



INDIANA  
REPERTORY  
THEATRE

The  
**PAPER DREAMS**  
of **HARRY CHIN**  
by Jessica Huang

April 26 – May 10, 2022

on the IRT Upperstage



## STUDY GUIDE

Indiana Repertory Theatre  
140 West Washington Street  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204

Janet Allen, Margot Lacey Eccles  
Executive Artistic Director  
Suzanne Sweeney, Managing Director

[www.irtlive.com](http://www.irtlive.com)

SEASON SPONSOR



SEASON PARTNER



INCLUSION SERIES  
LEAD PARTNER



INCLUSION SERIES  
ASSOCIATE SPONSOR



PRODUCTION PARTNER  
**NAVIENT**

CORPORATE PARTNER  
**BARNES &  
THORNBURG LLP**  
btlaw.com

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION  
SPONSOR  
**faegre  
drinker**

# THE PAPER DREAMS OF HARRY CHIN

BY JESSICA HUANG

Despite the US ban against Chinese immigrants, Harry Chin forged a new identity to earn precious American dollars to send home to his starving village. Now he is trapped between two families and two worlds. Seasoned with magic and mystery, this hauntingly theatrical tale from our overlooked history considers the personal and political repercussions of making a group of people illegal.

**Part of the IRT's INclusion Series: Celebrating Diverse Storytelling**

## CONTENT ADVISORY

*The Paper Dreams of Harry Chin* is a family drama that contains profanity and references to suicide. A script preview is available upon request.

The performance will last approximately two hours and 15 minutes with one intermission.

## STUDY GUIDE CONTENTS

Synopsis	3
From the Artistic Director	4
Director's Note	5
From the Designers	6
Playwright Jessica Huang	8
Before the Exclusion Act	9
The Chinese Exclusion Act	10
Paper Families	11
The Chinese Confession Program	12
Chinese Festivals	13
Indiana Academic Standards	14
Discussion Questions	15
Writing Prompts	16
Activities	17
Resources	20
Play Glossary	21
Going to the Theatre	24

Study Guide edited by  
Richard J Roberts, Resident Dramaturg

Cover Art by Kyle Ragsdale

**FOR INFORMATION ABOUT  
IRT'S EDUCATION PROGRAMS  
AND/OR STUDENT MATINEE  
TICKET SALES, CONTACT:**  
Anna Barnett, Education Coordinator  
abarnett@irtlive.com  
317-916-4841

# THE STORY OF THE PAPER DREAMS OF HARRY CHIN

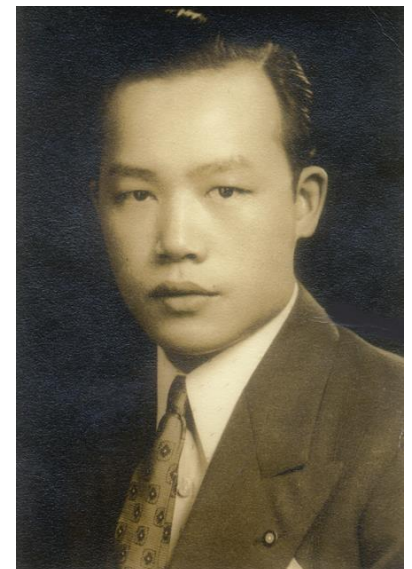
*The Paper Dreams of Harry Chin* is inspired by a true story [see the interview with playwright Jessica Huang on page 8]. The play tells the story of Harry Chin, a Chinese man who immigrated to America in 1939 despite the Chinese Exclusion Act and its fallout [see articles pages 10 to 12].

The play begins in 1970 in St. Paul, Minnesota, but it often travels back and forth through time and space. The play begins as Harry's old Buick begins acting very strangely. When the ghost of Harry's wife, Laura, emerges from the car, she briefly pulls Harry back into a memory of the day they first met in 1945. Back in the present, Harry goes to his job as a cook, where his boss offers him some time off because this is the anniversary of Laura's death. Harry refuses the offer, but then another ghost appears: the Poet, who traveled with Harry from China to the United States in 1939. Distracted, Harry burns the food he is cooking, and his boss insists that he take some time off.

