictive social contact between white Americans and Chinese was maintained through the 1870s. As a result 47 percent of Chinese immigrants had to leave the United States between 1850 and 1882²².

In Australia, the overabundance of Chinese laborers caused job competition between them and the European settlers, due to the Chinese will of participation to low-wage occupations²³. To uphold the European laborers' interests, Australian government promulgated a variety of immigration restriction acts to the Chinese. The first act was enforced in Victoria in June 1855. By the act, a vessel was not allowed to bring more than a Chinese immigrant for every 10 tons of its burden to Australia.²⁴ Other similar acts were promulgated in South Australia in 1857, and in New South Wales in 1858.²⁵ In addition to those acts, Australian government also adopted other various methods to interfere the Chinese immigration. For instance, the Chinese had to pay a higher fee than European did for mining and doing business. They could not be allowed to mine at the gold fields which were discovered by the Europeans for 3 years. Furthermore, the Chinese immigrants were encouraged to return to their homeland after 3 years in Australia²⁶. Due to the restrictive immigration policy, the Chinese population of Australia decreased rapidly. In 1861 there were 38,000 Chinese in Australia, but by 1871 the population of Chinese was 28,000²⁷. Especially in West Australia in 1888, there were only 400 Chinese²⁸.

Second, the Chinese immigrants in the United States and Australia contributed importantly to the economic development of the two countries.

The Chinese immigrants took part in various jobs in the United States and Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century. During the gold-rush days, they worked mainly in the gold fields. For example, of the total 24,732 Chinese in Victoria (Australia) in 1861, there were 24,544 people in the gold fields²⁹. Some Chinese were cooks and washers of gold-miners³⁰. The Chinese immigrants were also the principal labor force in building railroads. In the United States, there were 11,000 Chinese workers on the Central

Pacific Railroad in 1865, constituting 90 percent of the entire work force³¹. In Australia, 3,000 Chinese took part in building the railway from Darwin to Pine Creek in Northern Territory between 1886 and 1887³². By the time the gold-rush period effectively ended in the 1890s, the Chinese immigrants diversified into occupations as market-gardeners, storekeepers, furniture and cabinet makers, fruit and vegetable wholesalers and retailers, merchants, operators of tea rooms, restaurants, and laundries, or to become medical practitioners and fishermen³³.

Although participating in various economic activities, the Chinese immigrants in the United States and Australia always performed remarkably well. As a result, they were appreciated by the governments of the two countries at the time. In the United States, an officer described the Chinese as being “as industrious, as moral, and as orderly as any other class of our population”³⁴. In Australia, Henry Parker, a senior officer of New South Wales, admitted that the Chinese in Australia were “law-abiding, industrious, thrifty and peaceable”, and he acknowledged them for their “virtues of industry, of provident care, of foresight, of unmatched patience, and vast power of endurance”³⁵. Thanks to their economic activities, the Chinese immigrants had an essential contribution to the socioeconomic development of the United States and Australia, especially to the growth of remote areas of Australia and of the West in the United States. In specific, during the second half of the nineteenth century, the Chinese immigrants played an important role in providing the Australian urban inhabitants with foods³⁶; and they were the bosses of ¼ furniture shops in Sydney in 1880s³⁷. In the United States, without mentioning any specific contribution of the Chinese immigrants, Governor John McDougal of California state in 1852 described them as “one of the most worthy classes of our newly adopted citizens – to whom the climate and the character of these lands are suited”³⁸.

Third, the Chinese immigrants in the United States and Australia also adversely influenced on the socioeconomic circumstance of the two countries because of their trading and using opium.

A researcher commented that, in the second half of the nineteenth century, wherever the Chinese settled, wherever opium existed³⁹. From the small quantity which had been taken to Australia by the Chinese during their first wave of immigration, opium importation rapidly increased⁴⁰. In 1857, when the government of New South Wales first imposed a duty upon the importation of opium, 328 pounds (approximately 149 kg) of opium were imported into this colony, almost exclusively for the 9,000 Chinese. By 1890, the Chinese population of about 21,500 in Australia imported over 37,000 pounds (approximately 17 tons) of opium⁴¹. Between 50 and 90 percent of the Chinese population in Australia smoked opium⁴². In the United States, opium had been taken to the country by the Chinese during their first immigration. The Chinese in the United States not only sold opium at their opium dens but also sold it everywhere, and advertised their opium on newspapers. Prior to the 1870s, the main opium users in the United States were Chinese. However, since the 1880s, when opium smoking became popular in all over the country, the users included many native Americans⁴³. Twenty percent of the population of the United States smoked opium occasionally and fifty percent smoked it daily⁴⁴.

