

A STUDENT WORKBOOK

From Foundations to Frontiers: Chinese American Contributions to the Fabric of America





Committee of 100



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Chapter 1

Chinese American Contributions to Business and Entrepreneurship



San Francisco's Chinatown is bustling with Chinese American businesses and entrepreneurs. Chinese Americans have contributed to the U.S. economy in many ways.

ESSAY:

Chinese American Contributions to Business and Entrepreneurship

The U.S. [economy](#) is one of the strongest in the world. This is a result of the work of generations of immigrants. For example, Chinese Americans have made great contributions. Since immigrating in large numbers in the mid-1800s, they have increased the U.S. economy in many ways.

Initially, they provided much-needed labor. The main reason for Chinese [migration](#) to the United States was economic. Many Chinese immigrants arrived during the [Gold Rush](#) (1848). They mined for gold. But, they faced much [discrimination](#). For instance, they were required to pay unfair taxes. They were driven out of towns. They were victims of violence.

As such, they found other ways to make a [profit](#). They formed small businesses. At first, they served Chinese [consumers](#). But later, they started businesses to provide essential services to everyone. Early Chinese immigrants worked in laundries. During the Gold Rush, few women were available to do laundry. And, White men didn't want to do such work. So, laundry was shipped to Hong Kong and later, Hawai'i, to be cleaned. This was very expensive. Chinese immigrants saw an opportunity. They provided local and cheaper services. Chinese [entrepreneurs](#) established the first [commercial](#) laundry business in the American West. In 1851, Wah Lee opened the first known Chinese laundry in San Francisco. By 1870, there were over 1,300 Chinese laundries in San Francisco. Chinese businesses made up the majority of laundries in the city.

Chinese Americans were among the first immigrants to play a major role in building the country's [infrastructure](#). For example, they helped build the railroads. These railroads connected the country, from east to west. From 1865 to 1869, more than 20,000 Chinese workers were employed by the Central Pacific Railroad (CPRR). They made up over 90% of the workforce. Building the western half of the project, Chinese workers had the most dangerous jobs. These jobs included [blacksmithing](#), [carpentry](#), [tunneling](#), [leveling of roadbeds](#), and laying tracks.

From 1860-1910, Chinese Americans also transformed agricultural development in California. They had experience developing fertile farmland. They knew how to control waterways. They transformed dry river valleys. They were hired to reclaim lands in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

Since the mid-1900s, Chinese Americans have entered [occupations](#) across every industry. These [industries](#) included science, [high-technology](#), food service, medicine, education, and more. Many are founders and leaders of large companies like Yahoo, YouTube, Zoom, and DoorDash.

Many Chinese Americans hold professional jobs. Yet, they are underrepresented in leadership roles. This is especially true in [Corporate America](#). In 2018, Chinese Americans accounted for about 3% of professional occupations. But, they held only 1.5% of mid-level management roles. They held only 1.2% of executive positions. In comparison, White workers held about 69% of professional occupations. But, about 74% of mid-level managers and 85% of executives are White.

Chinese Americans, as well as other people of color, are kept out of corporate leadership positions. This is called a "[bamboo ceiling](#)." This concept was coined by Jane Hyun in 2005. It refers to barriers faced by Asian Americans in the workplace. Some barriers include stereotyping and racism. These barriers have led to a lack of advancement and leadership opportunities.

Today, there are over 160,000 Chinese American-owned businesses in the United States. Chinese Americans have made significant economic contributions. They are consumers, employees, business owners, and corporate leaders. They have contributed to the country's [Gross Domestic Product \(GDP\)](#). This is a measure of the value of all goods and services produced in a country. Chinese Americans have also created many jobs. In addition, they have increased [capital growth market](#), which is the value of money invested over time.

