

The Impact of the Chinese Exclusion Act on the Economic Development of the Western US

Discussion of Long, Medici, Qian, Tabellini (2024)

James Feigenbaum

Economics of Immigration

October 31, 2024

The Paper

- ▶ What was the effect of the Chinese Exclusion Act?

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 - ▶ Bad and long run

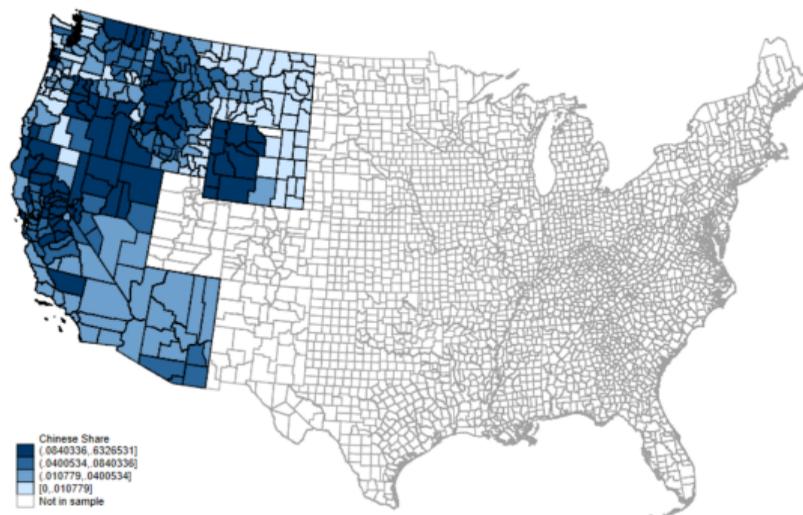
The Paper

- ▶ What was the effect of the Chinese Exclusion Act?
 - ▶ Bad and long run
- ▶ The Western US was growing but highly exposed counties grew a lot less over the next half century
 - ▶ Population down, labor supply down, occupation score down, manufacturing output down

Comments

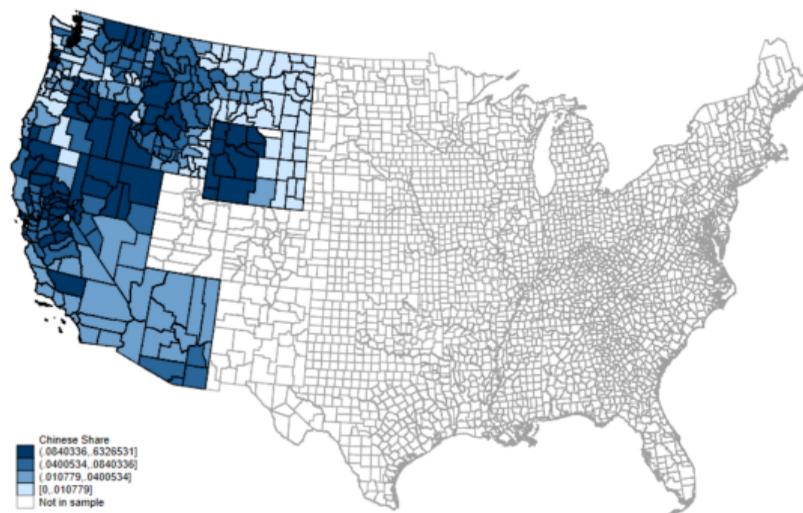
- ▶ To steal something from fellow discussant Ran Abramitzky:
 - ▶ Free disposal of any and all comments
- ▶ You all have been working on this paper for a while and it is very polished

Figure A.1: Spatial Distribution of Chinese in 1880



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- ▶ Focus on the West which make sense
- ▶ But why counties?
- ▶ Many western counties are HUGE and borders change a lot over this period (right?)

What About the CPP?



Explorations in Economic History

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Research Paper

The census place project: A method for geolocating unstructured place names ☆

[Enrico Berkes](#)^a, [Ezra Karger](#)^b, [Peter Nencka](#)^c  

- ▶ Berkes, Karger, and Nencka (EEH 2023) build up links from the complete count to small places
 - ▶ Basically towns and cities
- ▶ I'm assuming that the Chinese population pre Exclusion wasn't just concentrated in certain counties but within those counties in certain towns and cities and jurisdictions

Benefits of a CPP or town-level Analysis

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 - ▶ Especially if you are looking for other small mining or RR hamlets?

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 - ▶ Shorter distances, some shared governance, etc

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 - ▶ Shorter distances, some shared governance, etc
- ▶ Fancy new-ish historical data

Drawbacks of a CPP or town-level Analysis

- ▶ 1890...
 - ▶ because you need the complete count for this to work, you lose your first post-treatment year
- ▶ Manufacturing data will still be county level
- ▶ I don't know how good the CPP coverage is for the sparse west in the 19th century

