

Date completed: 09/03/2021

Title: Chinese in Maine

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Content Areas: Social Studies

Strands and Standards: *See pages 8-9 for detailed Strand/Standard information*

- Social Studies, Grades 6-8: History 1 F1, F2, D2, D4; History 2 F1, F2, F3, D1, D2, D3
- Social Studies, Grades 9-Diploma: History 1 F1, F2, D2, D4; History 2 F1, F2

Duration: 1 – 5 days

Grade levels: 6-8; 9-12

Materials and Resources Required: computer, projector, access to [Maine Memory Network](#) (recommended to start a free account – students can gather additional sources into folders using an MMN account), [MMN Chinese in Maine slide show](#), note paper, pens/pencils

Summary/Overview: This lesson presents an overview of the history of the Chinese/Chinese Americans in Maine and the U.S. including some of the factors that led to Chinese immigration to the U.S., the history of the Chinese Exclusion Act, a look into the xenophobia, racism, and discrimination many Chinese Americans have experienced and continue to experience, and the contributions of Chinese Americans to community life and culture in Maine.

Essential questions:

- What does it mean to be an immigrant?
- What were some of the factors that led to Chinese immigration to the U.S. in the latter half of the 1800s?
- What led to the creation of the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and Immigration Act of 1924? How were those acts examples of xenophobia?
- What were some of the struggles and obstacles of starting a new life in a Maine for Chinese immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries?
- In what ways have Chinese immigrants and their descendants contributed to community life and culture in Maine?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify and describe factors that led to Chinese immigration to the U.S.
- Students will be able to describe the Chinese Exclusion Act and its impact on Chinese Americans.
- Students will be able to define xenophobia and the impact it can have on immigrants.
- Students will be able to identify and describe the ways in which Chinese immigrants and their descendants have contributed to community life and culture in Maine.
- Students will answer questions about information from secondary and primary sources through close looking and hypothesizing.
- Students will examine and analyze primary source documents, art, and objects, and use the sources provided to draw informed conclusions and ask informed questions about the Chinese community in Maine and the United States.

Vocabulary: *immigrant(s); xenophobia; racism; discrimination; Americanization; cultural assimilation*

Steps:

Presentation:

1. If your classroom/school has a land acknowledgement, MHS recommends beginning this lesson with a land/water acknowledgement. More information in Teacher Resources at the end of this packet.
2. Share and discuss the following history/background of the Chinese in the U.S. and Maine with students, showing them images from the accompanying [slide show](#). Ask students to take notes and encourage them to record and/or share their thoughts and questions. As appropriate, take time to examine the slide show images to discuss each historical item and its connection to the history being explored. Acknowledge that this is a history and community that has roots going back centuries in Maine and one that some of students may be already be familiar with and may themselves be a part of.
3. Acknowledge that it would be impossible to cover every aspect of the history of the Chinese in Maine in just one lesson over one to several days and that the stories of Chinese-Americans in Maine should not and will not be confined to one lesson; it is a topic and a community students will encounter multiple times as they study history. This lesson can serve as an introduction to or review of the topic, as a resource to return to and use throughout a curriculum or unit of study, and as jumping off point for researching a variety of stories in conjunction with a curriculum that explores the many different stories of the many different people who have called what is now Maine their home for thousands of years.
 - a. Maine has had connections to China and to other parts of Asia since the 1600s when the American colonies were controlled by England. From the mid-1600s up until the eve of the American Revolution, Americans had access to a variety of Chinese goods such as silk, tea, and porcelain through the British East India Company. The East India Company was made up of a group of British merchants who were granted exclusive overseas trading rights with the East Indies (the archipelago between mainland Southeastern Asia and Australia), India, and China by the British crown. Chinese goods were very popular with colonists in North America, especially tea, although it was usually only the