**This text is an excerpt from the Committee of 100's report entitled, "From Foundations to Frontiers: Chinese American Contributions to the Fabric of America." It has been adapted for reading accessibility and clarity.*

HANDOUT:

Vocabulary¹

Agriculture

The process of cultivating soil and growing crops

“Bamboo Ceiling”

A term created in 2005 by Jane Hyun in “Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling: Career Strategies for Asians” that explains barriers faced by Asian Americans in the workplace such as stereotyping and racism which creates a lack of advancement and leadership opportunities

Blacksmithing

The making and repairing of things in iron by hand

Capital market growth

An increase in the value of something over time

Carpentry

The making or repairing of things in wood

Coined

Invented a new word or phrase

Commercial

Relating to commerce, the buying and selling of goods and services on a large scale

Consumers

People who buy things

Corporate

Businesses that operate for profit, or to make money

Corporate America

A phrase to describe the world of big business in the United States

Discrimination

Unjust treatment based on differences, especially categories such as ethnicity, age, sex, or disability

Economy

The production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services

Entrepreneur

Someone who organizes, manages, and takes on the risks of a business in order to eventually make a profit

Industry

A specific area of activity or interest, like a job category

Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

A number that measures the value of all goods and services produced in a country

Gold Rush

A rapid movement of people to a newly discovered gold field; the first major gold rush was to California in 1848–49

High-technology

Scientific technology involving the production or use of advanced or sophisticated devices especially in the fields of electronics and computers

Leveling

The act of making flat or evening out

Migration

Movement of people from one area to another

Occupations

Jobs

Profit

Earned money

Roadbeds

The part of the surface of a road traveled by vehicles

Tunneling

The digging or forcing of passages underground or through something like mountains

¹Definition is adapted from [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#)

HANDOUT:

Discussion Questions

Why did early Chinese immigrants come to the United States?

How were early Chinese immigrants discriminated against?

Why were early Chinese immigrants forced to create their own businesses? How did they overcome the discrimination?

How did Chinese immigrants demonstrate an entrepreneurial spirit? How did they fill a need or a gap?

Additional Fictional Resources

1. *Front Desk* by Kelly Yang (Scholastic Press, 2019) – Discuss what it means for Mia’s family to run a business and what the motel symbolizes for them. Evaluate the arrangement between Mr. Yao and Mia’s parents for owning and running the motel. Brainstorm ways their arrangement could be more fair.
2. *It’s Boba Time for Pearl Li!* by Nicole Chen (Quill Tree Books, 2023) – Complete a T-Chart of the challenges and successes Pearl and Auntie Cha face as they navigate their businesses. Discuss what it means to be an entrepreneur and to start your own business. Brainstorm creative solutions to help a small business in need. Work in teams to write a small business proposal.
3. *Made in Korea* by Sarah Suk (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2022) – Examine how the main characters demonstrate entrepreneurial skills. Analyze the business side of Korean pop culture and its influence in the United States and globally.

Further Information

Go to asianamericanedu.org to access these resources.

1. The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “[The Contributions of the Chinese Transcontinental Railroad Workers](#)”
2. The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “[Chinese Exclusion Act and the Exclusion of Asians, Pacific Islanders and Women](#)”
3. The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “[Views from the Top and Bottom of Success in the Silicon Valley](#)”

Chapter 2

Chinese American Contributions to Science and Technology



Chinese Americans have made many contributions to science and technology.

ESSAY:

Chinese American Contributions to Science and Technology

The Chinese immigrated to the United States for better jobs. But, they couldn't get any job they wanted. Early Chinese immigrants faced [discriminatory](#) policies and practices. They were denied training and education. They had limited access to jobs. They were excluded from various [industries](#). They mainly worked in mines, railroads, laundries, and restaurants. The work was hard and dangerous. The pay was low.

Things changed in the mid-20th century. The Chinese Exclusion Act was [repealed](#) in 1943. A new immigration law was passed in 1965. This lifted immigration bans. It opened doors for Chinese immigrants. First, a large [influx](#) of Chinese immigrants came to the United States. Some studied here. Many eventually became U.S. citizens. Second, post-1965 Chinese immigrants had more opportunities. They could enter [occupations](#) across many [fields](#). They especially excelled in [STEM](#). STEM means Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. Chinese American talent supported the [Space Race](#) in the 20th century. They advanced medicine and healthcare. They helped build today's high-tech businesses.