Meanwhile, Harry and Laura's daughter, Sheila, has leased a new apartment for Harry, who has been living with her since Laura died. This supposedly temporary arrangement is no longer working. Harry eventually accepts that he must move, and Sheila gives him a gift: his name, Chin, in Chinese calligraphy. Harry reveals that Chin is, in fact, not his real name. Sheila is shocked to learn this news after all these years, and wonders what other secrets her father has hidden. When Sheila leaves, Harry is visited by a third ghost: Yuet, his first wife from his village in China. Harry is pulled back into a memory of the harsh interrogation process before he was allowed into the United States.

Harry goes back to work, where he is drawn into a pair of memories that appear on stage simultaneously. On one side of the stage, Harry remembers his 1958 interview for the Chinese Confession program, where he confessed his illegal immigration in hopes of being exonerated. On the other side of the stage, Harry remembers a 1960 visit from his Chinese daughter Susan, when Laura first learned of Harry's family back in China. As before, Harry's distraction causes him to burn the food he is cooking, and this time his boss fires him.

Back in his apartment, Harry cooks an elaborate meal as an apology to Sheila, but the ghosts arrive along with her. Unable to ignore his past any longer, Harry must deal with the guilt he feels about his Chinese family, his friend the Poet, and Laura's death. Because of the Chinese Exclusion Act, Harry, like many other immigrants, has been forced to live a life of secrets and lies, causing grief and suffering for him and his family. Ultimately, Harry must forgive himself and let others forgive him for the difficult choices he made in an impossible situation.



*Photo of Harry Chin courtesy of Sheila Chin Morris.*

# HISTORY THAT RESONATES TODAY

BY JANET ALLEN, MARGO LACEY ECCLES ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

We are pleased to finally bring Jessica Huang's beautiful play, *The Paper Dreams of Harry Chin*, to the Upperstage and to our audiences. It was originally set to open in March 2020 and was deep into rehearsal when the pandemic hit and we had to sadly send the artists home. We had no idea that it would take two years to bring them back.

Jessica's play introduces us to a family caught up in a little-known segment of American immigration history, the years of the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882-1943). This was the first time in American history that immigrants were legally barred from entering the United States because of their specific race (and class). While Huang's work explores deeply a particular Midwestern family impacted by this immigration crisis in the years from 1939 to 1970, the resonances to today's immigration issues regarding recently targeted groups—the "Muslim ban" and the situation at our Mexican border—are part of the larger impact of the play. The hate speech about the "Chinese flu" that was fomented during the pandemic, and the violence it has unleashed on Asian Americans, also horrifically illustrates how quickly Americans can jump into xenophobia.

In a program similar to IRT's Indiana Series exploring culture in Indiana, the Minnesota History Theatre commissioned Jessica to explore a component of Minnesota race and culture. She interviewed members of "real life" Harry's family and learned about Asian-American families like them. The resulting play is not a realistic, linear telling of the story, but a strikingly theatrical mixture of past and present, of myth and reality, of ghosts and ancestors, of colliding memories that capture the disorienting feeling of moving from one culture to another. The style of the play is an intrinsic part of the content of the play, creating a very visceral experience for audiences as well as characters.

This play movingly illuminates the power of theatre to bring history to light through witnessing the struggles of the people who live it—a key value of our INclusion series. Part of the everyday life of many people of color in our country is experiencing marginalization and real hostility in "the land of the free and the home of the brave." We are particularly pleased to be creating the second full production of this magical play. We invite audiences of all cultural and racial backgrounds to share Harry and his family's experiences, and to consider deeply how we as individuals and communities can strive for greater understanding and acceptance.

# REMEMBERING & FORGETTING

BY JAKI BRADLEY, DIRECTOR

In a note at the beginning of *The Glass Menagerie*, Tennessee Williams writes, “The scene is memory and is therefore non-realistic. Memory takes a lot of poetic license. It omits some details; others are exaggerated, according to the emotional value of the articles it touches, for memory is seated predominantly in the heart. The interior is therefore rather dim and poetic.” *The Paper Dreams of Harry Chin* is at once a memory play and a forgetting play. It’s a play about a man who buries details of his past to make his present more bearable. For me, it’s also a play about the dueling heart of the American dream—who is allowed to pursue it and under what circumstances.