wealthiest people who had access to such goods until the mid- to late-1700s. When the American Revolution ended in 1783 and the United States of America became a country, U.S. merchants began trading directly with China. (slide image: [Chinese export porcelain, 1760](#))

b. Though small numbers of Chinese **immigrants** settled in North America in the 1700s and early 1800s, the first major wave of Chinese immigrants came to the United States in the 1850s, settling mainly on the west coast. An immigrant is a person who permanently moves to a foreign country. Many of these Chinese immigrants were young and male and were fleeing the political unrest of the Taiping Rebellion and/or were eager to try their luck at finding their fortune in the California Gold Rush. When the Gold Rush ended, Chinese Americans were considered cheap labor and they found employment as farmhands, gardeners, domestics, laundry workers, and railroad workers. Chinese immigrants often faced **xenophobia** in the U.S., or a dislike or prejudice against them simply because they were from a different country. They often faced distrust and **racism** (prejudice directed against a person or group of people on the basis of their racial or ethnic group), and **discrimination** (unjust and unfair treatment of people on the grounds of characteristics such as race, age, sex, or sexual orientation) from other Americans and were subject to laws restricting their rights and preventing them from becoming U.S. citizens, laws that did not apply to European immigrants. (slide image: [Chinese immigrant men, Augusta, ca. 1890](#))

Pause to review some of the essential questions with students - ***What does it mean to be an immigrant? What were some of the factors that led to Chinese immigration to the U.S. in the latter half of the 1800s?*** – and the check if they have questions they would like to ask or observations they would like to make.

c. Maine's earliest known Chinese immigrant was an accidental arrival directly from Amoy (now known as Xiamen) Island off the southeast coast of China. A young boy, who became known as "Daniel Cough," stowed away on a sailing vessel from mid-coast Maine. By the time the crew became aware of his presence it was too late to turn back, so Captain Sylvester Lord decided to bring him to Maine. When the ship arrived in Bass Harbor, Maine, in October, 1857, Daniel Cough began a new life in a strange land. Captain Lord eventually gave young Daniel a piece of land in Bernard facing Bass Harbor. Daniel built a house and later added on to it so he could turn part of it into a general store which he ran until his death in 1906. By 1865, he was a considerable taxpayer in his adopted town. He bought another piece of land at what is now called "China Hill," with a height of 167 feet, in West Tremont for its timber. He continued to acquire real estate, becoming the owner of several parcels. On January 17, 1870, he married Elvira Higgins, from nearby Halls Quarry, and started a family. Daniel was naturalized an American citizen in the Hancock County Superior Court in Ellsworth in April 1874. Many of Daniel's descendants continue to live in Maine today.

d. Racism and language barriers kept many of Maine's first Chinese immigrants from working in established trades and industries, so many were self-employed. Ar Tee Lam was a Chinese cigar maker who came to Portland from Cuba in 1858. He opened a

tobacco shop in Portland and, in 1880, opened the first known Chinese restaurant at 1 Custom House Wharf in Portland. Ar Foo Fong, a tea merchant by trade, came to Portland around 1860. He worked in George Shaw's shop on Middle Street, helping customers select teas (Shaw later founded the Shaw's supermarket chain). Fong wore traditional Chinese clothes and often worked by the front window to attract attention. By 1871, Fong opened his own shop on Congress Street. In 1877, 14-year-old Sam Lee opened the first Chinese laundry in Portland. (slide images: [Portland City Directory advertisement, 1871.](#); [Pekin Restaurant](#))

e. By the 1870s, the U.S. was experiencing widespread economic depression which meant high competition for jobs and growing hostility toward Chinese American workers who were often singled out as the cause of the nation's high employment rate and low wages. They were the targets of mob violence. In 1882 Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, essentially banning all Chinese immigration into the United States and denying citizenship to those already in the U.S. This was the first time in the history of the U.S. that a group of people was banned from entering the country solely upon the basis of race; only students, teachers, diplomats, travelers, and merchants were allowed to apply for admission. The law was originally intended to only last for 10 years, but it was renewed in 1892 and made permanent in 1902. The Immigration Act of 1924 went a step further and prevented immigration from all of Asia and set quotas or limits on the number of immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere. In 1943 during World War II these laws were modified when China became an ally of the U.S. Immigration quotas were eased further with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 and eventually removed with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. (slide image: [Chinese man, Augusta, ca. 1890](#))