There are many notable Chinese Americans in STEM. For example, Chien-Shiung Wu (1912-1997) was known as the "Queen of [Nuclear](#) Research." She was also called, "The First Lady of [physics](#)." She was elected into the National Academy of Sciences. She became one of the first members of Chinese heritage. Today, one in 25 living members of these prestigious STEM academies is Chinese American. As such, large numbers of Chinese Americans are driving U.S. technological [innovations](#).

As of 2018, about 15% of Chinese Americans have jobs in STEM fields. Also, about one in 25 American graduates with a college degree in STEM is Chinese American.

Chinese Americans are a large part of the workforce in STEM fields. They have also founded and led companies. There are many examples. Jerry Yang (born 1968) co-founded Yahoo. Steve Chen (born 1978) co-founded YouTube. Eric Yuan (born 1970) founded Zoom.

Chinese Americans have also excelled in the business side of STEM. They have played an important role in connecting innovators with the [market](#). They changed how business was done. They created new ways of doing things. For example, Alfred Lin (born 1972) [invested](#) in DoorDash. He helped the company grow. He changed the tech in the delivery industry. Another example is Yiqing "Pocket" Sun (born 1991). She focuses on female [entrepreneurs](#). Since 2017, she has invested over \$3 million dollars in 19 companies.

Chinese Americans have also innovated the healthcare and medical fields. They have made global impacts. For example, Min Chue Chang (1908-1991) was a [biologist](#). In 1959, he successfully produced healthy rabbits in a lab. He became one of the first innovators in [In-Vitro Fertilization](#) (IVF). He continued his work to help humans. Since 1978, more than 8 million babies have been born globally via IVF. About 1-2% of new births every year in the United States are through IVF. Another example is David Ho (born 1952). Ho is a [virologist](#). In the 1990s, he helped develop [combination antiretroviral therapy](#). This is a mix of drugs. It helped treat HIV. Peter Tsai (born 1952) is yet another example. He is a [material scientist](#). He invented the [N95 respirator](#). This is a special mask. This mask has kept healthcare workers safe during the COVID-19 [pandemic](#).

Chinese Americans have been and continue to be a major force in STEM.

**This text is an excerpt from the Committee of 100's report entitled, "From Foundations to Frontiers: Chinese American Contributions to the Fabric of America." It has been adapted for reading accessibility and clarity.*

HANDOUT:

Vocabulary¹

Biologist

An expert in the study of living organisms, including plants and animals

Combination Antiretroviral Therapy

A treatment that involves taking many medicines together to act against a specific type of virus or sickness

Discriminatory

Unjust treatment based on differences, especially categories such as ethnicity, age, sex, or disability

Entrepreneur

A person who organizes, manages, and/or takes on the risks of a business in order to make a profit

Fields

Disciplines or areas of study

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

A virus that attacks cells that help the body fight infection and sicknesses

Industries

Specific areas of activity or interest, like job categories

Influx

An arrival of large numbers of people or things

Innovations

New ideas, methods, or devices

Invest

To commit money in order to eventually make a profit

In-Vitro Fertilization (IVF)

A process where an egg is fertilized for pregnancy outside the body through a scientific procedure in a laboratory dish or test tube

Market

The process of getting products or services to customers in order to eventually make profits

Material Scientist

An expert in the study of making and using materials for real-world applications

N95 respirator

A mask or protective device designed to achieve a very close facial fit and efficient filtration of airborne particles

Nuclear

Of or relating to the nucleus, or center, of atoms which are the fundamental composition of everything around us

Pandemic

The worldwide spread of a new disease

Repeal

To rescind or take back, usually by an authority

Occupations

Jobs

Physics

A science that deals with matter and energy and their interactions

Space Race

The name of the 1950s-1960s Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, where they competed in space exploration

STEM

A term that means Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math

Virologist

A branch of science that deals with viruses and viral diseases

¹Definition is adapted from [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#)

HANDOUT:

Discussion Questions

Why were early Chinese immigrants limited in their jobs and opportunities?

How did Chinese Americans advance STEM in the United States?

What were the effects of the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 and the 1965 Immigration Act?

