

**BECOMING AMERICAN: THE CHINESE EXPERIENCE  
PROGRAM TWO: BETWEEN TWO WORLDS**

**MOYERS:** In 1887, a rancher out looking for his stray cattle on the Snake River between Idaho and Oregon, came upon a gruesome scene: the remains of human beings washed up in a creek. They were so picked over by buzzards and coyotes that neither their features nor their race could be identified.

**GREG NOKES** (*Journalist*): Some of the bodies were found, one was found headless. Others were found with axe wounds, just horrible, horrible crime was committed there

The savagery of the crime would indicate that it was more than just a robbery.

**MOYERS:** Years later, the true story came out. A gang of white men – ranchers and schoolboys -- had set upon ten Chinese miners, shot and beat them to death, then dumped their mutilated bodies into the river.

More Chinese arrived at the camp the next day and were promptly murdered. The killers then traveled by boat downriver, to another camp; by nightfall, thirty-one Chinese were dead.

**GREG NOKES:** The leader of this group, Bruce Evans, was said to have told the others in the gang: let's do our country a favor and get rid of these Chinamen and let's do a favor for ourselves and get their gold.

**MOYERS:** Local residents rallied around the suspects; only three were tried, and a jury freed them all.

The Snake River Massacre was not an isolated incident. In 1882, the U.S. passed the Exclusion Act – to stop Chinese laborers from entering the country and deprive those here of citizenship. That law ushered in the most violent decade in Chinese-American history.

**JOHN FINDLAY:** The spread of the anti Chinese feeling was like a disease going through the white population.

They became the scapegoats. They became sort of the solution. If we could just get rid of them, then our fortune would be better.

**MOYERS:** The Chinese were foreign, did not belong here *at all*. This old idea was given new life by the law. In Tacoma, Washington, six hundred Chinese were expelled and their houses burned to the ground. The Chinese of Juneau, Alaska were loaded onto boats and set adrift. In Rock Springs, Wyoming, twenty-eight were killed, the rest driven out.

**LING-CHI WANG** (Historian): ...Wyoming, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, California, Chinese were lynched. Chinatown were burned. Chinese were run out.

**MOYERS:** The last of the great fires was San Jose. When arsonists turned its Chinatown to rubble, a seventeen-year old named Young Soong Quong packed up and fled. Like thousands of other Chinese across the West, he made his way to the one place that seemed safe, where the sights and sounds were reminders of home: *Dai Fow*, "Big City," San Francisco's Chinatown.

[Words of] **ARNOLD GENTHE:** In order to get any pictures at all I had to hide in doorways. I waited for the sun to filter through the shadows or for some picturesque character to appear.

**MOYERS:** In 1895, a German photographer named Arnold Genthe wandered into San Francisco's Chinatown. But for him, we would have almost no visual record of this world.

*Tong Yun Gai*, the Chinese street, headquarters of Chinese America. The sidewalks were crowded with peddlers, cobblers and fortune-tellers, servicing the migrant laborers who converged here when their work was done. Fish-cutters from the Alaska canneries, fruit-pickers from the San Joaquin valley thronged the herbal stores and rice-shops, temples and gambling halls.

**SHAWN WONG** (Writer): Turn of the century San Francisco Chinatown for a Chinese was the center of their world in America.

**PETER KWONG** (Writer): You will hear the shouts of vendors selling their ware[s]

There are also people speaking all different kinds of dialects.

Toishan Hakka Canton City dialect

**MOYERS:** Six blocks long and two wide, Chinatown was a country within a country, filled with temptation for an ambitious young man hungry for life.

Young had worked as a houseboy — got a taste, there, of American ways -- and now, the ways of *Dai Fow*.

**CONNIE YOUNG YU** (Family Historian): My grandfather loved living in San Francisco Chinatown. Because he liked going out with his friends. There were restaurants. And his favorite, favorite activity was going to the opera. And there were three opera houses. Three opera houses to choose from.

**MOYERS:** But it was an insular world this young man was in – cut off by the Exclusion Law, from American civic life.

The law had barred Chinese laborers, the first time the U.S. excluded immigrants based on nationality or race. Those already here could stay, but could not become citizens.

**L. LING-CHI WANG:** Essentially Chinese were declared permanent aliens.

**CHARLES MCCLAIN (Historian):** It meant that they could never participate in elections. That politicians would never have to pay any attention to them. And, I think also it had a kind of symbolic significance in that it sort of read them permanently out of the American political community.

**MOYERS:** The story of the Exclusion years is of a people in between countries, often unsure to which they belonged. It's about families kept apart . . . lives shaped and *mis*-shaped by Chinese custom as well as U.S. law. To become American, the Chinese would have to wage a long campaign, not just in public, but inside their homes.

In the early days, homes were few in this society of men. They slept in boarding houses and gathered at the store run by their clan: Wongs at the Wong store, Lees at the Lees'. Bachelors, they were called, though half were married, their wives left back in China. The store was a makeshift home, hiring hall, social club, and where, for a few cents, letterwriters would help those who were illiterate trade words back and forth.

**ACTOR READS LETTER:**

Beloved parents:

Kneeling at your feet, your prodigal son begs you not to worry about him.  
Enclosed is thirty dollars.

Your unworthy son...

**ACTRESS READS LETTER:**

My Husband-lord:

According to Mr. Wang, you are indulging in sensuality, and have no desire to return home. I am shocked and pained...

**ACTOR READS LETTER:**

My Beloved Wife:

Because I can get no gold, I am detained in this secluded corner of a strange land.

**ACTOR READS LETTER:**

"Chin-hsin My Son, Take Notice,

I hope you will [soon] be home and get married. I may already be dead and gone by the time you come back. Would you feel sorry then? ...”

