

**Acts of Inclusion:
How the Quon Family Took Control of Its Story**

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Revised Handout/Source List

SCGS Jamboree 2022 Presentation Summary: From 1882 to 1943, in spite of the Exclusion Act, the Quon family of Hoiping built a Southern California retail network selling Asian handicrafts and asserted a right to partake in American society. Using store ads, contemporary images, and other sources, this session will retell the Quon success story and reveal the hidden stories of paper sons/daughters and other lesser known uncles and aunts.

CHINESE-AMERICAN BACKDROP

- **“Sei Yup”** means “4 Counties”. The Quons’ home area of Hoiping was one of the “4 Counties”. Sei Yup and the adjacent Sam Yup “3 Counties” area are located along the coast of Guangdong Province. Up to the mid-20th century, this small region accounted for something like 80% of Chinese emigration worldwide. From the mid-18th to mid-19th century, the province’s nearby capital of Canton/Guangzhou was the sole designated port for Western trade.
- **Late 19th/Early 20th C. China** - In 1841, the 1st Opium War was fought in Guangdong. In its aftermath, Canton and other Chinese cities were opened to Western and Japanese trade, and multiple foreign enclaves granted extraterritorial privilege; Hong Kong Island was granted to the British in perpetuity. In 1911, the 360-year-old Qing court collapsed, to be replaced by a weak republic. In 1937, World War II arguably began with Japan’s full-scale invasion of China. China’s alliance with the US in 1941 became a reason for repeal of the Exclusion Act.
- **The Exclusion Act** enacted in 1882, along with subsequent laws in place until 1943, barred Chinese from entering the US, except merchants and limited other exempt groups. Chinese needed to have certificates of residence, carry certificates of identity, apply for return permits, and undergo extensive interrogation to re-enter. It was and is the only US immigration legislation targeting one ethnic group.

GENERAL CHINESE GENEALOGY RESOURCES

Learn to navigate different name spellings and calendar systems and find ancestral villages, family trees (jiapu), and Exclusion Act files for individuals and businesses.

- **Chinese Family History Group of Southern California**
Their resources page is an excellent starting point. Join and you gain access to a further guide plus past webinars with John Wong, Marisa Louie Lee and others.
<https://chinesefamilyhistory.org/>

- **Chinese American Family History Research on Groups.io**
A helpful community sharing information and resources.
<https://groups.io/g/chineseamericanfamilyhistory/topics>
- **Bay Area Chinese Genealogy Group**
I haven't personally tapped their resources, but they also come highly recommended.
<https://bacgg.org/>
- **San Francisco Public Library**
Librarian Richard Le has been running Chinese ancestry workshops and is keen to promote the entirely free resources of his and other libraries and archives.
richard.le@sfpl.org
- **Legacy Family Tree Webinars**
There are only about 2 webinars on Chinese topics - but good ones with handouts: Grant Din on Chinese research broadly and Trish Hackett Nicola on Exclusion Act case files (also see her site: <https://chineseexclusionfiles.com/>).
- **Village Database**
A searchable resource: <http://villagedb.friendsofroots.org/about.html>. This article provides more context: [Tom, Henry. The Village Database: A Resource for Chinese American Genealogy Research. *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Winter 2021, 122:4.](#)
- **FamilySearch.org**
Check out their Wikis, as well as "How to Use This Collection" guides - eg: https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Chinese_Emigration_and_Immigration.
- **National Genealogical Society**
This year's conference held in Sacramento had a Chinese focus. It may be worth investigating whether any of the relevant sessions are still available.
<https://conference.ngsgenealogy.org/>

GENERAL BOOKS

Chang, Iris. *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History*. New York: Viking, 2003

- Covers more recent immigration.

Chen, Jack. *The Chinese of America*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980.

- Balanced, readable overview.

Ngai, Mae. *The Chinese Question: The Gold Rushes & Global Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2021.

- Shows how anti-Chinese sentiment arising out of near simultaneous gold rushes in the US, Australia & S. Africa - the first mass encounter of Chinese and Westerners - was not incidental but integral to a new world order based on, among other things, the gold

standard. Can look for online interviews for an abridged version of her fascinating research.

Brooks, Charlotte. *American Exodus: Second-Generation Chinese Americans in China, 1901-1949.* Oakland: University of California Press, 2019.

- Early 20th c. China changed rapidly and as many as half of American-born Chinese moved “back” due to a mixture of opportunity there and lack thereof in the US.

SPECIFICALLY ON CHINESE EXCLUSION

Chin, Tung Pok and Winifred C. Chin. *Paper Son: One Man’s Story.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000.