While this story is specific to one man and his particular path to this country, the story of immigration—of struggle, success, and the deep hope that your children grow up in a more peaceful, bountiful world than the one you live in—is as American as apple pie (which is, of course, not actually American).

I was bowled over the first time I read this play. The first time Jessica Huang and I spoke about it, we talked for hours, about the ideas in the show and much, much more. I was struck by the style: lyrical, poetic, its own kind of magical realism; and the content: a deeply humane portrait of a father and a daughter, and a country. I didn’t realize at first that the story was based on a real person, and seeing the photos and writings from the actual people made it feel even more special.

This cast started this journey in March 2020, and we nearly made it to tech before the production had to be canceled due to COVID. Now the play feels more relevant than ever, and to be able to return to this play with the same performers is an enormous gift.

Telling this story requires a lot of brilliant collaborators. With the designers, we worked together to create a theatrical event that could leap through time and space, jumping from decade to decade and city to city the way this story (and our memories) do. And with the actors, we created a room that was equal parts rigorous—studying the history and details—and playful, to support the spirit of Jessica’s writing.

*Photo of Harry Chin courtesy of Sheila Chin Morris*



# REALITY & MAGIC



*Preliminary model by scenic designer Wilson Chin.*

## **WILSON CHIN** SCENIC DESIGNER

The writing is beautifully poetic, so I knew I wanted to create a world that is full of metaphoric iconography that evokes feelings of travel, displacement, and loss. We took objects that symbolize these emotions, and made them large or multiplied as part of the set design. It's also a play that moves fluidly and instantly between time and place, so there is a simplicity and openness to the set that allows for theatrical transformation. A simple gesture from an actor, or a subtle (or not so subtle) shift in lights and projections can snap us into a different time and place more poetically and instantaneously than a scenic move.

## **REUBEN LUCAS** PROJECTIONS DESIGNER

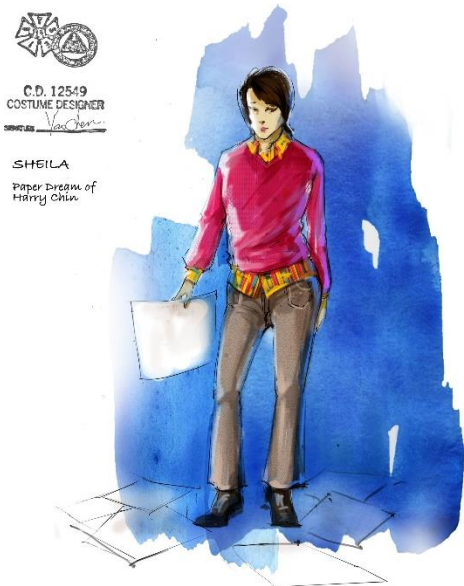
A haunting through time, a psychological portrait, a dream-like quality; expressionism, abstraction, surrealism—these ideas presented in early design discussions influenced the projection design. The story is a theatrical puzzle that is told in a disjointed space where time is slippery. The projection design aims to follow the sense of a dream-like world by mostly avoiding literal imagery. Instead, the design tries to enhance the disorienting nature of the script with emotionally based content that may be undefinable. Most of the content is chosen for texture, color, and other abstract qualities that enhance the inherent mystery of the story.

**YAO CHEN COSTUME DESIGNER**

This play is absolutely my passion project of the year. Speaking as a first-generation Chinese immigrant, this is my first time to come across a convincing story that depicts the life of Chinese immigration in a poetic and honest way. Harry reminds me of the past generation of Chinese: hardworking, solid, quiet, and not good at emotional communication in general. For them, life is daily responsibility and commitment as a worker and a parent. I think it is my job to dress them in a realistic way: austere, simple, and far away from glamor. Yet the poetic and dreaming quality of the story also inspires me to add an imaginative touch to the garments. The scenic world presents the idea of cracking beautifully, and I have tried to echo this concept through costume as well, especially in the finale.



Costume renderings  
by designer Yao Chen  
for (clockwise from top left)  
the Poet, Susan, Yuet, Sheila,  
& (center) Harry.