**MOYERS:** Family and tradition pushed the men back to China. So did U.S. law – with a vengeance.

**STANFORD LYMAN (Historian):** The Exclusion Act made it virtually impossible for Chinese to have a normal family life inside the United States. The Exclusion law applied to Chinese laborers. It exempted merchants, travelers and students. What this meant to the Chinese who could not become a merchant, and what it meant was not a student or a traveler what it meant was that he could not bring his wife.

**MOYERS:** The so-called “bachelors” worked and saved and waited to go home. But Young didn’t save: optimistic, unattached, he earned his wages at a downtown hotel and then spent them with friends.

**CONNIE YOUNG YU:** When my grandfather Yung left the village, he promised his parents that he would be back in ten years.

Every year went to another year and another year and he did not realize, you know, ten years had gone by and he received a letter from his mother saying your father has passed away. And he went into the deepest mourning and the mourning was mixed with great regret that he did not fulfill his promise.

**MOYERS:** Young was now stepping into the great quandary of the Exclusion Years: how to sustain a family life across the Pacific.

He sailed to China to visit his father’s grave, and choose a bride, Gum Gee. But scratching out a living in the village was not the future he wanted. He returned to the U.S. alone; Gum Gee would serve her new mother-in-law, as custom prescribed.

**CONNIE YOUNG YU:** I think [Gum Gee] was very realistic. She knew that it’d be years before she saw her husband again because that was the way things were.

**MOYERS:** Gum Gee was just twenty. She knew the law: her husband, a laborer, had to become a merchant to send for her. She worked the fields; she harvested; she waited. He worked at a store, saving carefully until he could buy it. No more luxuries for him now – and no trips home. Years passed.

**CONNIE YOUNG YU:** Her mother-in-law, as the years went by... was very, very discouraging and said, you shouldn't go to to America, you're just so old. And you're getting unattractive. You're not gonna have any children. Why ruin my son's future?

**MOYERS:** Gum Gee honored custom and her mother-in-law for fourteen years before she got the word she was waiting for. She sailed to California, a merchant's wife.

**CONNIE YOUNG YU:** My grandfather was waiting at the dock holding a box of dim sum, you know, special delicacies for his wife. And my grandmother actually could see him. She was very self-conscious. She had aged quite a bit. And she really looked older than 35. And I think she was very aware of that.

And here he is trying to, be pleasant and-- and he's trying to say nothing's happened, you know. Welcome to America.

And she looked at him, standing there. She wanted to grab that box of dim sum and throw it back in his face.

**MOYERS:** The Youngs settled themselves by doing what they knew best: they worked. And at 36, Gum Gee bore their first son. But as with so many others -- who also waited -- she never forgot.

**CONNIE YOUNG YU:**

I don't think she ever forgave her husband for her lost youth.

There was no one to take it out on but her husband.

I would hear her talk and kind of harangue him every day and just scold him. And the tone of voice, like she was really begrudging him that time that he spent in America not working hard enough or not saving fast enough.

The pain that came with the Exclusion laws was what stayed with them the rest of their lives.

**MOYERS:** Congress was not finished with the Chinese. Over the years, the Exclusion laws would tighten the grip on those already here and those who wished to come. The first change came in 1888. Until then, Chinese laborers in America had papers allowing them to move back and forth to China. Abruptly, the Scott Act changed the rules.

**L. LING-CHI WANG:** That certificate says that you have the right to travel abroad and come back . That was rendered invalid by our government

At the time that this act was going through Congress there were twenty thousand Chinese who were visiting their love ones at home. There were some people who were already on the boat about five hundred of them arriving, and only, of course, to be turned back.

**MOYERS:** More anti-Chinese laws came, in quick succession. The Exclusion law expired in 1892; it was renewed with an added sting: identity papers just for the Chinese, to be carried at all times.

**CHARLES MCCLAIN:** And if they didn't have that in their possession they were subject to arrest and deportation. And this was a very, very, this was the first time the United States had ever introduced anything quite like this

**MOYERS:** The Chinese hated the law; tens of thousands refused to register and mobilized a public campaign to overturn it.

[Words of] **WONG CHIN FOO:** Remember the politician who lords it over you today is a coward. When you don't [have the] vote, they denounce you as a reptile; the moment you appear at the ballot box, you are a brother and are treated to cigars and beers.

**MOYERS:** His name was Wong Chin Foo; he was a journalist, a showman, a provocateur. He wanted more than a new immigration law, more even than equal rights. For him it was also personal: he wanted respect.

**SHAWN WONG:** He was the master of what we now know as the soundbite. Chinese don't eat rats. I will pay someone five hundred dollars if they can prove that Chinese eat rats.

**MOYERS:** Where he came from, or why, is a mystery. But by 1880 he was lecturing any U.S. audience he could find. Confucius, he said, lived five hundred years before Jesus who was a Johnny-come-lately. Assimilation? You try it, he said. Anybody here want to become Chinese? He meant to shock - as when he gave his newspaper its name.

**L. LING-CHI WANG:** He actually put, you know, the word Chinese American onto his newspaper, you know, like a banner and it's like claiming, you know, America for himself. And in the process, I think, claiming America for the rest of the of the Chinese American community.

**MOYERS:** More visionary than businessman, he printed eight thousand copies of his paper for a New York Chinese population of under a thousand. In less than a year, his venture was dead.

But he wouldn't quit. In 1883, that great baiter of the Chinese -- their arch-enemy Dennis Kearney -- was touring the East.

**SHAWN WONG:** Wong Chin Foo put himself out there to be the target.

And so he challenged Dennis Kearney to a duel, you know. Let's fight it out in the street. You and me. Mano a mano.

