

China at CUNY Initiative

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Invisible Journeys: Chinese Immigration in the U.S. and Peru Through a Human Rights Lens

1. Goal of the Activity

Students will:

- Understand the historical trajectories of Chinese migration to the U.S. and Peru.
- Identify patterns of racialization, labor exploitation, and exclusionary laws that both countries had in common (*for example., the Chinese Exclusion Act; the coolie trade in Peru*).
- Analyze those contexts with an international human rights perspective (*for example: rights to non-discrimination, fair labor, and cultural identity*).
- Learning positive effects of immigration processes to developing and developed countries.
- Addressed the topic from a critical perspective in order for the students to formulate their own opinion.

2. Prerequisites

Students should:

- Have basic familiarity with the concept of human rights (for example: UDHR, labor rights, anti-discrimination, UNHCR).
- Understand the concept of migration as a human right and racialization.
- Have basic knowledge in comparative politics methods and tools.

3. Pre-Class Activities

For students:

- **Readings (short, accessible pieces):**
 - **Chinese Immigrants in Peru by Li He.** Ibero-Americana, Nordic Journal of Latin American Studies Vol. XX:2, 1990, pp. 3-16
[223-1-589-5-10-20171128.pdf](#)
 - **Standing Up Against Racial Discrimination: Progressive Americans and the Chinese Exclusion Act in the Late Nineteenth Century by Wenxian Zhang.** Phylon 56, vol. 56, No. 1, (SUMMER 2019), pp. 8-32 (25 pages).
[Standing Up Against Racial Discrimination: Progressive Americans and the Chinese Exclusion Act in the Late Nineteenth Century Progressive Americans](#)

- **Guiding questions:**

- What economic and political conditions shaped Chinese migration to each country?
- How were Chinese immigrants racialized and controlled?
- Which human rights principles were violated or upheld in these contexts?
- What are the historical consequences of those policies nowadays?

For me:

- Create a simple comparison chart (U.S. vs. Peru) for use in class discussion, highlighting key milestones in both countries.

4. In-Class Activity

Step 1: Warm-up Discussion

- “What images or narratives come to mind when you hear “Chinese immigration?””
→ *Purpose: Analyzed similarities and differences in both processes*
- “Who tells these stories in the U.S.? In Peru?”
→ *Purpose: Reveal stereotypes and center the invisibility of Chinese immigration history.*

Step 2: Mini-Lecture

- I present a brief comparison chart (U.S. vs. Peru) mentioning the key events, with emphasis in the continuities in racial exclusion and human rights struggles:
For example:
 - U.S.: 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, Page Act, Chinatowns, WWII labor mobilization.
 - Peru: Coolie trade (1849–1874), integration and anti-Chinese violence, 20th-century mestizo nationalism.

Step 3: Small Group Activity — Comparative Human Rights Case Study

- Students divide into small groups and discuss the following questions:
 - What were the main labor conditions faced by Chinese migrants
 - What were the forms of discrimination and resistance
 - Which were the (human) rights violated (connect to UDHR/UNHCR principles)
 - What are the main legacies that Chinese immigrants have left in each society today?

- How does a human rights framework change our understanding of migration history?

5. Post-Class Activity and Assessment

- Short written reflection (300 words) or short infographic about any part of the class content that grabbed their attention.
- I can provide quick written or oral feedback.

6. Materials

- PowerPoint with comparative migration timeline
- Readings (PDF links or uploaded files)
- Group worksheet: “Chinese Migration and Human Rights Comparison Chart”
- Optional: short video clip — *PBS Asian Americans* or *BBC Reel: The Forgotten Chinese Slaves of Peru*