# ONE MAN'S DOUBLE LIFE

## PLAYWRIGHT JESSICA HUANG

BY RUTHIE FIERBERG



History Theatre in St. Paul, Minnesota, operates on a mission to produce theatrical works that examine the true stories and real people of Minnesota, unearthing stories we otherwise would never hear of—stories like Harry Chin’s. During the enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Act—a 60-year period when the United States banned immigration of Chinese laborers, and prejudiced Americans forced Chinese Americans out of their communities—Chin entered the United States via forged papers. Known as a “paper son,” Chin experienced a violent detention and interrogation that led him to a double life of secrecy once freed.

Playwright Jessica Huang discovered Chin’s past at the Minnesota Historical Society while seeking a subject for a History Theatre commission. “I knew that I really wanted to write about the Chinese Exclusion Era because it was a period of history that I never studied in school,” says Huang. “But as I’ve grown to hear about how it had an enormous impact that was decades long, it felt like a missing piece of my understanding and the understanding of our collective history.” When she stumbled upon Chin’s testimony, she discovered her foundation. She reached out to Sheila, Harry’s daughter, and the play—while grounded in the way “this political action impacted their personal lives”—morphed into a story about fathers and daughters.

Set in 1970, the play opens on the anniversary of the death of Sheila’s mother, Laura, who returns as a ghost to visit Sheila and Harry. “Somebody once described my work as ‘the supernatural in the everyday,’ and I think that I sort of exist inside of that realm naturally as a person,” says Huang, who is of Jewish and Chinese heritage. “Benevolent visitations or hauntings from my ancestors— those are things that I feel like I have a familiarity with. In my world view there is a place for ghostly presences.” But Huang’s piece is a spiritual ghost story. “There’s a line in the play that says, ‘haunting is helping.’ Sometimes that’s a painful thing when we have to reckon with the things that haunt us, whether they’re literal ghosts or more figurative; but when we unpack and reveal and come to terms with the things that have happened to us, that’s when we can start to heal from them.” The current climate is ripe for this drama that unearths another time of racism and xenophobia in American history—as Broadway’s *Allegiance* did when it dramatized the story of the Japanese internment camps—and calls upon audiences to confront issues of immigration and nationalism and their consequences.

Huang reworked the play after a developmental reading in New York prior to its IRT production. Revisiting the work allowed Huang to merge the intuitive writing style of her early career with the technique she’s honed through subsequent experience. *The Paper Dreams of Harry Chin* reveals a piece of American history that, while it haunts us, can also heal.

—*Special thanks to Playbill.com for permission to reprint this article.*



# CHINESE IMMIGRATION BEFORE THE EXCLUSION ACT

Although a handful of Chinese merchants and sailors had previously arrived in the United States, the first wave of Chinese immigration began in 1815, after the establishment of maritime trade between the two nations. In 1848, there were only 325 Chinese Americans. News of the 1849 California Gold Rush led this number to jump to 20,000 by 1852.

Another big draw for Chinese immigrants was labor opportunities. The First Transcontinental Railroad was built between 1863 and 1869, a massive project that allowed trains to travel across the entire United States. After the Civil War, the project had no trouble organizing engineers and designers. But laborers were scarce, as most white people preferred working in either farming or mining professions. Therefore, the designers resorted to hiring Irish and Chinese immigrants, many of whom were desperate for work and would accept very low wages. Working conditions were brutal, often deadly. Racial prejudice often caused the Chinese to be treated with little regard by their white foremen. Explosives were used daily to clear mountains and boulders out of their path, and immigrants were often ordered to abandon safety and work hastily. Dozens of workers could die in a single accident, yet the work continued without changes in procedure. Workers were not provided their own food or shelter, left to fend for themselves in the harsh climates in the few hours they had at the end of the day.

Once the transcontinental railroad was firmly established, East Coast demand for West Coast fruits and vegetables, became a strong market force, and many experienced Chinese farmers were hired by white landowners as farm workers. Their expertise helped establish today's thriving wine and produce industries in California. Laws in place at that time, however, forbade Chinese immigrants from buying their own land. Most areas severely regulated where Chinese people could live, leading to the development of Chinatowns in many West-Coast cities. Many Chinese people were forced to accept uncomfortable, difficult, and sometimes dangerous work that others didn't want.

Discrimination against Chinese laborers only worsened in the following decades. In the 1870s, the economy hit a low point, and many Americans feared that the Chinese were taking all of their jobs. "Yellow Peril" became a common racist term for the fear of societal downfall due to an increase of Asian immigrants who would overthrow the United States and wipe out Western culture. This fear was part of the push that led to the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882.