- An eloquent and moving first-hand account. Among many vivid details of interest are Chin’s candid discussion of the misery of “grass widows” and husbands’ liaisons with non-Chinese women.

Lau, Estelle T. *Paper Families: Identity, Immigration Administration, and Chinese Exclusion.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

- This book covers similar ground to Erika Lee’s book, but with more case study examples, especially ones illustrating the tangled ramifications of paper relationships.

Lee, Erika. *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

- My understanding of Exclusion as the unfortunate cornerstone for a US immigration edifice still with us today comes entirely from Lee’s powerful book.

Rose, Chelsea, Jacqueline Y. Cheung, and Eric Gleason. “‘Bona Fide’ Merchants: Negotiating Life, Labor, and Transnational Mobility in the Time of Chinese Exclusion”. *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Winter 2021, 122:4.

- New scholarship adding nuance to our understanding of the peculiar privilege of qualifying for the exempt status of “merchant”.
- https://www.ohs.org/oregon-historical-quarterly/back-issues/upload/Rose-et-al_Bona-Fide-Merchant_OHQ-122_4_Winter-2021_web.pdf (OHQ offers free access).

Waters, Marjorie. *Chinese American Exclusion/Inclusion: Classroom Materials for the Exhibition.* New York: The New York Historical Society Museum & Library, 2014.

- Richly illustrated, with samples of case file materials and handy timelines.
- <https://chineseamerican.nyhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Chinese-American-Classroom-Materials.pdf>

RESOURCES TO TELL THE QUON STORY SPECIFICALLY

While many of these will not be useful to other people, my point is to show the variety of sources used to recreate the Quon story. Please contact me for full citation details.

ABOUT PLACES RELEVANT TO QUONS

Woon, Yuen-fong. *Social Organization in South China, 1911-1949: The Case of Kuan Lineage in K'ai-P'ing County*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1984.

- In-depth case study of villages neighboring those of the Quons and how they changed over time due to emigration.
- <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.22799>

Lee, Murray. *In Search of Gold Mountain: A History of the Chinese in San Diego*. Virginia Beach: Donning Company, 2003.

- Comprehensive overview, plus useful preview of Quon partnership files.

LOCAL HISTORY, MEDIA & IMAGE SOURCES

- **The San Diego Union & San Diego Evening Tribune** - key sources for Quon interviews, obituaries, and store advertisements (at www.genealogybank.com).
- **San Diego History Center** <https://sandiegohistory.org> - much background information and a recently revamped photo catalog.
- **Library of Congress** <https://www.loc.gov/> - Sanford Fire Insurance Maps and historic photos.
- **California photos:** Calisphere <https://calisphere.org/>, Online Archive of California <https://oac.cdlib.org/>, USC Digital Library <https://digitallibrary.usc.edu/>.

MA THESES, JOURNAL ARTICLES, ORAL HISTORIES, ETC.

Scholars delve into the darndest things. When you least expect it, you may strike gold.

- **“From Underground Chinatown to Hall of China: Chinese Representation at San Diego’s 1915 and 1935 Expositions in Balboa”** - by Michael Yee, details Quon involvement in the complex issue of how Chinese culture was portrayed and perceived, and led to a striking Quon newspaper mention and to Liu’s thesis.
- **“Celestials in the Golden Mountain: The Chinese in one California City, San Diego, 1870-1900”** - by Judith Liu, helpful overview, with great population statistics and information on Coronado Island not readily found elsewhere.
- **“Bureaucracy, Corruption and Organized Crime: Enforcing Chinese Exclusion in San Diego, 1897-1902”** in “Western Legal History” - by Jeffrey Scott McIllwain, tipped me off to Quon Mane’s work as a government interpreter.
- **Interview of Eleanor Ring Storrs** as part of “Republican Philosophy and Party Activism”, Regional Oral History Office The Bancroft Library University of California Berkeley, California Government History Documentation Project - informative anecdote about Quon Mane’s service in the W. W. Stewart household.

OTHER MEDIA - though modern, these helped me reimagine my ancestors' experiences.

