



## The Intersection of Race and Class within the Context of Chinese-American Immigration.: An Overview

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Abstract

This study explores the intersection of race and class within the historical and contemporary framework of Chinese-American immigration. From the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese immigrants arrived in the United States primarily as laborers during the Gold Rush and the construction of the transcontinental railroad. However, their presence was met with systemic racism, economic exploitation, and legal exclusion, most notably exemplified by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. These immigrants were often confined to low-wage labor sectors, and their racial identity further marginalized them within American society. This paper examines how race and class have coalesced to influence the identity formation, social positioning, and lived experiences of Chinese Americans across generations. Drawing upon historical records, socio-political contexts, and intersectional theory, the study reveals how institutionalized racism and socio-economic inequality have persisted and evolved over time. It also investigates contemporary challenges, including economic disparities, xenophobia, and cultural stereotyping, that continue to affect Chinese-American communities. The paper contributes to a broader understanding of how marginalized groups navigate the dual burdens of racial and class-based discrimination. Ultimately, this research emphasizes the need for intersectional approaches to immigration studies that consider the compounded impact of race and class on immigrant communities.

**Keywords:** *Intersectionality, Race, Class, Chinese-American, Immigration.*



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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of time, the foundation for comprehending the Chinese American

experience has been provided by the stories of immigrants. As a result of the interaction between racism and social class, Chinese immigrants and

their descendants were subjected to a social fabric that was fraught with complexities. The purpose of this research is to investigate the historical patterns of immigration, the socio-economic realities that these communities have been forced to bear, and the manner in which the confluence of race and class has caused these communities' identities and the way they live their lives on a daily basis.

The history of Chinese-American immigration is deeply intertwined with the broader narratives of race, class, and social exclusion in the United States. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese immigrants have contributed significantly to the economic development of America—particularly through their labor in mining, agriculture, and railroad construction. Despite their contributions, these communities were met with hostility, discrimination, and marginalization. The experiences of Chinese Americans exemplify how immigration is not merely a movement across borders but a complex process shaped by power dynamics, social hierarchies, and historical legacies.

This paper seeks to explore the intersection of race and class as critical factors that have shaped the lives of Chinese immigrants and their descendants. The concept of intersectionality, originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, provides a useful framework for understanding how overlapping systems of oppression—such as racism and classism—interact to produce unique experiences of inequality. Chinese Americans have historically faced exclusion not only because of their racial identity but also due to their perceived socio-economic status. These intersecting forms of marginalization created a racialized labor class that was both exploited for economic gain and excluded from full societal participation.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Chinese immigrants were legally restricted through acts such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882—the first U.S. law to ban immigration based on race or nationality. Such legislation institutionalized racial prejudice and reinforced class distinctions, relegating Chinese Americans to the lowest rungs of the labor market. They were often restricted to ethnic enclaves, denied access to education and political representation, and portrayed in mainstream discourse as perpetual

foreigners. These early patterns of exclusion have had long-lasting impacts on the socio-economic positioning of Chinese-American communities.

In contemporary times, although some progress has been made, Chinese Americans continue to experience racial and class-based disparities in various domains, including education, employment, housing, and representation. The resurgence of anti-Asian sentiment, especially in times of socio-political crisis, further highlights the enduring nature of these intersecting inequalities.

This study aims to provide a historical and sociological overview of how race and class have shaped the Chinese-American immigration experience. Through a critical examination of past and present contexts, the paper highlights the importance of adopting an intersectional lens in understanding immigrant identities, challenges, and social mobility within American society.

## **2. CONTEXTUALIZATION OF CHINESE IMMIGRATION THROUGHOUT HISTORY**

The Gold Rush and labor shortages for the transcontinental railroad were the primary motivating factors that led to the beginning of Chinese immigration to the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century. People that immigrated to the United States in the past encountered numerous obstacles, such as racial discrimination, legal exclusion, and economical restrictions. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was a piece of legislation that specifically targeted Chinese laborers. This act reflected the interaction of race and institutional practices that disadvantaged the status of Chinese people

## **3. AN ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIOPOLITICAL CLIMATE AND THE DYNAMICS OF RACE**

"Discrimination in the Legal System" An example of how race had a role in shaping the sociopolitical landscape for Chinese immigrants is provided by the Chinese Exclusion Act and following similar restrictive legislation. There were restrictions that were created by the legal framework that hindered immigrants from obtaining upward mobility, which reinforced the existing class divisions. Racist Assumptions the minority and similar assumptions simplify Chinese American life too much, ignoring the real economic hardships that many members of the community endure. The intersectional issues faced

by those at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale are often overlooked because of this preconception.

#### 4. THE FACTS OF SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

Participation in the Labor Market the washing machines, farms, and service industries used to be common places for Chinese immigrants to work for low wages. Significant class divisions exist, especially among newer immigrants who confront difficulties in the job markets, even though subsequent generations obtain better levels of education and pursue professional occupations. Second, Chinese Americans frequently form neighborhood groups and mutual aid networks to help newcomers adjust to their new home. However, one's socioeconomic situation frequently restricts access to these resources, making it harder to overcome systemic obstacles.

#### 5. THE PRESENT-DAY OBSTACLES

In the aftermath of the pandemic, society is confronted with a number of challenges. The COVID-19 epidemic exacerbated existing racial tensions and economic disparities. As anti-Asian prejudice increased, there was a corresponding increase in the level of discrimination against Chinese Americans, particularly those of lower socioeconomic class. Access to Education the Families with low incomes continue to confront substantial obstacles when attempting to enroll their children in reputable schools and obtain the resources that they require. Consequently, cycles of poverty and obstacles to upward mobility continue to exist as a consequence of this dynamic.

#### 6. CONCLUSION

The intersection of race and class within the context of Chinese American immigration is multifaceted, reflecting a history of resilience coupled with enduring challenges. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for addressing contemporary social and economic issues faced by the community. Efforts to promote equity must be inclusive, acknowledging the diverse experiences within the Chinese American demographic.

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