# THE CHINESE EXCLUSION ACT

The California Gold Rush of 1848 attracted a significant number of Chinese to immigrate to the United States. Even greater numbers came in the 1860s to work on the Transcontinental Railroad. Others moved to cities such as San Francisco, where they took low-wage jobs, often in restaurants and laundries. As the U.S. economy declined after the Civil War, labor and government leaders began to blame Chinese “coolies” (laborers) for depressed wage levels. Public opinion began to demonize Chinese immigrants, and a series of ever more restrictive laws were placed on Chinese labor, behavior, and even living conditions.



As the U.S. economy declined after the Civil War, labor and government leaders began to blame Chinese “coolies” (laborers) for depressed wage levels. Public opinion began to demonize Chinese immigrants, and a series of ever more restrictive laws were placed on Chinese labor, behavior, and even living conditions.

In 1882, the federal government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which banned all immigration of “skilled and unskilled laborers” from China for a period of 10 years. The act was renewed in 1892 for another ten years and then in 1902 indefinitely. The Immigration Act of 1924, which included the Asian Exclusion Act and the National Origins Act, banned immigration from East Asia entirely.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was the first time in history when a particular ethnic group was banned from entering the United States on the premise that it endangered the good working order of the nation. Provisions of the act also banned Chinese immigrants from becoming U.S. citizens, thus making permanent aliens of those who were already here. Further restrictions forced Chinese Americans into urban conclaves called Chinatowns. Like other immigrants, many Chinese men who had immigrated here eventually hoped to bring their families to join them. With the passage of the act, they were faced with a choice: return to China to stay, or never see their families again.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was finally repealed by the 1943 Magnuson Act. World War II had made China and the United States allies against Japan, and Congress wanted to create an image of fairness. The Magnuson Act permitted Chinese already living in the country to become naturalized citizens and stop hiding from the threat of deportation. While the Magnuson Act overturned the Chinese Exclusion Act, it restricted the national quota of Chinese immigrants to only 105 per year. The passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 finally ended these restrictions.

In recent years in the United States, patriotism—love for one’s country—has become hopelessly entangled with nationalism—promotion of one’s own country to the detriment of other countries. Xenophobia has been on the rise; but during the pandemic, there has been a particularly sharp rise in anti-Asian violence. A recent poll found that one in six Asian Americans experienced race-based violence in 2021—a tenfold increase from previous years. Such statistics are a harsh reminder that, even though the Chinese Exclusion Act is no longer the law of the land, the racism that it represents is still very much among us.

# PAPER FAMILIES

The Chinese Exclusion Act, banning immigration of Chinese laborers, allowed exceptions for merchants, diplomats, students, teachers, and children of American citizens. In 1906, when the San Francisco earthquake destroyed thousands of public records, a new opportunity for citizenship arose: Chinese men who were already in the United States could claim that they had been born in the United States. Thus, any children they had left behind in China would be eligible to become United States citizens, for which they would receive an immigration document. These documents could then be used for their actual children, or sold to friends, neighbors, or strangers. This process allowed men who had no blood relations in the United States to find a way to enter the country.

ORIGINAL.

No. 101529

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

Certificate of Residence.

Issued to Chinese Sabaren, under the Provisions of the Act of May 5, 1892.

This is to Certify THAT Mary Turn, a Chinese has made application No. 5592 to me for a Certificate of Residence, under the provisions of the Act of Congress approved May 5, 1892, and I certify that it appears from the affidavits of witnesses submitted with said application that said Mary Turn was within the limits of the United States at the time of the passage of said Act, and was then residing at San Bernardino and that he was at that time lawfully entitled to remain in the United States, and that the following is a descriptive list of said Chinese Sabaren:

NAME: Mary Turn AGE: LOCAL RESIDENCE: San Bernardino OCCUPATION: Hairdresser HEIGHT: 5 ft 6 in COLOR OF EYES: Dark Brown COMPLEXION: Dark PHYSICAL MARKS OR PECULIARITIES FOR IDENTIFICATION: Scar on back head left side

And as a further means of identification, I have affixed hereto a photographic likeness of said Mary Turn

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND AND SEAL this 6 day of March, 1894 at San Bernardino, Cal.