- **“Our Town” (Parts 1 & 2)** - These episodes have nothing to do with Chinese-Americans, but vividly explore the dynamics and emotions of immigration at the community level. <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/632/our-town-part-one> & <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/633/our-town-part-two>
- **“Reunification”** - A moving excavation of the repercussions to one family from their Hong Kong-to-California journey. <https://reunificationthemovie.com/>

NATIONAL ARCHIVES (NARA) “EXCLUSION ACT FILES”

Files directly referenced in the presentation:

Arrival Case Files

- | | | | |
|-------------------|--------------|-------------------|---|
| ● Quon Mane | Main Subject | File 12756/005-17 | https://catalog.archives.gov/id/28817518 |
| ● Quon Tong | Brother | File 2907/35 | |
| ● Quon Quock Quan | Brother | File 10135/15 | https://catalog.archives.gov/id/28802912 |
| ● Quon Chew Ben | Son | File 28217/008-04 | https://catalog.archives.gov/id/288696 |
| ● Quon Hong Qui | Nephew | File 32015/003-06 | https://catalog.archives.gov/id/28877677 |
| ● Quan Hong Toy | Nephew | File 10410/060-56 | |
| ● Quon Choak | Cousin's son | File 31160/31 | |
| ● Quon Foon | Cousin's son | File 10148/69 | https://catalog.archives.gov/id/28803176 |
| ● Quan Shut Yee | Cousin's son | File 14438/011-29 | https://catalog.archives.gov/id/28826891 |
| ● Quon Quock Chew | Cousin | File 12297/084 | https://catalog.archives.gov/id/117694178 |
| ● Quon Quock Jim | Cousin | File 17546/11-27 | https://catalog.archives.gov/id/28838151 |
| ● Quon Fan Mon | Cousin's son | File 17546/10-3 | https://catalog.archives.gov/id/28838097 |

Partnership Files

- Quon Mane Co. San Diego File 13546-5

The fact that so many files are now available *in full* (not just index information) at <https://catalog.archives.gov/> is a result of their being scanned *in response to my requests*. I note this so that other researchers will not be disappointed if the files they seek are only available by request—and so that they know their requests will enrich the public record!

Accessing Files

I can't emphasize how life-changing these files can be, if they exist for your family. However, if you're like me, you may have felt intimidated about making a first visit or request because the various guides can be confusing and imply a lot of preparation is required. Rest assured a request need not be complicated. My interaction with NARA has been by email only, and in my experience, the archivists are friendly and will reply within a couple days or weeks at most.

I started with zero family documents. With spellings of names found in naturalization papers and passenger lists on Ancestry and FamilySearch, I found a few family members here: <https://catalog.archives.gov/>, and used file #s and ARC Identifiers there to make requests. When I contacted the wrong branch of NARA, they redirected me. From case files of a few close

family members, I found out about unknown relatives, whose files I could also request. Some key relatives didn't have their own files, but statements by them and photos turned up in other people's files. NARA provided downloadable PDFs, some for free, others for about US\$1-2 per page. In files ranging from 14 to 114 pages, I learned about unknown sisters, mothers' surnames, milestone dates, village details, and more.

ABOUT NARA PARTNERSHIP & DEPARTURE RECORDS

If you had a family member who was in the exempt category of "merchant", besides an individual case file, you may want to look in this semi-searchable set of Exclusion-era records: "California, Chinese Partnerships and Departures from San Francisco, 1893-1943," available at <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2427227>.

Note that non-California companies are also included.

What's possible to obtain:

You may find

1. a dated card indicating that a merchant applied for a re-entry permit and was at least contemplating departure from the US; this can be a datapoint in and of itself, and could also lead to a case file with the application or other information;
2. or evidence of a partnership/company, which should indicate a company file that can be requested from NARA.

While some files provided only minimal information about one specific partner, who was not someone I was especially interested in, others have been as large as 22 pages, with lists of partners in English and Chinese, photos, \$ share holdings, company accounts, company letterhead, simple affidavits, etc.

What you need to know:

Automated search by entering a person's name into the search boxes only covers the departure records. If you only use the automated search, you may miss the company material, which you need to browse image by image. But there are over 20,000 images and once you plunge in, you may feel lost in the weeds.

The material is eclectic in format, and different portions use different organizational methods. There is a [finding aid](#) and [relevant FamilySearch Wiki](#) which explain the logic, but if you have not worked with unindexed images before, or are not familiar with the multiple potential meanings of the word "index", you may feel that the guides do not readily match up with what you see.

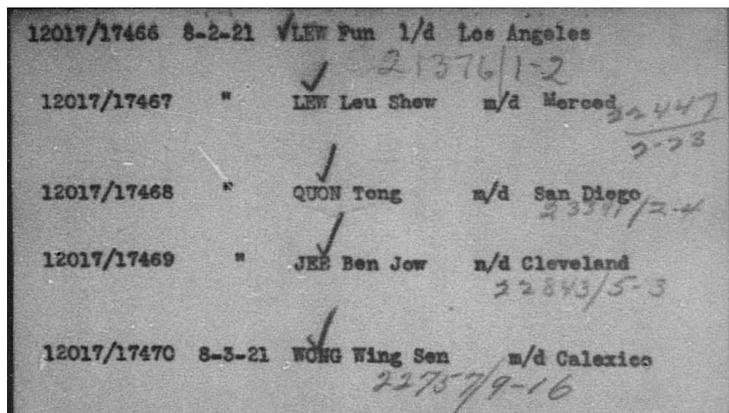
For one, the guides describe five "series", but on Family Search, the microfilm is split into either two rolls.