**MOYERS:** Of course newspapers couldn't resist. "What weapons?" reporters wanted to know. "Kearney's choice," Wong shot back.

[Words of] **WONG CHIN FOO:** I give him the choice of chopsticks, Irish potatoes, or guns.

[Words of] **DENNIS KEARNEY:** I'm not to be deterred from this work by the vaporings of Chin Foo, Ah Coon, Hung Fat, Fi Fong or any other of Asia's almond-eyed lepers.

**MOYERS:** Wong showed up at a rally – a crowd of white men drinking and cheering, plus Wong Chin Foo, heckling from a front row.

**SHAWN WONG:** And Dennis Kearney dismissed him. But he made his point. He saw his statement to Dennis Kearney in all the newspapers of the day.

**MOYERS:** Then Wong showed up in Chicago, agitating for the right to vote.

[Words of] **WONG CHIN FOO:** We want Illinois, the place that Lincoln called home, to do for the Chinese what the North did for the Negroes.

**MOYERS:** But how do you change laws when you don't have votes, or money or allies among whites? That was a problem no showmanship or eloquence could solve. In the 1890's, Wong Chin Foo vanished -- as suddenly as he'd appeared leaving no record, even, of where or when he died.

But by then the Chinese were deep into another fight.

**L. LING-CHI WANG:** They somehow grasped this very important concept that America prides itself in being a country ruled by law.

**STANFORD LYMAN:** The one venue open to them since they were not allowed to be citizens, since they were not allowed to serve on juries, since they were not allowed to vote, since they were nobody's constituency was the court. And why was that? Because of one word in the Fourteenth Amendment. No state shall deny to any person the equal protections of the law. The Fourteenth Amendment did not apply to only to citizens of the US. It applied to persons. And it was as persons that the Chinese brought case after case.

**MOYERS:** The law had been no friend to the Chinese. They were barred from public schools, and from hospitals. There were special taxes on Chinese miners, launderers, fishermen. But this was not a fate the Chinese would accept.

**L. LING-CHI WANG:** almost – every single anti Chinese law that got enacted in California, whether it be local or state, you will find Chinese contesting it.

**MOYERS:** The first great battle was over the so-called “Cubic Air Ordinance” in San Francisco, on its face an innocent health measure.

**STANFORD LYMAN:** Under this ordinance no person was allowed to stay in a room, in an apartment, unless there was five hundred cubic feet of air space for each person. This law was enforced only in the Chinese quarter of the city where Chinese workers often bunked in triple bunks, double bunks, in small rooms.

**MOYERS:** The police swept through the Chinese quarter, making arrests. But the elders of Chinatown ordered the men *not* to pay their fines -- to crowd the jails instead. Then their lawyer turned the logic of the law against the city itself. Was this not a health violation? Were there five hundred cubic feet of air for every prisoner?

**STANFORD LYMAN:** The city was not only embarrassed and furious but sought revenge.

**CHARLES MCCLAIN:** So, A law was passed in 1876, which said that all prisoners committed to the county jail should have their hair cut off to within one inch of the scalp. It was clearly designed to humiliate male Chinese prisoners who wore their hair in a long braided queue.

**MOYERS:** The Chinese sued for damages, and reached Judge Stephen Field on the Circuit Court, who over a long and distinguished career had done nothing to hide his dislike of the Chinese.

**STANFORD LYMAN:** Justice Field asked the representatives of the City of San Francisco what for what purpose they had enacted this statute. And they answered. That it had to do with lice being in people's hair and that they shaved their head for that reason.

But Justice Field noted that the law only shaved the heads of male prisoners. So he wanted to know if it was believed by San Francisco that women prisoners had never had lice. That there was something genetic, was there something genetic about women that they could not have dirty hair? And the city could not answer that. Then Justice Field went on in a famous statement he said, when we are appointed to the bench we are not struck blind. He then pulled out the record of the enactment of the law in the city council and showed, that the purpose of the law was to harass the Chinese for sitting in the jails. In other words, he said, what you are doing is punishing people for availing themselves of their own rights.

He said look, he has no friendship toward the Chinese. That he wishes there could be a way to keep them out of the country. But, he points out, when it comes to violating the Constitution, the Constitution comes first. He will not permit that.

**MOYERS:** That case set the precedent. And in 1886, a San Francisco laundryman, harassed by the city, took his complaint all the way to the Supreme Court, and won. Now the protection of all “persons” was the supreme law of the land.

And the Chinese weren’t done.

**CHARLES MCCLAIN:** The opening words of the 14th Amendment say that all persons born in the United States are citizens of the United States. But what about Chinese born in the United States?

**MOYERS:** Wong Kim Ark was a 22-year-old cook born in San Francisco. But after visiting China, he was stopped, when he tried to come back to the country. If he was born here, he was a citizen. But the law said, Chinese couldn’t be citizens. Wong sued.

[Words of] **U.S. Solicitor General:** “Are Chinese children born in this country to share with the descendants of the patriots of the American Revolution the exalted qualification of being eligible to the Presidency of the Nation?”

**MOYERS:** It took the Supreme Court to remind the government that the words of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment meant just what they said. A person born in America was an American.

**CHARLES MCCLAIN:** If you look at the record of Chinese activism in the courts, they had assimilated to the extent that they understood that there were American political institutions that they could use.

**L. LING-CHI WANG:** It sort of contradicts, a popular stereotype the Chinese usually just, you know, take it lying down and, very stoically accepted, whatever fate that they were assigned by American society when in fact they were very, very active in the pursuit of their rights, the pursuit of their dignity in American society against all odds.