O. M. Melburn  
Collector of Internal Revenue,  
District of California

In an attempt to enforce the Chinese Exclusion Act, in 1910 the Immigration and Naturalization Service established Immigration Stations on the West Coast. Since official records were often non-existent, an interrogation process was created to determine if potential immigrants were actually related to U.S. citizens as claimed. A typical interrogation process lasted two to three weeks, but some immigrants were interrogated for months. Questions included details of the immigrant's home and village as well as specific knowledge of his or her relations. Each immigrant who purchased a paper family received a personal manual that included hundreds of such details. They spent months in advance committing these details to memory. Witnesses—usually other “family” members living in the United States—would be called in to corroborate these answers. Any deviation between testimonies would prolong questioning or throw the entire case into doubt. This situation not only put the applicant at risk of deportation, but also those in the “family” as well. These detention centers were in operation until the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943.

During and after World War II, the U.S. government scrutinized immigrants of various ethnic groups whose politics were considered suspect. Many paper sons feared that their fraudulent documentations would be exposed and that they would be deported back to China. New legislation broadened immigration from Asia and gave paper sons a chance to tell the truth about who they were and restore their real names in “confessional” programs. But many chose to stick with their adopted names for fear of retribution, and took their true names to their graves. Some refused to teach their children their native language and shunned elements of Chinese culture such as food and religious rituals. Many paper sons never told their descendants about their past, leaving them with confusion and disconnecting them from their family history.

# THE CHINESE CONFESSION PROGRAM

The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service established the Chinese Confession Program in 1956. It sought confessions of illegal entry from U.S. citizens and residents of Chinese origin, with the (somewhat misleading) offer of legalizing the confessor's status in exchange. The program was partly motivated by concerns in the United



States about the rise of communism in China and the role that Chinese-Americans might play in facilitating it, as well as the danger of communist Chinese entering the United States illegally.

Although the program was described as an amnesty program whereby people could obtain legal status by confessing their immigration violations, there was very little change to the actual immigration laws. The program's primary benefit to those who confessed was that if they were eligible for a statutory remedy, their past illegal entry or misrepresentation of status would not bar them from having their paperwork processed.

Although confessing to the authorities offered (temporary) immunity from prosecution and deportation, the confessor had to surrender his or her passport and thus be vulnerable to deportation. Confessors needed to provide full details of their blood families as well as paper families. This meant that a single confessor could implicate a large number of other people, and therefore increase the risk of deportation for all these others.

The program resulted in 13,895 confessions, far less than the number of people suspected of having entered illegally. (The 1950 Census listed a total of 117,629 Chinese in the United States.) Since confessions by neighbors could implicate a person and cause him or her to be deported, the program created fear and distrust in many Chinese-American communities. As a result of the confessions, 22,083 people were exposed.

The Chinese Confession Program was ended in 1966, shortly after the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Bill Ong Hing, a professor of law at the University of San Francisco, wrote in 2015: "The 'confession program' for Chinese in the 1950s was mostly a fraud perpetrated on our community, but we need not repeat that fraud for undocumented immigrants today. Let's be honest, and treat them with the respect they deserve."

# CHINESE FESTIVALS

Two traditional Chinese Festivals are featured in *The Paper Dreams of Harry Chin*.

## GHOST FESTIVAL

The seventh month of the Chinese calendar is Ghost Month; it falls during July and August in the Gregorian calendar. Throughout this month, spirits are said to rise from the lower realm and start to interact with the living. The fifteenth day of the seventh month is called Ghost Day, and is the day of the Ghost Festival. On this day, it is common to prepare an elaborate meal and leave a plate for each deceased member of your family. Failure to do so can spell bad luck for the living. During Ghost Month, charms are used as offerings to, or wards against, the spirits who are present. Joss papers, also known as ghost money, are bill-sized pieces of red or gold paper. They can be burned ritualistically to keep the hungry ghosts satiated during the Ghost Festival, or they can be used to make tiny clothes, paper houses, etc., to aid the dead in the afterlife.



## MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL

The myth of Sheung Ngor is told several times in the play. Sheung Ngor is the Chinese moon goddess. Long ago, there were ten suns in the sky, until Houyi the archer shot nine of them down. He was awarded the Elixir of Life, but his wife, Sheung Ngor, was forced to drink it to keep it out of the wrong hands. She ascended to the moon, and now is said to endow her worshippers with beauty. This myth is often cited as the origin of the Mid-Autumn Festival.