Who are some of the scientists mentioned in the text?
Why were these scientists specifically mentioned?

Additional Fictional Resources

- A. *Clues to the Universe* by Christina Li (Quill Tree Books, 2022) – Discuss why the author chose to set this book in the 1980s with multiple space shuttle launches and examine the impact of this choice on the narrative. Research rocket launches and explore STEM projects from [NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory](#).
- B. *Danny Chang Sums It Up* by Maisie Chan and Natelle Quek (Harry N. Abrams, 2021) – Discuss how the author uses Danny's and Nai Nai's attitudes toward math to either subvert or reinforce stereotypes. Write about the roles of math and art in building their relationship.
- C. *We Dream of Space* by Erin Entrada Kelly (Greenwillow Books, 2022) – Discuss how the themes of space and astronomy unites the Nelson Thomas children. Make connections to the role of Chinese Americans in space exploration. Research Asian Americans who played important parts in the Challenger launch.

Further Information

Go to asianamericanedu.org to access these resources.

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, "[Views from the Top and Bottom of Success in the Silicon Valley](#)"

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, "[Chinese Exclusion Act and the Exclusion of Asians, Pacific Islanders & Chinese Women](#)"

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, "[Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 - Civil Rights Movement Era](#)"

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, "[Model Minority Myth](#)"

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, "[Perpetual Foreigner – Systemic Racism Against Asian Americans](#)"

Chapter 3

Chinese American Contributions to Food and Cuisine



This photograph shows a variety of Chinese dishes. By 2016, the United States had over 45,000 Chinese restaurants in operation.

ESSAY:

Chinese American Contributions to Food and Cuisine

Chinese food is very popular in the United States. It is part of the American national [cuisine](#).

Chinese [immigrants](#) began to arrive in large numbers in the mid-1800s. At that time, the United States had little cuisine of its own. It didn't have a national food identity. This differed from China. China had centuries of experience in [hospitality](#). The Chinese had their own dishes. They had their own eating and serving practices. Chinese immigrants brought over their skills and knowledge.


As such, the best restaurants of the era were Chinese-owned. In the 20th century, [Chop Suey](#) became popular. Chop Suey translates to "odds and ends." It is a distinctly Chinese American dish. It consists of stir-fried meat, eggs, and vegetables. It is often served with rice and soy sauce. Experts believe it was invented by Chinese immigrant cooks working on the railroads.

As Chinese immigrants settled, Chop Suey [joints](#) popped up. They were cheap. They became popular with young folks living in the city. Food at such restaurants evolved as a [fusion](#) of Chinese and American tastes. Chinese chefs in the United States adapted their flavors, ingredients, and cooking methods. They accommodated their new kitchens and customers.

U.S. [migration](#) laws changed. Previous bans and restrictions were lifted. For example, in 1943, the United States [revoked](#) the Chinese Exclusion Act. This Act was [discriminatory](#). It severely restricted Chinese immigration for 60 years. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act further opened immigration pathways. This Act allowed more people to immigrate. Asian immigration to the United States increased. Chinese workers, [entrepreneurs](#), and students immigrated. This expanded Chinese cuisine in the United States.

In the 1950s-70s, the majority of Chinese immigrants were from Hong Kong and Taiwan. In 1979, the United States and China restored [diplomatic](#) ties. The number of Chinese immigrants grew significantly. Such policy changes led to a more diverse range of Chinese cuisine styles. This included Hunan, Sichuan, Taipei and Shanghai. These are all regions in China.

The shift from exclusive to more inclusive immigration [legislation](#) also led to the arrival of more skilled Chinese chefs. More Chinese restaurants emerged in cities with large Chinese populations. This included New York City and San Francisco.



By 2016, the United States had over 45,000 Chinese restaurants in operation. This is greater than the combined number of McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut, Taco Bell and Wendy's restaurants. By 2018, one in 25 chefs and head cooks in the United States was Chinese American. A [commentator](#) said there is "nothing so all-American as Chinese food."

