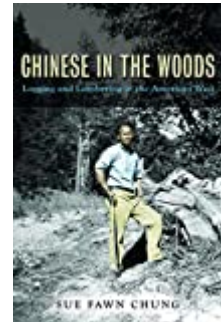


Sue Fawn Chung. *Chinese in the Woods: Logging and Lumbering in the American West.* Asian American Experience Series. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015. Illustrations. 264 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-03944-7.



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In *Chinese in the Woods*, historian Sue Fawn Chung fills a notable gap in western history. While the role of the Chinese in building the Central Pacific Railroad is well known and documented, Chung expands this history to encompass the role of Chinese immigrants in the timber industry of the Sierra Nevada in the last half of the nineteenth century. Situating her work primarily in the context of Chinese American and immigration studies, Chung endeavors to illustrate the agency of individual immigrants to counter the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century stereotype of the Chinese as a docile, cheap, and exploited labor force.

In addition to detailing the choices made by individuals, this study also provides insight into the lives of Chinese immigrants in general, including an examination of the connections of clans and associations or *âtangsâ* that fostered chain migration and often served an economic and social safety net. While some Chinese maintained close cultural ties, others adopted American lifestyles, such as Western names, clothing, and marriage customs. Most of these *âWesternizedâ* immigrants quickly left the timber industry for more lucrative opportunities. Although most Chinese filled the ranks of unskilled laborers, *âa few worked their way up to more prestigious positionsâ*; some, for example, owned lumber companies and

lumber yards (p. 51).

Chung claims that the Chinese constituted 90 percent of the lumber industry workforce in the Sierra Nevada in the 1870s-90s and thus played a crucial role in the development of the American West. While the role of the Chinese certainly deserves attention, Chung uses an expansive definition of *âlumberingâ* to include charcoal making, cord-wood cutting, flume tending, and other work associated with mining, railroad building, and lumbering in the Sierras in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In addition to mill work and firewood production, lumber work under this definition also included *âdigging ditches, grading roads ... cooking and cleaning; raising fresh produce and providing fresh fishâ* (p. 183).

The California gold rush and the subsequent construction of the transcontinental railroads coincided with an influx of Chinese immigrants to the West Coast, and the first chapter, *âEarly Contact and Migration,â* addresses this migration from the Guandong Province in China to California. In connecting individuals on both sides of the Pacific and addressing Chinese immigration policies and social-economic conditions along with those in the United States, Chung details a robust picture of the Chinese experience in the West. Chung also provides

some unique insights into the connection between traditional logging in South China and the Chinese in the Sierra lumber industry. Although tree cutting was similar in China and the American West, the transportation of logs differed significantly. Chinese workers became adept at flume construction and tending, but it is not clear if they ever worked as teamsters, the highest skilled position in the timber industry. Indeed it appears that cordwood cutting was the primary job of most Chinese in the woods.

Chung moves beyond woods work to highlight the nativism and discrimination of Euro-Americans against the Chinese that culminated in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. In the third chapter, she examines Carson City, Nevada, and Truckee, California, as detailed case studies in how these communities reacted to the influx of the Chinese. Seeking to oust the Chinese, Carson City engaged in mob violence, including the torching of Chinatown, while Truckee became infamous for the "Truckee method" of using economic pressure of boycotting Chinese and Anglo businesses that employed Chinese workers or engaged in commerce with Chinese merchants.

Since so much of the Sierra Nevada lumber industry depended on mining and railroads, Chung devotes a chapter to each of these industries. She rightly characterizes logging as subsidiary to mining and railroad build-

ing. As many Euro-Americans sought potential wealth in mining, opportunities for Chinese labor arose in the timber industry during the mining booms in the Sierra Nevada. Based on extensive research, Chung claims that by the 1880s in some areas, such as Truckee, California, the Chinese constituted almost 100 percent of the loggers (p. 169), but as lumber demands of both mining and railroad industries declined in the 1890s, so did the need for immigrant labor. This combined with the Chinese Exclusion Acts and increased agitation against the Chinese led to a sharp decline in the number of Chinese workers in the lumber industry, such that few remained by 1900.

This book is meticulously researched and combines an impressive array of both secondary and primary sources, including an innovative incorporation of archeological data. Unfortunately, the reader is quickly overwhelmed with a staggering array of names, dates, ages, and addresses so that, at times, this book reads more like an annotated census report than a chronological history. Indeed, the lack of a discernible historical narrative is a major shortcoming and makes this work nearly inaccessible to anyone other than the most devoted scholar of Chinese American history. For the latter however, *Chinese in the Woods* could well prove a gold mine of statistical and historical data.

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