Pause again to review some of the essential questions with students - ***What led to the creation of the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and Immigration Act of 1924? How were those acts examples of xenophobia? What were some of the struggles and obstacles of starting a new life in a Maine for Chinese immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries?*** - and to check if they have questions they would like to ask or observations they would like to make.

f. The first documented Chinese immigrant to settle in Portland, ME arrived in 1858 and by the 1890s a Chinese community had begun to form in the city, made up mostly of men whose families were prohibited from immigrating because of the Chinese Exclusion Act. Many of these men attended the Chinese Sunday schools at the Second Parish Presbyterian Church and the First Baptist Church. Participating in these Sunday Schools was a way to learn English and provided an opportunity to socialize and connect with the community. From 1922 to 1945, the Portland Public Schools offered daytime "Americanization" classes for adult and school-aged immigrants with coursework in the English language and citizenship. **Americanization** was a national movement that grew in popularity during World War I, when some Americans questioned the loyalty of immigrants to their adopted land. Americanization was also a form of **cultural assimilation** or the absorption of a minority group into a larger more dominant group with the minority group being expected to change their own culture to be more like the

larger more dominant group. The first Chinese restaurant in Portland opened in 1880 at 1 Custom House Wharf and between 1914 and 1920 Portland had a Chinese Masonic Lodge. Professional boxer Harry Wong was a Chinese American Mainer who fought 37 bouts in Portland and Lewiston between 1946 and 1948. Wong's professional record was 17 wins, six draws, and nine losses. Toy Len Goon came to Maine from China in 1921 with her new husband Dogon Goon who had lived in the U.S. from the time he was 18. Together they operated a laundry on Forest Avenue in Portland and raised eight children. When Dogan died in 1941 the children were ages 3 to 16 and Toy Len was alone. She kept the laundry going, raised the children, and ensured they all received secondary educations. American Mothers Committee of the Golden Rule Foundation named Toy Len the 1952 mother of the year. (slide images: [Chinese man, 1910](#); [Chinese Sunday school student, 1910](#); [Adult Americanization class, Portland, 1925](#); [Toy Len Goon, Portland, 1952](#); [Toy Len Goon in Washington, D.C., 1952](#)).

g. The Moon Festival was celebrated in Portland for the first time on October 8, 1884. Also known as the Mid-Autumn Festival, the Chinese Moon Festival usually takes place in September or October and is one of the most important traditional celebrations for the Chinese. It is a time for families to reunite and come together to observe the full moon, eat food from the autumn harvest, light lanterns, and recite poetry. Mooncakes - small round pastries with a thin crust and red bean paste or lotus seed paste filling - are a customary treat enjoyed during the festival. An October 8, 1884 newspaper article about the Chinese community's celebration of the Moon Festival was the first report of traditional Chinese moon cakes in America: "made of rice and wheat flour, and filled with a mixture of watermelon seeds, almonds, walnuts, and a Chinese aromatic seed called gee ma, made into a thick past with quince jelly." Many families in Maine still celebrate the festival. The first known Chinese New Year celebration occurred in the Augusta area in 1890 when the Winthrop Daily Banner reported that the local Chinese celebrated the Chinese New Year with candy and fruit along with what was described as "some black looking substance which was cut up into squares and was swimming in equally black looking gravy in a platter on the table." An employee of the Augusta laundry painted Chinese characters in gold paint onto a card to be sent to his "best girl." (slide images: [The Wong family, Portland, 1923](#); [Quoy Wong family, Bangor, 1922](#) - these images do not depict the Moon Festival or Lunar Festival, but are suggested for this section as the festival is a time for families to come together.)