**VOICE OF ACTRESS:** “The signer of this contract, Sun Gum, hereby accepts that she became indebted to her master for food and passage from China to San Francisco. She shall willingly use her body as a prostitute at Tan Fu’s place for four and one-half years. She shall receive no wages... .if she becomes pregnant she shall work one year extra. Should Sun Gum run away, she shall pay all expenses incurred in finding and returning her to the brothel...If she contracts the four loathesome diseases she shall be returned to China.”

Thumb print of Sun Gum

**MOYERS:** No-one knows what happened to Sun Gum: whether she was shipped back to China . . . or survived long enough to be a free woman here. But one thing is sure: the public campaigns that Chinatown waged, the great court battles it fought for its freedoms, were not waged by or for its women. While its men fought the oppression of whites, women fought the oppression of Chinatown itself. And in the Chinese push for freedom in America, this was the second front.

**L. LING-CHI WANG:**

It was not easy to grow up as a woman in Chinatown in those days.

They were brought up not only to be good wives, obedient wife, but to be, good mother, to serve the husband, to serve the in-laws and to serve even the the male children.

**PETER KWONG:**

Chinese come from very strong patriarchal society. With very strong feudal feelings against woman.

**MOYERS:** Tradition held that a virtuous wife should stay in her Chinese village: the few who broke custom by coming here were expected to serve. To please their husbands, many had their feet bound so tightly that they were crippled.

**PETER KWONG:** The custom of bound feet in the main is to restrict the mobility of women so they would not travel too far away from home and get into troubles. And there are those men who believe that the shape of a small foot is erotic.

**JUDY YUNG (Historian):** The merchant wives they were pretty much housebound, and they didn't go out in public because it was considered indiscreet or improper for women to be seen in public.

**MOYERS:** Husbands were free to take concubines into the home – or second wives. Arranged marriages were common, often against a young girl's will.

And these were the lucky ones. The harshest lives belonged to the prostitutes, and in the 1880's, they were almost half the women in Chinatown.

Gangsters roamed the Chinese countryside, looking for parents so poor they would sell their daughters – fifty dollars was the going price. Girls as young as six were smuggled in and sold as *mui tsai*, indentured servants. Brothels bid for the older girls, who, in America, could fetch a thousand dollars or more, a windfall to their smugglers.

**JUDY YUNG:** When the women were brought in to this country, they would be auctioned off.

Many of the women did not outlive the terms of their contracts

When they did become ill and died, sometimes there were reports that their bodies were discarded in the streets, they weren't given decent burials. They weren't shipped back to China like the men were. It just speaks to how little value is attached to women and women's lives.

**MOYERS:** The women couldn't turn for help to the police, who were indifferent to crime in Chinatown, or to law-abiding citizens who were terrorized by the Chinese gangsters, the "Tongmen." Their refuge was the Protestant Church, and one iron-willed missionary.

**BUDDY CHOY:** I remember seeing her once in my life when I was about 13 years old. She was a tall, domineering presence when she walked in the room.

She came to a Chinatown that she knew nothing about. She didn't speak a word of Chinese.

**MOYERS:** Donaldina Cameron barged her way into San Francisco's Chinatown in 1895. She came to the Presbyterian Mission Home a teacher, but when she saw the lives of women around her, she heard God's call. She drew allies among Chinese women in the Home: Wu Tien Fu, once an indentured servant, became her aide and interpreter. And soon they were a common sight: Cameron dressed in a worsted British suit and Eton collar, swooping down on a brothel, policemen in tow.

**JUDY YUNG:** She would go onto the rooftops and get in through the skylights.... and get into the brothel grab the girl running back to the mission home

**BUDDY CHOY:** It was like something out of Hollywood. It was like a King Kong movie. I really did not believe it (laughs).

**JUDY YUNG:** Tong men would guard the brothels and make sure that they didn't escape.

It was amazing that doing as many rescue raids as she did, she did not ever get hurt herself, and she was always threatened that dynamite sticks would be found outside the home. And there were all kinds of messages.... threats.... sent to her.

**MOYERS:** But her work was about much more than prostitutes: any girls or women suffering at the hands of men she wanted rescued and sheltered at the Mission.

There, they'd be remolded in the image of *God* and of His chosen instrument, Cameron herself. There were classes in English and needlework, there was Bible study, housework. Girls complained about the austere regimen; some fled. But many seized their chance and made new lives.

Mission girls would be among the first Chinese-American women to go to University. . . would be among the first to vote. And many joined the mission's crusade and in time helped stamp out the traffic in slave-girls. A revolt was taking form that would upend the old ways of Chinatown – though, at the turn of the century, it was just barely in view.

**MOYERS:** In 1900, Europeans were pouring through Ellis Island. The Bureau of Immigration spot-checked them for disease, kept an eye out for criminals. But, beyond that, there were few restrictions, and most got through within hours.

Since Exclusion, some ten million Europeans had entered the country. Over that time, the tiny Chinese population of 120,000 had dropped further still– to 90,000.

**PETER KWONG:** Chinese has the sorry distinction as the only immigrant group that I know of in American history their population declined.

The Exclusion Act did exactly what they intended it for.

**MOYERS:** The law had been renewed every ten years. But prominent Americans now called for a tougher law – none more loudly than the labor leader Samuel Gompers.

As a young immigrant himself, Gompers had worked as a cigar maker, and after he watched the Chinese take hold of that industry, in the 1870s, he never forgot it.

This tornado of a man, now the most powerful labor leader in the country, made it a mission to keep the Chinese out of America and its work force. And he was one of many: the labor movement was filled with enemies of the Chinese.

**PETER KWONG:** They were driven out of blue collar working class jobs.

There were many, many Chinese working sewing industries and they were driven out. In boot and shoe making they were driven out. They were forced out in fishing, farming. Cigar-making.