The opium addicts spent most of their money on opium⁴⁵. In the second half of the nineteenth century, an average Chinese worker in the United States and Australia earned \$5 per month⁴⁶. He could spend this money on 37.5 kg of rice or to buy 104 grams of opium⁴⁷. Instead of spending money on food to live and work for a month, the laborers only enjoyed pleasant feeling for few days when they used opium. As a result, their level of nutrition was poor. For an immigrant laborer, who consumed about six pounds (2,721 grams) of opium per year, the total price could exceed \$130, equal to his several month's income⁴⁸. If the laborer spent all \$60 that he earned per year on opium, he only afforded a half of his opium demand. Though almost laborers did not hesitate to smoke opium dottle, their “thirst for opium” could not be satisfied. Without enough food and

opium, “those who use it [opium] are in a short time so debased as to become incapable of any exertion, and their bodies... rendered totally unfit and unable to perform or undergo any corporal labor or fatigue”; as a result, “they are under the necessity or resorting to robbery, plunder and depredation to enable them to procure... this pernicious drug”⁴⁹.

The serious influence of opium made a medical officer in Australia in 1893 become anxious: “Who has not seen the slave of opium – a creature tottering down the street, with sunken yellow eyes, closely contracted pupils, and his skin hanging over his bones like dirty yellow paper”⁵⁰ and “disease, defilement, depravity, misery and crime – these are the indispensable adjuncts which make the Chinese camps and quarters loathsome to the senses and faculties of civilized nations”⁵¹. In the United States, the government first had not forbidden the use of opium due to its careless consideration of its effect⁵². But then, because of the serious corollary of opium use and “the Chinese image changed from that of the harmless coolie to that of an evil, opium-addicted mandarin evil”⁵³, the government of the United States banned the importation of opium to the country from China in 1880⁵⁴.

In conclusion, prior to the nineteenth century, some Chinese immigrants had gone to the United States and Australia. By the second half of the nineteenth century, Chinese immigrated to the two countries rapidly due to various reasons, such as the sociopolitical chaos in China, the requirement of labor force in the United States and Australia, as well as the great progress of the maritime transportation at the time. The Chinese immigrants were first offered a lot of favors from the governments of the United States and Australia. But then, because of their rapid immigration and their conflicts with the European settlers, the Chinese immigrants had to encounter the interference affairs of the authority and people of the two countries. Consequently, many Chinese immigrants had to come back China or went to other regions of the world. However, many Chinese tried their best to settle in the United States and Australia and to participate to a variety of economic activities in the two countries. Therefore, they not only ensured gradually their livelihoods but also had an essential part in the development of the United States and Australia. Nevertheless, besides the useful contributions, the Chinese immigrants also caused the adverse corollary to the two countries, especially in the business and the use of opium. Their essential contribution and harmful influence demonstrated the duplicity of the Chinese during their immigration and living in various regions in the world.

¹ Che Beng Tan, *Chinese Transnational Network* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 153.

² James Jupp, *The Australia People: An Encyclopedia of the Nation, Its People and Their Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 198.

³ Sucheng Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil (The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860–1910)* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 37.

⁴ Jupp, *The Australia People*, 198.

⁵ Tan, *Chinese Transnational Network*, 154.

⁶ Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich, *Labor Immigration under Capitalism: Asian Workers in the United States before World War II* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 214.

⁷ Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil*, 42.

⁸ *Ibid*, 46.

⁹ Jupp, *The Australia People*, 197.

¹⁰ Trinh Thi Dinh, “Tình Hình Nhập Cư Vào Ôtxtrâyliya Thời Kỳ Thuộc Địa (1788–1901)”, *Tạp Chí Nghiên Cứu Đông Nam Á*, Số 5 (2006): 27–33. (“Immigration Situation to Australia during the Colonial Period (1788–1901)”, *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 5 (2006): 27–33), 31.

¹¹ However, the government of the United States still maintained the rights of limitation and forbiddance to the Chinese immigration in necessary situation. Practically, these rights were promulgated via the policy of “Chinese restriction” during the later period. See: Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil*, 37–38.

¹² Susie Lan Cassel, *The Chinese in America: A History from Golden Mountain to the New Millennium* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2002), 32.

¹³ Dinh, "Tình Hình Nhập Cư", 29.

¹⁴ Jupp, *The Australia People*, 197; Susan Lawrence and Peter Davies, *An Archaeology of Australia since 1788* (New York: Springer, 2010), 226.

¹⁵ Cassel, *The Chinese in America*, 5.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 27.

¹⁷ D. Michael Quinn, *Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth Century-Americans* (Urbana: Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, 1996), 166.

¹⁸ Geographically, the distance between China and the United States was further than the distance between China and Australia; therefore it took the Chinese more time to come from China to the United States than it did to the Chinese who came from China to Australia. Historically, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the United States was an independent nation, while Australia was still a colonial country of Great Britain.

¹⁹ John Soennichsen, *The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2011), 16.