h. In 2021 there are more than 17 million people who identify as Asian living in America and the Asian population in Maine is 14,946. This includes Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Lao, and many other people who identify as Asian living in all parts of Maine and working in a wide variety of industries including education, retail, medicine, information technologies, and dining. Even amid xenophobia and discrimination, the Chinese and greater Asian-American communities have found success in Maine and become vital parts of community, though xenophobia, discrimination, and racism against these groups continues in the 21st century. In 2020 hate crimes against Asian-Americans in major U.S. cities grew by nearly 150 percent. Since the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the group Stop AAPI Hate has recorded

more than 6,000 reported incidents of hate against Asian-American and Pacific Islanders in the U.S. Some people have linked the rise in hate crime against Asian-Americans on the anti-Chinese rhetoric of some politicians including former President Donald Trump, who referred to COVID-19 as the "China virus" or the "kung flu". Asian Americans have been the target of derogatory language in the media, online harassment, verbal assault, bullying, threats, and violence that appears to be linked to the pandemic, but that also has roots in racism and violence going back several centuries. (slide images: [Tiananmen Square Protests, Portland, 1989](#); [Timwah Luk, Falmouth, 2009](#)).

Pause again to review an essential question with students - ***In what ways have Chinese immigrants and their descendants contributed to community life and culture in Maine?*** - and to check if they have questions they would like to ask or observations they would like to make.

4. Check for student understanding with review questions:

Review Questions:

1. What kind of relationship did North America have with Asia in the 1700s? How did that relationship change after the American Revolution?
2. What is xenophobia? In what ways did Chinese immigrants experience discrimination in the United States in the 1800s and 1900s?
3. How did Chinese living in Portland, Maine in the 1800s and 1900s find or create a sense of community for themselves?
4. What is the Moon Festival?
5. How do xenophobia, racism, and discrimination continue to be issues for the Asian-American community in the 21st century?

Suggested research and further exploration activities:

1. Ask students to consider what they have learned/already know and to use primary sources available on Maine Memory Network and the Library of Congress to answer the questions *“What were the impacts of the Chinese Exclusion Act for people immigrating to and living in the United States? How was this legislation and example of xenophobia?”*
2. Ask students to learn more about the story of Toy Len Goon using the resources on Maine Memory Network and the recording of [From Chinese Laundress to Mother of the Year: Bringing the Story of Toy Len Goon Beyond the Model Minority Myth](#) with Dr. Andrea Louie and to consider the questions *“Toy Len Goon may be best remembered today as the 1952 Mother of the Year, but what parts of her story are often left out of that narrative? How was the story of her as Mother of the Year an example of the ‘model minority myth’?”*.

3. Mark the Moon Festival and/or Chinese New Year by learning more about the traditions involved in the celebrations. Find and try a recipe for moon cakes, write poetry, and ask students to share how they mark holidays and family celebrations in their home or community.

Teacher Resources:

Tips for Acknowledging Indigenous Land/Water: Acknowledgement is a relatively recent practice, and is ideally practiced as a respectful way to address the Indigenous inhabitants of what is now North America, acknowledge human and non-human relatives, address the ongoing effects of the structure of settler-colonialism, emphasize the importance of Indigenous sovereignty and self-governance, and help students be aware and conscientious of the fact that we are living on unceded Native Homelands. Land/water acknowledgements are best developed through meaningful connections; acknowledge with respect and use a format that lets you speak from the heart. Making connections with neighbors of a Nation near to where you live is one of the best places to start when creating a land acknowledgement from the heart. Talk with your school administrators and colleagues about creating a land acknowledgement at the institutional level.

Great online resources with more information can be found here:

- https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_CAYH4WUfQXTXo3MjZHRC00ajg/view
- <https://native-land.ca/resources/territory-acknowledgement/>
- https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/mainewabanakireach/pages/1311/attachments/original/1617062949/Land_Acknowledgment_Resources_2021.pdf?1617062949.