**MOYERS:** But if the Chinese threat to labor had long passed, Gompers' passion had not. In 1901, he carried his message personally to the new President. He got no argument from Teddy Roosevelt – and not much at his next stop, Capitol Hill.

**SHAWN WONG:** So this was Gompers message to Congress:

“The free immigration of Chinese would be for all purposes be an invasion by Asiatic barbarians. It is our inheritance to keep civilization pure and uncontaminated. We are trustees for mankind.”

**ERIKA LEE** (Historian): By 1902 the question is no longer should the United States restrict immigration. It's how to restrict immigration and how to do it better.

**MOYERS:** In 1902, Congress expanded Exclusion to Hawaii and the Philippines. Then, two years later, it rewrote all its anti-Chinese laws so they would last forever.

**PETER KWONG:** The law was passed in Congress with almost no debate, no discussion.

**MOYERS:** That same year, a popular magazine carefully reviewed the Chinese population. It was aging. There were few girls or women. There was much illness. Cheerfully, the author predicted extinction. By 1930 or '40, he said, the Chinese in America would be gone.

**SHAWN WONG** (University of Washington, Seattle): The Chinese were the first immigrant group excluded from America. Therefore they became the first to have to sneak into the country.

The Chinese would dress up as Mexicans learn a few phrases of Spanish.

You can imagine a Chinese immigrant walking across the border and saying "Que Pasa" or something like that in his own Toishan-Mexican dialect.

Another way was through Cuba.

They would get on the ship and work as a crew member and some of the Chinese painted themselves black to make themselves look Cuban jump ship and there you are. You're in America, you're Cuban but you're in America.

**MOYERS:** It was at the border that the drama of Chinese Exclusion played out, where whites and Chinese acted out the parts handed them by the law. Chinese diplomats and merchants were welcome: the rest had to fend for themselves.

1906 -- San Francisco's great earthquake, followed by days of fire, and three thousand dead. Chinatown was burned to the ground -- a catastrophe, or so it seemed.

**SHAWN WONG:** The 1906 San Francisco earthquake was a stroke of good luck for Chinese. Because of the resulting fire that burned much of the city and burned many of the immigration records of Chinese, the Chinese could now say I was born in America and no one could prove them wrong.

**MOYERS:** Here was an opening -- and for the next forty years the Chinese would use their wits and money to make the most of it. Now the law -- and the math -- were on their side. Because if they could persuade an official they were born here, they became citizens and their children did too.

**NEIL THOMSEN** (National Archives, 1987-99): They could go to the Immigration Bureau and say I'm Mr. Lee. I am going to make a visit to China. I have three sons. I'm bringing those three sons in. Now maybe he has those three sons and maybe he doesn't .

**PETER KWONG:** They would claim more than what they would actually have as their children. And these-- slots could be given to their friends' children or in fact sold to others so other people could come to the United States and claim to be American citizens.

And this is called paper son.

**BOB CHIN:** That is how I got over here, by using the paper son citizenship. The paper cost about \$2,000.00.

**SUK WAN LEE:** My parents bought a paper -- for \$4,500.

My mother hadn't wanted me to come over because it cost so much.

**MOYERS:** But getting hold of the papers was just the beginning. Now you had to learn about the family and the village in China you were pretending were yours. That assumed identity had to be memorized -- from a coaching book.

**NEIL THOMSEN:** Coaching letters can be sometimes 50, 60 pages. Sometimes they have maps of the village on them. They're as big as a library table ... an elaborate map showing every house the name of every person living in the house.

**BOB CHIN:** And I would say I would take about three months or so studying that document and get it more or less, you know, fluent to enter the United States.

**NEIL THOMSEN:** You arrive at San Francisco. The white people get off the ship. You're detained. You're put aboard an Angel Island ferry.

**MOYERS:** Angel Island, in San Francisco Bay, unveiled by the Bureau of Immigration in 1910. Until the end of Exclusion, these graceful buildings, with their palm trees and manicured lawns, were the main arrival point for Chinese hoping to enter. Americans dubbed it the Ellis Island of the West.

**CONNIE YOUNG YU** (Family Historian): Ellis Island was a symbol of freedom It's a wonderful beacon.

Angel Island was a symbol of detention, of interrogation, and of trauma.

**NEIL THOMSEN:** You arrive at Angel Island. You're marched under guard to the detention barracks.

**DALE CHING:** Armed guards, to march around and follow where you go.  
First stop to the hospital.

They want you to take, remove all your clothes. And they make sure even though you have no clothes on, they put a guard in there.

**MOYERS:** Months of preparation came to this: the interrogation.

**ARK CHIN:** My admission to America was totally dependent on that.

I was ten years old and so to be brought into a room for interrogation and you see this big Lo Fan, you know, the devil so to speak. And it was kind of overpowering.

**BOB CHIN:** I really afraid to fail because of, uh, all my parents spent all the money.

**SUK WAN LEE:** They brought in a huge stack of photos for me to identify my “paper” father.

**MOYERS:** Suk Wan’s real parents had slipped into the U.S. nine years earlier. Since they weren’t citizens, they could not legally send for her. She’d be questioned many times about a family she’d never met, a life back in China she’d never led.

**SUK WAN LEE (Interrogation, 1931):**

Q: Where does your family eat their meals?

A: In the parlor.

**NEIL THOMSEN:** These interpreters and the interrogators are very sophisticated in their ways.

**THOMSEN:** They're putting little ‘x’es next to these answers and these responses. And so the person is flustered.

**SUK WAN LEE (Interrogation, 1931):**

Q: Why are you sure your father was home at the time your mother died?