**This text is s an excerpt from the Committee of 100's report entitled, "From Foundations to Frontiers: Chinese American Contributions to the Fabric of America." It has been adapted for reading accessibility and clarity.*

HANDOUT:

Vocabulary¹

Chopy suey

An American Chinese dish consisting of meat and eggs, cooked quickly with vegetables and bound in a starch-thickened sauce

Commentator

A person who comments on events or on a text

Cuisine

A style or method of cooking, especially as characteristic of a particular country or region

Diplomatic ties

Formal relations between the governments of different countries

Discriminatory

Unjust treatment based on differences, especially categories such as ethnicity, age, sex, or disability

Entrepreneur

Someone who organizes, manages, and takes on the risks of a business in order to eventually make a profit

Fusion

A merging of distinct elements into a whole; food prepared using techniques and ingredients of two or more ethnic or regional cuisines

Hospitality

The business or practice of providing services to guests in hotels, restaurants, bars, etc.

Immigrant

A person who comes to a country to live permanently

Joints

Places like restaurants, bars, or dance halls

Legislation

Laws created by the government

Migration

Movement from one area to another

Revoke

To take back

¹Definition is adapted from [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#)

HANDOUT:

Discussion Questions

How did the early United States and China differ in regard to hospitality?

What is Chop Suey?

How and why did Chinese Americans create food that was a fusion of Chinese and American cultures, tastes, traditions, etc?

How did immigration policies impact Chinese food and cuisine in the United States?

Additional Fictional Resources

- A. *A Place at the Table* by Saadia Faruqi and Laura Shovan (Clarion Books, 2022) – Discuss the role of food in Sara and Elizabeth’s friendship. Discuss the symbolism of the characters creating a fusion dish that blends their Pakistani/Muslim and English/Jewish cultures. Make connections to the early Chinese American chefs who created fusion dishes. Explore fusion dishes across immigrant communities and create a page for a class cookbook explaining the dish.
- B. *Chinese Menu: The History, Myths, and Legends Behind Your Favorite Foods* by Grace Lin (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2023) – Browse the table of contents and choose a few stories to read. Discuss the importance of legends, myths, and histories in telling the stories of Chinese American food. Share or research stories about food from other cultures.
- C. *Maizy Chen’s Last Chance* by Lisa Yee (Yearling, 2023) – Contextualize Maizy’s family’s immigration story using the parts of the lesson essay on the history of Chinese immigration. Compare and contrast The Golden Palace to Chinese restaurants learned about or researched in the lesson. Discuss what the restaurant represents for Maizy’s family.
- D. *Measuring Up* by Lily Lamotte and Ann Xu (HarperAlley, 2020) – Discuss the role of food in Cici’s identity as a Taiwanese American and an immigrant. Create a recipe based on one of the featured ingredients in the cooking competition. Evaluate how the graphic novel format contributes to this story.

Further Information

Go to asianamericanedu.org to access these resources.

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “[Chinese Exclusion Act and the Exclusion of Asians, Pacific Islanders and Women](#)”

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “[Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 - Civil Rights Movement Era](#)”

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “[Redefine American](#)”

Chapter 4

Chinese American Contributions to Art and Film



Chinese American artists have made lasting contributions in the art and film industries by advocating for change in representation, bringing awareness to sociopolitical issues, and achieving mainstream popularity.

ESSAY:

Chinese American Contributions to Art and Film

The United States has had a big impact on global culture and arts. It is considered an [epicenter](#) of modern English-language [cinema](#). It is also a key force in [innovations](#) in musical genres. For example, the United States developed jazz, rock, and folk. Many groups have contributed to this cultural richness. Groups include Black American, Latinx, Asian, and Jewish communities. Chinese Americans have received less attention as a cultural force. But, they have made great contributions. For instance, they have impacted [fields](#) ranging from photography to [animated film](#).

In Hollywood, there was Anna May Wong (1905-1961). Wong was a Chinese American actress. She launched her career in the 1920s. She is considered the first Chinese American actress to gain international recognition. Despite this, Wong faced many setbacks. In 1935, she was denied the lead role of O-Lan in the film *The Good Earth*. O-Lan was a Chinese character. Instead, a white actress played the role in [yellowface](#). Wong struggled to fight against the [Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype](#). In March 1924, she had enough. She created Anna May Wong Productions. She wanted to make her own films about her culture.