For information about the Nations nearest where you live/teach, a good starting point is the map at: <https://native-land.ca>

What we know of as “Maine” today is part of the unceded Homelands of the Wabanaki peoples. “Wabanaki” translates into English as the “Dawnland,” with the Wabanaki peoples being the People of the Dawnland, meaning those who see and greet the first light of the day. They share common oral histories and belong to Algonquian/Algonkian language groups, but have unique languages.

About Wabanaki Nations: We encourage you and your school to reach out to the Native communities in Maine to expand your learning. More information about the four federally-recognized tribal communities in Maine can be found here:

- The Aroostook Band of Micmacs: <http://www.micmac-nsn.gov/>
 - Micmac Tribal Government: http://micmac-nsn.gov/html/tribal_government.html
- The Houlton Band of Maliseets: <http://www.maliseets.com/index.htm>
 - Maliseet Tribal Government: <http://www.maliseets.com/government.htm>

- The Penobscot Nation: <http://www.penobscotculture.com/>
 - o Penobscot Tribal Government: <http://www.penobscotculture.com/index.php/8-%20about/81-tribal-facts>
- The Passamaquoddy Tribe
 - o Indian Township (Motahkomikuk): <https://www.passamaquoddy.com/>
 - o Pleasant Point (Sipayik): <http://www.wabanaki.com/>
 - o Passamaquoddy Tribal Government: http://www.wabanaki.com/wabanaki_new/chief_council.html
 - o Passamaquoddy Joint Tribal Council: http://www.wabanaki.com/wabanaki_new/joint_council.html

The Abenaki are the fifth Wabanaki tribe today; however, the Abenaki are not a federally-recognized tribe as of 2021. Not all Tribal Nations that exist in North America today have received federal recognition, and not all Native Nations seek federal recognition but this does not diminish their sovereignty. There are no tribes in New Hampshire or Vermont that, as of 2019, have received federal recognition, but four tribes in Vermont have received state recognition. Federal recognition provides a federal relationship between Indigenous sovereign nations and the US government. Tribal Nations throughout North America are sovereign nations, and actively MHS: Healthcare History Page 17 of 19 work to maintain their self-governance. Federal recognition is not related to Tribal Nation sovereignty; it affords certain rights to Indigenous peoples within the laws of the United States. It is important to recognize that not all Wabanaki people live in what is now Maine, and not all Indigenous peoples living in what is now Maine today are Wabanaki. Native and non-Native people alike live throughout Maine, the United States, Canada, and countries around the world. Maine as we know it today exists within unceded Wabanaki Homelands; the federally-recognized tribal communities in Maine own trust land throughout the state as presented through treaties.

About Maine Historical Society: Maine Historical Society (MHS) is the third-oldest state historical society in the United States, following Massachusetts and New York, respectively. Founded in 1822, only two years after Maine separated from Massachusetts and became a free state as part of the Missouri Compromise, MHS today is headquartered at 489 Congress Street in Portland. The campus contains an office building and museum, the Brown Research Library (est. 1907), and the Wadsworth-Longfellow House, the childhood home of American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. An enormous online database containing digitized images and objects from MHS's robust collection can be found online at Maine Memory Network: <https://www.mainememory.net/> Teachers can create free accounts on Maine Memory Network to save images to albums for classroom use. MHS's mission: "The Maine Historical Society preserves the heritage and history of Maine: the stories of Maine people, the traditions of Maine communities, and the record of Maine's place in a changing world. Because an understanding of the past is vital to a healthy and progressive society, we collect, care for, and exhibit historical treasures; facilitate research into family, local, state, and national history; provide education programs that make history meaningful, accessible and enjoyable; and empower others to preserve and interpret the history of their communities and our state."