A: I just remember that he was home.

Q: We know that the man whom you claim to be your father was in the U.S. at the time ... How do you explain your testimony?

A: You are wrong ...

Q: Are you sure your mother died on September 3, 1925?

**MOYERS:** Under scrutiny, Suk Wan’s story broke down. She was ordered back to China. While her real parents secretly financed her appeal, she was held in the women’s barracks, crowded with detainees.

**NEIL THOMSEN:** You're segregated from any family members here or back in China.

Months might go by.

Sometimes the time is so long that the people themselves start to write letters to the Immigration officials saying I've been here now four months, six months, seven months. I want to go home. Let me go home.

**MOYERS:** After nine months, Suk Wan asked to stop the appeals. Her parents tried to visit her, the day she was deported.

**SUK WAN LEE:** My parents, my sister, my cousin, -- a lot of people -- came to say good bye. We were separated by a fence and were not allowed to talk to each other. Everyone was crying.

**MOYERS:** Suk Wan Lee would not return to the United States for nearly half a century and never saw her parents again.

Ark Chin's family took no chances: with a well-placed bribe, they got him through in a week. Bob Chin was held on Ellis Island for two months, Dale Ching, whose papers were legitimate, was kept on Angel Island for three months. But then, he too was set free.

**PETER KWONG:** The fact that the Chinese were willing to go through this very difficult, at times very humiliating process is that after all these problems, they still see the United States as a place of opportunity, a place that they could improve their family's well being. That's why they keep coming.

The, Chinese were determined to beat the system.

**MOYERS:** They kept pushing their way in. After 1920, their numbers in this country, which had been steadily dropping, began to climb. Chinese America was here to stay.

**MOYERS:** The 1920's: Exclusion was nearing its half-century mark.

**PETER KWONG:** All these progress that was going on in American society really did not touch the Chinese community. They pretty much isolated. They left to their own devices.

**MOYERS:** The Chinese who made their way here were still shoved to the sidelines of American life. They were waiters, domestics and almost a third were laundrymen working the "eight-pound livelihood" -- named for the irons they wielded as they pressed a hundred shirts a day.

**PETER KWONG:** The daily drudgery, was something that they have to tolerate. If they lucky they could accumulate enough and go home and buy a piece of land and retire.

They not really living in the present.

**MOYERS:** White racism trapped them; so did custom. By a wide margin, it was still men and boys slipping into the country, keeping bachelor society alive, with all its familiar rituals.

**MAXINE HONG KINGSTON (Writer):** My father was a laundryman.

And these men from the community would come to the laundry to have my parents read their letters to them.

I'm folding socks or pressing the underwear and meanwhile really listening.

They were always telling about some terrible condition in China.

And the wives are saying how could you leave me and you're leaving me to starve to death while you are having fun in America. Now you send me more money. And then it was up to my mother or father to write a letter back. Sometimes some very formal stuff, you know. Oh, I miss you. You are so dear to me. And I will come home soon. And a lot of times I really felt they were writing fiction.

**MOYERS:** Which was home, China or America? Almost fifty years into Exclusion, many had no clear answer.

But change was coming. In the worst days, there'd been nearly thirty Chinese men for every woman – now there were seven. Even the humble laundryman and waiter could hope to find a wife. And their children -- raised in America – would want very different lives.

She was a laundryman's daughter who decided to be a movie star. She went far: in the twenties and thirties, she played opposite Lawrence Olivier . . . Marlene Dietrich . . . Douglas Fairbanks.

**GRAHAM HODGES (Wong Biographer):** People could see Anna May Wong in this tiny dress and with Fairbanks pointing a sword right at her mid section.

That outfit became made her a sensation around the world.

**MOYERS:** American-born, confident in ways her father's generation could never be, still she lived suspended between two countries, starting with how people saw her.

[Words of] **ANNA MAY WONG:** Americans regard [us] as a dark, mysterious race, impossible to understand. Why is it that the screen Chinese is always the villain? And so crude a villain – murderous, treacherous, a snake in the grass. I was so tired of the parts I had to play.

**MOYERS:** She played all the stock parts: the Mongolian slave . . . the temptress . . . the doomed lover. And her lines were usually Chinglish, as it was called.

[Words of] **ANNA MAY WONG:** People are surprised that I speak and write English without difficulty. But why shouldn't I? I was born right here in Los Angeles and went to public schools here.

For years, when people asked me to describe 'my' native country, I've surprised them by saying it is a democracy composed of forty-eight states.

**MOYERS:** Her skin marked her.

**GRAHAM HODGES:** Hollywood followed a very strict code of no kissing between people of other races. Which is to say that Anna May Wong could not kiss a westerner on screen. And of course, this limited her terribly. Because that meant she couldn't be a leading lady.

The studios had the roles for her, but they would prefer to use a western star and put them in makeup. They would paste their eyes back. They would they would adopt their lips. A, and it would oftentimes look absurd

[Words of] **ANNA MAY WONG:** If they [get] an American actress to slant her eyes and eyebrows and wear a stiff black wig, [that's] all right. But me? [N]o film lovers can ever marry me. I must always die in the movies, so that the white girl with the yellow hair may get the man.

**MOYERS:** Wong called herself the woman of a thousand deaths -- it should be her epitaph, she said. To slip the racial codes, she made for Europe: Berlin, Madrid, London -- anywhere the work was -- and the limelight.

**GRAHAM HODGES:** Every time that Anna May Wong left the United States, and she left frequently between 1927 and 1937, she would have to visit an immigration inspector.

**ERIKA LEE:** She was required to have two white witnesses testify on her behalf that she was, indeed, Anna May Wong. That she was, indeed, a Chinese American citizen.