Another distinguished Hollywood actor of Chinese descent is Beulah Ong Kwoh (Quo) (1923-2002). Kwoh played over 100 roles in television and film. Early in her career, she changed her last name to Quo. This is because people constantly asked if KWOH was a radio station. In 1965, Kwoh co-created East West Players. This is the country's first Asian American theater company. East West Players allowed Asian American actors to tell their own stories.

Chinese Americans have been a [longstanding](#) voice in the arts in this country. Many artists sought to document the Chinese immigrant experience. They eventually created art to bring awareness to [sociopolitical](#) issues.

Artists and creative thinkers have protested the injustices of anti-Asian racial [discrimination](#). They have raised awareness of the struggles faced by new immigrants. They have fought for positive social and political change. For instance, Jim Dong and Nancy Hom are Chinese American visual artists. They created a "[portable mural](#)" in 1976. The mural is entitled *The Struggle for Low Income Housing*. It is a large-scale artwork. It [protested](#) the destruction of [low income](#) communities in San Francisco. It advocated for increased [civil rights](#) for the city's diverse immigrant populations.

By the late 1900s and early 2000s, Chinese American artists achieved popular [acclaim](#) and [mainstream](#) status. Ang Lee (born 1954) is one of these pioneers. Lee is best known for his movies *Life of Pi*, *Brokeback Mountain*, and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Jon Chu (born 1979) is another pioneer in filmmaking. He directed *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018). This film was loved by critics. It also made over \$238 million. It became the highest-[grossing](#) romantic comedy of the decade. Ali Wong (born 1982) is another modern pioneer. She is a comedian. She is of both Vietnamese and Chinese descent. She achieved mainstream popularity with two Netflix stand-up comedy specials. Her shows are entitled, *Baby Cobra* and *Hard Knock Wife*.

Chinese American filmmakers and performers bring unique ideas and perspectives to the screen. They have helped U.S. cinema to be more [inclusive](#) and relatable. Their stories connect to both Asian and non-Asian audiences.

**This text is an excerpt from the Committee of 100's report entitled, "From Foundations to Frontiers: Chinese American Contributions to the Fabric of America." It has been adapted for reading accessibility and clarity.*

HANDOUT:

Vocabulary¹

Acclaim

Enthusiastic and public praise

Animated Films

Motion pictures made from a series of drawings, computer graphics, or photographs of inanimate objects (such as puppets) and that gives the appearance of motion by small changes in each frame

Cinema

The business and art of making movies

Civil rights

Personal rights of a citizen guaranteed by the Constitution

Discrimination

Unjust treatment based on differences, especially categories such as ethnicity, age, sex, or disability

Epicenter

The central point of something

Fields

Disciplines or areas of study

Grossing

Earning a particular amount of money before taxes are paid or costs are taken away

Inclusive

Including everyone, especially people who have historically been excluded (because of their race, gender, sexuality, or ability)

Innovation

A new method, idea, or product

Longstanding

Existing or continuing for a long time

Low income

A social class categorized by an individual or family making less money than the federal poverty threshold

Mainstream

Reflecting the popular attitudes and values of a society or group

Mural

A large painting or picture on a wall

Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype

A stereotype that suggests a person is not considered to be “American” despite being born in the United States or descending from generations of Americans; this stereotype is mostly applied to people of color

Portable

Easily carried or moved

Protest

To make a statement or gesture in opposition to something

Sociopolitical

Relating to social and political factors

Yellowface

The use of makeup and prosthetics by white actors to portray Asian characters

¹Definition is adapted from [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#)

HANDOUT:

Discussion Questions

What did early Chinese American artists and actors have to endure in industries like Hollywood?

Who was Anna May Wong?

What was the impact of the creation of East West Players?

What were the motivations of Chinese American artists to create art for positive social change?