1-Digit Industry Codes

Table 2: Effect on Chinese Labor

	Dependent Variable: Log (# of individuals + 1)													
	Labor Supply (males age 15-64) by Sector													
	Tot. Pop.	All Workers	Personal services	Entertainment, Recreation	Mining	Manufacturing	Wholesale, Retail Trade	Transportation, Communication	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing	Professional Services	Construction	Business, Repair Services	Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	Public Admin.
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	
Post x High Chinese Share	-0.92 (0.18)	-1.03 (0.17)	-0.36 (0.11)	-0.30 (0.06)	-0.90 (0.13)	-0.16 (0.09)	-0.45 (0.15)	-0.17 (0.07)	-0.04 (0.12)	-0.16 (0.07)	-0.07 (0.05)	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.00 (0.04)	0.02 -0.03
Conley SE	[0.14]	[0.13]	[0.09]	[0.05]	[0.13]	[0.07]	[0.09]	[0.08]	[0.07]	[0.04]	[0.03]	[0.02]	[0.02]	[0.02]
Obs.	2,688	2,401	2,401	2,401	2,401	2,401	2,401	2,401	2,401	2,401	2,401	2,401	2,401	2,401
Chinese Industry Share			0.615	0.363	0.338	0.186	0.117	0.112	0.0739	0.0295	0.0168	0.00887	0.00633	0.00295
Dep. Var. mean (sample)	204.2	131.7	30.37	1.185	24.59	11.47	20.99	3.539	18.45	1.356	0.890	0.260	0.354	0.351
- in 1880	357.9	318	72.55	3.024	75.71	35.02	20.67	13.94	38.76	1.464	1.332	0.339	0.0865	0.128

Notes: Observations are at the county and year level. The columns are organized by the share of Chinese workers in the industry in 1880, which is stated at the bottom of the table. Dependent variable means are also presented at the bottom of the table. All regressions control for county FE and year FE interacted with: the # of years connected to railroad as of 1882 and a dummy variable that equals 1 if the county ever had a mine during 1840-1882. Standard errors clustered at the county-level are shown in parentheses. Conley (1999) standard errors with 100km cutoffs are shown in square brackets.

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- ▶ You are throwing away data because you have way more detail in the complete count census from both occ and ind codes
- ▶ Probably overkill to use every occ1950 x ind1950 (especially before 1910 when the data is kind of made up anyways. . .)
- ▶ But could you zoom into specific industries that you have theories about?

1-Digit Industry Codes

Table 3: Effect on White Labor

	Dependent Variable: Log (# of individuals + 1)													
	Labor Supply (males age 15-64) by Sector													
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Dep. Var. Mean (Sample)	14,891	5,179	171.2	57.86	268.4	892.3	703.2	529.9	1,151	180.8	468	127.9	133.9	179.8
- in 1880	4,126	1,503	41.93	5.232	147.7	153.2	155	109.1	483.3	48.09	77.40	37.66	13.54	43.16

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- ▶ But could you zoom into specific industries that you have theories about?
 - ▶ Industries with large Chinese presence?
 - ▶ Industries linked to those industries (upstream or downstream)?
 - ▶ Industries that might rely more on larger local populations (or local population growth)?
 - ▶ Industries that might cater more to immigrant populations?

Zeros in the Data

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Zeros in the Data

Not to totally contradict my last slide (and my ideas about the CPP data) but...

- ▶ I am guessing that Table 2 and even Table 3 have a lot of zero in county x industry x year cells
 - ▶ You report means but those are inflated by San Francisco and other large urban counties
 - ▶ Most of the west is rural and sparsely populated and tiny
- ▶ Can you show robustness to the usual things we worry about with $\log+1$?
 - ▶ IHS, levels, per capita, extensive margin, etc

Occupation Scores and Farmers

- ▶ Occupation scores aren't perfect but they are what we use before 1940
- ▶ The farmer problem is well known
 - ▶ Are the occscore results robust to kicking out farmers?
 - ▶ Or using one of the Collins et al corrections?
- ▶ Are miners and ranchers similarly occscore problematic?

Spillovers in the Mechanism

- ▶ I read Table 8 as telling us that treated counties lost out on future migrants
 - ▶ But is it that the Chinese Exclusion costs reduced the number of people in total leaving the eastern US or Europe for the West?
 - ▶ Or that those migrants were going to go and just went somewhere else?
- ▶ Maybe these spillovers wouldn't be to neighboring counties but seems like some kind of reallocation is likely here, no?

Spillovers in the Mechanism

- ▶ Could you split by initial (pre Exclusion Act) non-Chinese foreign born share or dominant source country?
 - ▶ The most natural story for a limited policy effect would be other immigrants showing up to take the place of the excluded Chinese
 - ▶ Maybe this is most likely in places that already drew a lot of immigrants?
 - ▶ And especially from immigrant groups that send a lot of people to the US after 1882?

Extra Citations for Fun

- ▶ Hannah Postel (demographer but economist-adjacent) has a bunch of papers on the Chinese Exclusion Act, mostly thinking about the Chinese population in the US
 - ▶ Also amazing work to census link Chinese names in the US census despite obviously terrible enumeration

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- ▶ Card, Chang, Becker, Mendelsohn, Voigt, Boustan, [Abramitzky](#), and Jurafsky (PNAS 2022) compute tone of political speech about immigration in Congress
 - ▶ I'm sure there's some cool stuff in there about the Chinese Exclusion Act and Chinese immigration more generally
 - ▶ Even just documenting how much more anti-Chinese the rhetoric was in the West would be useful
 - ▶ And maybe declines after the Exclusion Act?

Small Things

- ▶ A referee might want an IV here for “county high Chinese”
 - ▶ Clearly the baseline controls that predict your X (like mining 1840-1880 or railroad before 1882) are bad instruments
 - ▶ You might want a pre-buttal footnote to shut up a referee about that around page 14?
- ▶ I don't totally get the spillover definition
 - ▶ Why does it matter the share of my neighbors who were “treated”
 - ▶ Makes more sense to make that binary if **any** neighbors are treated?
- ▶ Footnote 12: Split out postal workers (who are probably 99% of the federal public administration jobs)?
- ▶ Are the results robust to ending the data in 1930 or 1920? Or extending to 1950?