The subtitle of the form says something like reentry permit for alleged citizen of Chinese descent. So their their citizenship, their status, is under so much suspicion

that it's documented in this bureaucratic form that they're only considered alleged citizens.

**MOYERS:** But this “alleged” citizen always came home. In Hollywood she took whatever parts there were -- even the daughter of Fu Manchu himself.

**KAREN LEONG (Historian):** For her to make it in the film industry, she had to embrace being a foreigner

Anna May Wong, at some point, realized she needed to play along with the game.

**MOYERS:** She knew her industry – knew what it would take. She went for *Shanghai Express* as a step up, even if once again she'd play the fallen woman. Then, in 1932, came Pearl Buck's runaway bestseller, the novel “The Good Earth.”

**GRAHAM HODGES:** Here she was, the preeminent Chinese American actress of her generation and the most important movie Hollywood had ever made about China.

**MOYERS:** But once they announced that Paul Muni, a white man, would play the lead, Wong knew that she, a Chinese, would be barred from playing his wife. She packed her bags.

[Words of] **ANNA MAY WONG:** I am going to a strange country, and yet, in a way, I am going home. ... Chinese in the United States suffer from a lifelong homesickness. I have never seen China, but somehow I have always known it.

**MOYERS:** But her tour of China was not as pretty as it seemed.

**GRAHAM HODGES:** The Chinese were divided about Anna May Wong They were troubled by the roles that she had taken.

The anger that was under the surface came boiling right through to the top. And the welcomes turned to chants of down with Wong Lu Shong. The stooge of America.

**HELEN ZIA (Writer):** Those roles that she played that she didn't want to play, that she felt imprisoned by and trapped by, followed her to China.

[Words of] **ANNA MAY WONG:** The officials made speeches that lasted for hours. They all took turns berating me for the roles I had played.

**MOYERS:** She had talked of spending years in China, but after nine months, she sailed home. She was back in Los Angeles in time for the enormous success of The Good Earth. Louise Rainer, the white actress who'd landed the lead role, now picked up an Academy Award.

**LOUISE RAINER AT AWARDS DINNER:** “Thank you very much. ”

**GRAHAM HODGES:** She had the enthusiasm, the talent, the beauty, the entire package to be someone of enormous fame. I think that if she had been in the Good Earth we wouldn't have had this the type of conversation we had when you're trying to remember what Anna May Wong was like.

**KAREN LEONG:** But I think it's a mistake to see Anna May Wong's career as a tragedy or her life as a tragedy.

[She] was probably the most visible Chinese American worldwide.

**MOYERS:** The laundryman's daughter made a total of fifty-four films and became an advocate for Chinese causes, as her career drew to a close.

**HELEN ZIA (Writer):** She spoke up at a time when women didn't do that so much and Chinese Americans couldn't. She in many ways is an unsung hero for what she accomplished

**MOYERS:** For Chinatown, the Great Depression was an other indignity in a life already filled with them.

Every family knew the stories: the Lees' son, down the block . . . he graduated from law school, and then nobody would hire him. And what about Pardee Lowe, that Stanford boy? A job interviewer told him right out, “Me No Likee, Me No Wantee, Chinee boy.”

Parents urged their young to look to China.

**JADE SNOW WONG:** It was it was always emphasized that there was no future for us here. Why is education important I mean even for women? It's so we could serve China someday. I was born here but the expression was to go back because my parents had come from there.

**MOYERS:** To make lives for themselves in America, the young would have to push on two fronts, against the codes of white society -- and those of their parents as well. The assault on Chinatown's ways had started with its women; it would be carried forward by their young.

**ARK CHIN:** In the classical Chinese family [the father is the] patriarch. He was all-powerful. There's never to be any back talk by any member of the family.

**JADE SNOW WONG:** I'm now 79. My mother's a hundred and one. She's never said thank you to me yet. Any service one does for one's parents is expected, you know. The more you do, the better.

**MOYERS:** Jade Snow Wong, as a daughter, was only a *Siu Hay*, a “small happiness” for her parents. She was expected to clean up after her brothers, and yield them the better food at the table. She began working at age six.

**JADE SNOW WONG:** As soon as we could handle scissors we were helping mom. And as soon as we could do more we were sewing. Child labor was just accepted to make ends meet.

**ARK CHIN:** Somebody’s got to— chop wood, clean the bean sprouts and peel the eggs and in the morning, swab the, the restaurant.

It was what we call a mom and pop restaurant except there was no mom.

**MOYERS:** Ark Chin’s father came from the old school: he’d left his wife behind in China, and ruled over his Chop Suey restaurant – and his son -- with a strict hand.

**ARK CHIN:** And some of the demands that my father lay on me didn’t make any sense.

But in spite of it, I never dared talk back.

In my schooling, in my reading, I could see an escape from the restaurant. And so that constantly propelled me forward.

**MOYERS:** Ark lived behind the restaurant with his father and grandfather, who’d worked here all his life as a laundryman.

**ARK CHIN:** When I was in the last year of high school, I was washing dishes and my grandfather said, What are you going to do after high school? I said, grandfather, I’m going to go to college, into civil engineering. And, he said, you know, going into engineering is a dead-end. He said I’ve known people who have studied engineering. They never got a job as an engineer.

He was a very affable old man. But there was irony in his voice when he talked to me.

He understood that I’m a bright person. And that my future was hemmed in, And the sadness is that he feels powerless to do anything. And that was kind of the pervasive, you know, mental attitude amongst that generation.

**JADE SNOW WONG:** I really was excited with learning new ideas outside of my cultural background. But when I approached my parents for any help they refused. My father declared that his obligation was first to his sons. He said if you have the talent you can provide for your own education. So, I took up the challenge. Worked my way through college.