Additional Fictional Resources

- A. *Dream, Annie, Dream* by Waka T. Brown (Quill Tree Books, 2022) – Compare Annie’s experiences with theater to those of Anna May Wong, Beulah Ang Kwoh, and other individuals they have researched. Write about similarities and differences related to the context, media landscape, and struggles and successes of each person.
- B. *Not Your All-American Girl* by Madelyn Rosenberg and Wendy Wan-Long Shang (Scholastic Inc, 2022) – Discuss the title of the book and create a bubble map about beliefs they hold around the phrase “All-American” within art and film. Consider how Lauren’s Chinese and Jewish American identities add complexity to her story.
- C. *Stand Up, Yumi Chung!* by Jessica Kim (Puffin Books, 2021) – Consider how stereotypes around comedy and Asian American girls are represented in the book. Have students research Asian American female comedians and compare them to Yumi.
- D. *The Magic Fish* by Trung Le Nguyen (Random House Graphic, 2020) – Examine how the main character uses storytelling (specifically fairy tales) to communicate with his Vietnamese immigrant parents. Discuss how art can be used as a platform to express identity and culture.

Further Information

Go to asianamericanedu.org to access these resources.

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “[Breaking the Color Line in Hollywood: Beulah Ong Kwoh, Actor](#)”

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “[Actress Anna May Wong](#)”

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “[APIDAs on the Big Screen](#)”

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “[Generation Rising, APIDAs Contribute](#)”

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “[Perpetual Foreigner - Systemic Racism Against Asian Americans](#)”

Chapter 5

Challenges to Success – Perpetual Foreigner



This photograph was taken at a rally in Chinatown in Washington, DC in March 2021. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a rise in anti-Asian and anti-Chinese violence that was often rooted in the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype.

ESSAY:

Challenges to Success – Perpetual Foreigner

Those with Asian and/or Pacific Islander heritages are affected by the [Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype](#). This stereotype suggests that people who look “Asian” are outsiders or foreigners. It doesn’t matter if they were born in the United States. It doesn’t matter if they live in the United States. It doesn’t matter if their families have been here for generations. It positions Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) as always being different. They are not seen as “Americans.” This stereotype has affected many different [fields](#).

The stereotype has been used against the AAPI community. This has happened since they arrived in the United States. It started when the Chinese [migrated](#) in large numbers in the 1850s. Chinese immigrants were seen as different. They wore “strange” clothes. They spoke a “strange” language. They had “strange” customs. Laws were passed to ban them from immigrating. Laws also denied them equal opportunities. Laws have also led to their incarceration. In addition, Chinese and other Asian immigrants were often victims of anti-Asian attacks. This was all allowed because they were seen as foreigners.

The Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype is also evident in the area of science and technology. For example, Chinese scientists have been [racially profiled](#). Since the 1950s, scientists of Chinese [descent](#) in the United States have been accused of being Chinese spies. Some even faced criminal charges. Some cases were valid. But many of the charges were dismissed.

Even the White House has suspected the Chinese government of spying. They accused them of using students to collect [intellectual property](#). This led to the suspension or limitation of visas. The United States was especially suspicious of students involved in China’s [civil-military fusion program](#). These students were denied visas to study in the United States. There are also [legislative](#) proposals to restrict all Chinese graduate students from studying STEM-related subjects. Such decisions are fueled by the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype. This negatively impacts Chinese Americans’ access to opportunities. By cutting off talent sources, it also negatively impacts the country’s ability to innovate.

This distrust of Chinese American scientists is a problem. It has kept the United States from tapping into their talents. It has kept Chinese students from coming to the United States to study. The Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype must actively be overcome. More and more Chinese Americans are breaking through. In recent years, there has been an increase in foreign students in the United States from China. Many of these students are majoring in [STEM](#). STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, or Math. These areas are critical to U.S. national security and interests. Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans have greatly contributed to U.S. innovations in science and technology.

The Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype also affects the area of voting. Initially, many Chinese and other AAPI immigrants were denied the right to vote. However, laws have changed. The number of [eligible](#) Chinese American voters grew by 57% between 2008 and 2018. Yet, voter [turnout rates](#) for Chinese American voters remain low. One major reason for this is that Chinese Americans are not seen as “Americans.” Their issues and concerns are often ignored. Candidates of the Democratic and Republican parties have historically failed to reach out to AAPI communities. As members of U.S. society, AAPI communities should be actively included in shaping the nation’s future. Their votes should count. As such, broader efforts are needed to engage Chinese American voters with U.S. politics.