Exhibits: [Begin Again: reckoning with intolerance in Maine](#); [400 Years of New Mainers](#); [Chinese in Maine](#); [Toy Len Goon: Mother of the Year](#); [Twenty Nationalities, But All Americans](#)

Primary Sources: [Maine Memory Network](#); [Library of Congress](#); [Chinese Exclusion Act: Primary Documents in American History \(Library of Congress\)](#)

Videos and Podcasts: [From Chinese Laundress to Mother of the Year: Bringing the Story of Toy Len Goon Beyond the Model Minority Myth](#); [Portland's Early Chinese Restaurants](#)

My Maine Stories: [From Chinese Laundress to Mother of the Year](#); [An Asian American Account](#)

Organizations: [Chinese and American Friendship Association of Maine](#)

Strands and Standards:

Social Studies – History, 6-8: Students draw on concepts and processes using primary and secondary sources from history to develop historical perspective and understand issues of continuity and change in the community, Maine, the United States, and the world.

- **History 1:** Students understand major eras, major enduring themes, and historic influences in the history of Maine, the United States, and various regions of the world by: **(F1)** Explaining that history includes the study of past human experience based on available evidence from a variety of primary and secondary sources, and explaining how history can help one better understand and make informed decisions about the present and future. **(F2)** Identifying major historical eras, major enduring themes, turning points, events, consequences, and people in the history of Maine, the United States and various regions of the world. **(D2)** Analyzing major historical eras, major enduring themes, turning points, events, consequences, and people in the history of Maine, the United States and various regions of the world. **(D4)** Making decisions related to the classroom, school, community, civic organization, Maine, or beyond; applying appropriate and relevant social studies knowledge and skills, including research skills, and other relevant information.
- **History 2:** Students understand historical aspects of unity and diversity in the community, the state, including Maine Native American communities, and the United States by: **(F1)** Explaining how both unity and diversity have played and continue to play important roles in the history of Maine and the United States. **(F2)** Identifying a variety of cultures through time, including comparisons of native and immigrant groups in the United States, and eastern and western societies in the world. **(F3)** Identifying major turning points and events in the history of Maine Native Americans and various historical and recent immigrant groups in Maine, the United States, and other cultures in the world. **(D1)** Explaining how both unity and diversity have played and continue to play important roles in the history of the World. **(D2)** Comparing a variety of cultures through time, including comparisons of native and immigrant groups in the United States, and eastern and western societies in the world. **(D3)** Describing major turning points and events in the history of Maine Native Americans and various historical and recent immigrant groups in Maine, the United States, and other cultures in the world.

Social Studies 9-Diploma – History: Students draw on concepts and processes using primary and secondary sources from history to develop historical perspective and understand issues of continuity and change in the community, Maine, the United States, and the world.

- **History 1:** Students understand major eras, major enduring themes, and historic influences in United States and world history, including the roots of democratic philosophy, ideals, and institutions in the world by: **(F1)** Explaining that history includes the study of the past based on the examination of a variety of primary and secondary sources and how history can help one better understand and make informed decisions about the present and future. **(F2)** Analyzing and critiquing major historical eras: major enduring themes, turning points, events, consequences, and people in the history of the United States and the implications for the present and future. **(D2)** Analyzing and critiquing major historical eras: major enduring themes, turning points, events, consequences, and people in the history of the world and the implications for the present and future. **(D4)** Making a decision related to the classroom, school, community, civic organization, Maine, United States, or international entity by applying appropriate and relevant social studies knowledge and skills, including research skills, ethical reasoning skills, and other relevant information.
- **History 2:** Students understand historical aspects of unity and diversity in the United States, the world, and Native American communities by: **(F1)** Identifying and critiquing issues characterized by unity and diversity in the history of the United States, and describing their effects, using primary and secondary sources. **(F2)** Identifying and analyzing major turning points and events in the history of Native Americans and various historical and recent immigrant groups in the United States, making use of primary and secondary sources.