I took this course in sociology and I could just see John Ross now, he's standing there looking at us. And we're all looking at him, and he says very quietly, well, you know, there was a time in America when parents had children to make them work. And I thought, well that that that sounds right. But, he says, now we think differently. Children have rights. Well, that was different. And they should have their individual wishes regarded as well as being part of the household. And that was revolutionary to me.

Right around that time I was sixteen, I was so excited to be going out on my first date. And of course, my father noticed it. Asked me, "With whom are you going out?" And when I said a boy he said, "Well, I forbid you to go." And so then I gathered up my courage and tried to sound like my sociology professor and said, "In America children have rights here. They don't just exist to work for their parents." And so my father said, "Where did you learn this philosophy?" And I said, "Well, from my teacher and you always taught me that my teacher is supreme after you".

And he said... how can you let a foreigner's teaching refute our Chinese culture?

He was really very angry because it was the first time I had talked back to him. Didn't expect it. But nevertheless, I went out and it was my sort of declaration of independence.

**TOMMY WONG:** December the 7th I remember that day. The night after December the 7th the federal agents came in, they wanted the Japanese people. They just questioned everybody. What are you? Chinese or Jap? Chinese or Jap? So I tell 'em I'm Chinese. Let me see an ID. I gave them the ID. Wong. Okay. The two Japanese fellas that I was roomin' with they took them away.

**ENID LIM:** They were rounding up the Japanese for the internment camps. And we were told not to leave Chinatown and that if we did leave it, that we wore our buttons that proclaimed American Chinese

**MOYERS:** December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1 was a calamity for the American Navy in Honolulu, and for Japanese Americans. Perversely, it would be Chinese America's deliverance.

For four years China had been at war with Japan; suddenly, China was our ally. The good will spilled over to the Chinese here: now they were the good Asians.

**NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER:** "Registration Day Line-up. Throughout the nation, rich and poor, citizen and alien, enact a drama of democracy ... East Side, West Side, even in Chinatown, New York's melting pot responds..."

**TOMMY WONG:** Bein' in the United States Navy was one of the proudest days of my life I wasn't a Chinese. I wasn't a white man. I was a US Navy military naval man. People 'd ask me, 'Sailor, do you need a ride?' They would go outta their way to take me where I wanted to go.

Puttin' on a uniform, I was like a show-off with it. I was happy. Because I had that respect that I never had before.

**BOB CHIN:** I may could be better life in the service because a civilian at that time either laundry or restaurant business. So by going to the service, I could be somebody else.

**PETER KWONG (Hunter College):** There was tremendous shortage of labor because most of male went to war.

**NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER:** Here is where the victory is born. In the factories of America's industries going full-blast...

**PETER KWONG:** And so Chinese working for the first time able to in large number, work alongside American workers.

And the whites have the opportunity to see the Chinese as real individuals rather than these horrible image of them as as aliens.

It is a very sad twist of fate that Japanese Americans now are the bad guys. The place that the Chinese used to have.

**NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER:** From San Francisco's huge Chinatown comes a steady flow of patriotic Americans of Chinese descent, eager to register for work in vital wartime industries.

**JUDY YUNG (University of California, Santa Cruz):** There were seven shipyards in the bay area, and they needed workers to help build ships, so Chinese women ended up for the first time taking on jobs like welders and riveters and burners and flangers.

**ENID LIM:** One of my aunts was one of these riveters. And I remember she just gloried in the fact that she was working for good money now.

**MOYERS:** Patriotic fervor swept through Chinatown. But there were still fifteen anti-Chinese laws on the books –what to make of them? They were now an embarrassment among allies, and in 1943, with FDR's support, a bill repealing Exclusion sailed through Congress. This historic event barely earned a headline; even Chinese-Americans had other things on their minds.

**ARK CHIN:** We were getting ready to be shipped overseas and I think all of a sudden, People were becoming color-blind because suddenly they realized that we're going to really have to hang together or, or die.

**MOYERS:** Ark Chin was one of thousands of young replacements thrown into the European front in the winter of '44.

**ARK CHIN:** Fear never leaves you.

One time, we went into a hollow. The guys were tired. They wanted to rest. I said, now guys, let's get the hell out of here. Sure enough, as soon as we got out of there, the mail came in.

So after that, I didn't have any problem with my squad. They followed me.

So that was a sense of realization that I had become somebody more than I had started with.

Coming back, first of all, I'd survived.

Later, back in the restaurant, we went through another one of those incidents where the rednecks said, we fought that God damn war for you Chinks – I said, what? I was out there. You know, I fought that war.

**MOYERS:** Veterans came home with new rights. It wasn't just the G.I. bill. Now laws were written to allow them – and all Chinese with citizenship – to bring in wives.

Ark's family dispatched him to China, in hopes he'd find a bride in the old village. He would have none of it. But on the way home, he stopped at an uncle's in Hong Kong.

**ARK CHIN:** He says, I know a girl that is absolutely perfect. She's a university student and she is absolutely beautiful. So I said, no forget it.

But I, went over there. And, I saw her standing there with a parasol, in a cheongsam. I was totally stunned.

Literally it was love at first sight.

**MOYERS:** Some sixty-five years after the Exclusion Act, the Chinese here could lead lives that others took for granted. They could become naturalized like other immigrants, could live together like other families.

Bachelor society was dying at last.

**NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER:** Chinese mothers present their youngsters in this Chinatown baby parade in San Francisco's . . .

**ARK CHIN:** Our children we sense have been born into a new era.

I did not kid myself that still there would be roadblocks. Yeah, it was going to be a struggle. But what the hell, that's life.