In the arts, the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype has hurt AAPI [creatives](#). Artists of AAPI descent are expected to make “Asian” art. Such art is rarely seen as “American.” At best, it has been seen as a bridge between “Eastern” and “Western” art. This is very limiting. It is also dismissive. Increasing the visibility of Chinese and other minorities in American arts culture could open up new innovations in this field.

Barriers like stereotypes prevent individuals and communities from achieving their full potential. Removing such barriers will allow U.S. society to grow, thrive, and innovate.

**This text is an excerpt from the Committee of 100’s report entitled, “From Foundations to Frontiers: Chinese American Contributions to the Fabric of America.” It has been adapted for reading accessibility and clarity.*

HANDOUT:

Vocabulary¹

Civil-Military Fusion Program

China's national strategy to build China's economic and technological achievements into military power

Creatives

People who pursue careers in creative fields such as the visual and performing arts

Descent

The origin or background of a person in terms of family or nationality; heritage and/or ancestry

Eligible

Being qualified or permitted to do or be something

Incarceration

The act of imprisoning someone or the state of being imprisoned

Intellectual Property

Any intellectual creation, concepts, ideas, inventions, or work that are protected by law as belonging to the creator

Fields

Disciplines or areas of study

Foreign

Outside a place or country; not belonging to this country

Legislative

Relating to the branch of government that is charged with such powers as making laws, levying and collecting taxes, and making financial appropriations

Migrate

Move from one area to another

Perpetual

Never-ending or forever

Racial Profiling

The act of suspecting or targeting a person on the basis of their race

STEM

A word that means Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math

Stereotype

An idea that many people have about a thing or a group that may often be untrue or only partly true and is often negative

Turnout Rates

Participation rates of a given election

Visas

Endorsement on a passport by the proper authorities showing that it's been examined and the bearer may proceed

¹Definition is adapted from [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#)

HANDOUT:

Discussion Questions

What is the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype?

How has the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype been used against Chinese Americans and other AAPI groups? How has this stereotype showed up in various fields/professions?

In what ways is the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype a barrier and challenge for Chinese Americans and other AAPI groups?

What are some of the broader impacts of stereotyping?

Additional Fictional Resources

- A. *American as Paneer Pie* by Supriya Kelkar (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2021) – Discuss how the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype impacts the Indian American community in this book. Discuss how Lekha and Avantika’s thoughts and actions are influenced by their own beliefs about the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype. Reflect on the title of the book and make a connection to the readings or videos in this lesson.
- B. *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang (First Second, 2008) – Discuss how the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype is portrayed in the book and what the author’s purpose is with the character Chin-Kee. Watch the television adaptation on Disney+ and create a Venn diagram to compare and contrast how the book and television series depict the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype.
- C. *Finally Seen* by Kelly Yang (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2023) – Compare and contrast the experiences of Lina and Millie. Evaluate the extent to which their struggles are rooted in the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype.
- D. *In the Beautiful Country* by Jane Kuo (Quill Tree Books, 2023) – Discuss how the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype impacts Anna and her family when they immigrate to the United States. Analyze specific examples of racism they face and discuss whether or not they are rooted in the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype.

Further Information

Go to asianamericanedu.org to access these resources.

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “[Chinese Exclusion Act and the Exclusion of Asians, Pacific Islanders & Chinese Women](#)”

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “[Perpetual Foreigner– Systemic Racism Against Asian Americans](#)”

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “[Breaking the Color Line in Hollywood: Beulah Ong Kwoh, Actor](#)”

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “[APIDAs on the Big Screen](#)”

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “[McCarthyism and Profiling](#)”

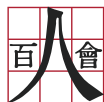
The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “[From Outrage to Organizing: The Impact of the Vincent Chin Case](#)”

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “[Stand Against Hatred](#)”



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