²⁰ Charles J. McCain, *The Search of Equality: The Chinese Struggle against Discrimination in Nineteenth Century America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 12–17.

²¹ Diana L. Ahmad, *The Opium Debate and Chinese Exclusion Laws in the Nineteenth Century American West* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2007), x (of Introduction).

²² Cassel, *The Chinese in America*, 31.

²³ In 1877, at the gold field in Palmer River in North Queensland, there were 17,000 Chinese, while there were only 1,400 Europeans. In North Territory, in 1887 there were 7,000 Chinese, while there were only 1,000 Europeans. The crowded presence of the Chinese immigrants made the Europeans in Australia worry. Many conflicts between the Chinese immigrants and the European settlers were broken out. In which, the two most serious conflicts were taken place at the gold fields of Buckland River in Victoria in 1857 and at Lambing Flat in 1861. See: Lara Marks – Michael Worboys, *Migrants, Minorities and Health: Historical and Contemporary Studies* (London: Routledge, 1997), 27; Melvin Ember, Carol R. Ember, Ian A. Skoggard, *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures around the World* (New York: Springer Science and Business Media, Inc., USA, 2005), 635.

²⁴ By 1888, the further restrictions were introduced. In New South Wales, the passenger limitation was fixed at one immigrant to every 300 tons register. In the case of Victoria the passenger limitation was fixed at one Chinese passenger to every 500 tons of the burden of a ship. See: John Stonham, *The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2011), 952.

²⁵ John Vrachnas, Mirko Bagaric, Athula Pathinayake, Penny Dimopoulos, *Migration and Refugee Law: Principles and Practice in Australia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 3rd Edition, 2012), 7.

²⁶ Stonham, *The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882*, 953.

²⁷ T. A. Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia from the First Settlement in 1788 to the Establishment of the Commonwealth in 1901, Vol. 3* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1333–1334.

²⁸ Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia*, 1323.

²⁹ Jupp, *The Australia People*, 199.

³⁰ Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil*, 52.

³¹ Cassel, *The Chinese in America*, 8.

³² Jupp, *The Australia People*, 199.

³³ Ember, *Encyclopedia of Diasporas*, 635; Cassel, *The Chinese in America*, 24.

³⁴ McCain, *The Search of Equality*, 11.

³⁵ Bessie Ng Kumlin Ali, *Chinese in Fiji* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 2002), 30.

³⁶ C. F. Yong, *The New Gold Mountain: the Chinese in Australia* (South Australia: University of Richmond, 1977), 262.

³⁷ Sing-Wu Wang, *The Organization of Chinese Emigration, 1848–1888, with Special Reference to Chinese Emigration to Australia* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center Inc., 1978), 263.

³⁸ McCain, *The Search of Equality*, 9.

³⁹ David Ownby, Mary F. Somers Heidhues, “*Secret Societies*” *Reconsidered: Perspectives on the Social History of Modern South China and Southeast Asia* (New York: M. E. Sharpe Inc., 1993), 102.

⁴⁰ John Rainford, *Consuming Pleasures: Australia and the International Drug Business* (North Fremantle: Fremantle Press, 2009), 13.

⁴¹ 1 pound = 453.5 gram; 1 ounce = 28.3 gram.

⁴² Marks, *Migrants, Minorities and Health*, 35.

⁴³ Ahmad, *The Opium Debate*, x (of Introduction).

⁴⁴ David T. Courtwright, *Dark Paradise – A History of Opiate Addiction in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 68.

⁴⁵ Charles Dickens, *Household Words – A Weekly Journal, Vol. XVII (from December 19th, 1857 to June 12th, 1858)* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1858), 416; Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia*, 1333.

⁴⁶ Cheng, *Labor Immigration under Capitalism*, 239.

⁴⁷ The price of rice in the second half of the nineteenth century was \$0.06 per a pound. It means a laborer could spend \$1 on 7.5 kg of rice. While the price of opium was \$1.36 per an ounce. It means a laborer could spend \$1 on 20.8 grams of opium. See: Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco 1850–1943: A Trans-Pacific Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 87.

⁴⁸ Chen, *Chinese San Francisco*, 87.

⁴⁹ Timothy Brook – Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, *Opium Regimes: China, Britain, and Japan, 1839–1952* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 88.

⁵⁰ Marks, *Migrants, Minorities and Health*, 36.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 28.

⁵² As an American officer confirmed: “*Opium does not lead a person to crime and deeds of violence as the drinking of liquor does*”, because “*when they smoke opium they are inoffensive... drop off and go to sleep*”. See: Chen, *Chinese San Francisco*, 88.

⁵³ Clayton D. Laurie – Ronald H. Cole, *The Role of Federal Military Forces in Domestic Disorders 1877–1945* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1997), 86.

⁵⁴ Chen, *Chinese San Francisco*, 89.

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