(Note that there is another version of the same material with a somewhat different title - "Partnership lists of Chinese firms in San Francisco, California, and nationwide, 1893-1907;

and index of Chinese departing from San Francisco, California, 1912-1943" - that is split into three rolls, without the automated search feature, so it is entirely browse-only: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1193921>).

What you will see:

An automated search of the departure records (Series 3) turns up index cards like this:



California, Chinese Partnerships and Departures from San Francisco, 1893-1943," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2H5-VZYX> : 17 March 2018), Tong Quon, 02 Aug 1921; citing NARA microfilm publication A3362 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2001); FamilySearch digital folder 100682130.

My relative is the 3rd entry: Quon Tong.

The other information from left to right is:

- the number of his application for a "Permit to Re-Enter" (this implies a trip was planned, but does not necessarily confirm the trip was made),
- the application date (2 August 1921),
- "m/d" means "Merchant Departed"; the finding guide gives other abbreviations used,
- San Diego is where he was based,
- the handwritten notation is an arrival case file number - so indeed a roundtrip was made.

With this information, I was able to request Quon Tong's arrival case file.

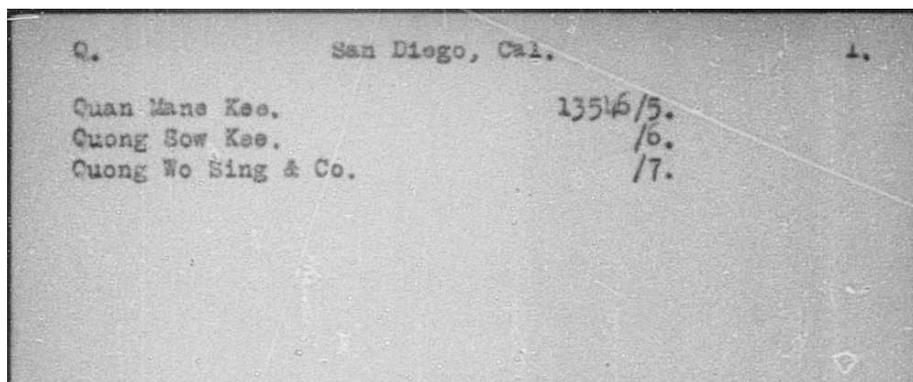
(Note that for reasons I do not know, the current catalogued file number is 23341/002-04, rather than 23341/2-4.)

The cards cover 50,000 departures from 1912 to 1943.

The Others Series 1, 2, 4 and 5:

Series 1, 2, 4 and 5 are company-related information in a mixture of formats, with different sections for San Francisco, other California towns, and non-California locations.

Some information is again in the form of index cards. Below is a "Series 1" record for Quon Mane & Co, found in a section that was organized alphabetically by town, then alphabetically by company. I was able to request File 13546/5.



Partnership lists of Chinese firms in San Francisco, California, and nationwide, 1893-1907; and index of Chinese departing from San Francisco, California, 1912-1943, roll 1 pt. A, 1911-14 Apr 1943, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C91K-27XQ-J?cat=1193921>

The San Francisco portions are organized by street, or by year and then street.

There are also scans of several volumes of ledgers with transcriptions of partner lists. The scans include images of ledger indexes, which are alphabetically tabbed pages at the start of each ledger, with all companies starting with that letter listed, followed by a reference to a page in the ledger.

***To help those browsing wade through the images, please note that my own browsing log is available at: tinyurl.com/4rerbewy. It includes image numbers, with notes about those images. Please contact me at dedehuang@hey.com if you have questions or suggestions about how this could be made more helpful.**

OTHER NARA RESOURCES

- <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/> > 100 milestone documents
Find a transcript of the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882).
- DocsTeach www.docsteach.org/ (part of NARA's education division)
A search on "Chinese Exclusion" calls up hundreds of illuminating primary documents, many of which are also typical examples of what researchers may be able to find for their own family members or other individuals.
- *The Chinese Exclusion Act: Researching in the National Archives*
<https://books.apple.com/us/book/the-chinese-exclusion-act/id1041503797>
- History Hub <https://historyhub.history.gov/>
Pose questions and receive answers from a government or citizen archivist.