The Mid-Autumn Festival is a harvest festival celebrated on the fifteenth day of the eighth month of the lunar calendar to coincide with the full moon. (This date falls around the end of September or beginning of October on the Gregorian calendar.) It is also called the Moon Festival, and involves worship of the moon and Sheung Ngor, the moon goddess. The Ancient Chinese believed that the moon was associated with rejuvenation and the cycle of life, and compared the cycle of the moon to menstruation. In modern day, the festival is usually celebrated by placing food on an altar facing the moon, carrying lanterns, and eating mooncakes, a seasonal delicacy.

*The Moon Goddess in a painting from the Ming dynasty.*

# INDIANA ACADEMIC STANDARDS

## ALIGNMENT GUIDE

Seeing IRT's production of *The Paper Dreams* of Harry Chin is a great way to help make connections for students and facilitate their understanding of the text and key elements of US History. Some standards to consider on your trip would be:

### READING - LITERATURE

- RL.1 – Read and comprehend a variety of literature independently and proficiently
- RL.2 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by analyzing, inferring, and drawing conclusions about literary elements, themes, and central ideas o Sample: 9-10.RL.2.2: Analyze in detail the development of two or more themes or central ideas over the course of a work of literature, including how they emerge and are shaped and refined by specific details.
- RL.3 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature, using knowledge of literary structure and point of view o Sample: 11-12.RL.3.2: Analyze a work of literature in which the reader must distinguish between what is directly stated and what is intended (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement) in order to understand the point of view.
- RL.4 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by connecting various literary works and analyzing how medium and interpretation impact meaning

### READING - VOCABULARY

- RV.3 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature and nonfiction texts by determining or clarifying figurative, connotative, and technical meanings o Sample: 9-10.RV.3.3: Interpret figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text.

### U.S. HISTORY STANDARDS

- USH.2 – Students examine the political, economic, social and cultural development of the United States during the period from 1870 to 1900.  
Sample: USH.2.5: Summarize the impact industrialization and immigration had on social movements of the era including the contributions specific individuals and groups.
- USH.3 – Students examine the political, economic, social and cultural development of the United States during the period from 1897 to 1920.  
Sample: USH.3.2: Explain the origins, goals, achievements, and limitations of the Progressive Movement in addressing political, economic, and social reform.

### MEDIA LITERACY

- ML.1 – Develop and enhance understanding of the roles of media and techniques and strategies used to achieve various purposes.
- MS.2 – Analyze the purposes of media and the ways in which media can have influences.  
Sample .ML.2.1: Interpret the various ways in which events are presented and information is communicated by visual image-makers to influence the public.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY

Have students read these articles from this study guide: “The Chinese Exclusion Act,” “Paper Families,” “The Chinese Confession Program.” How many students knew about this part of American history before reading these articles? Why might such a long-lasting ban have received so little attention? How do attitudes reflected by this ban compare to attitudes towards immigration today?

## AFTER SEEING THE PLAY

Compare and contrast the Chinese experience as depicted in the play with the work, social, and family lives of more recent immigrants. How are they different? How are they similar?

Compare and contrast the family relationships in the play with your own family. How are they different? How are they similar?

What are some of the secrets that Harry keeps? What are his different reasons for these different secrets? What is the cost to Harry of keeping these secrets? What is the cost to others of Harry’s secrets? What happens when Harry’s secrets are revealed? What other choices might Harry have made? What are the challenges of secrets in our lives?

How does the story of Harry Chin and his family remind you of more current immigration stories? How does the Chinese Exclusion Act remind you of current US policies regarding immigration?

Discuss the structure of the play. The story of Harry Chin’s life is not told in chronological order, requiring the audience to remember and put together the pieces of the puzzle as the play goes along. How did this process work for you? Why do you suppose the playwright chose to tell this story in this fashion? How does the structure of the play embody certain ideas and themes in the story?

How does the presence of ghosts affect the story? How do Chinese beliefs about ghosts differ from American ideas about ghosts? Why do you suppose the playwright chose to use ghosts as part of telling this story?

What does the car symbolize in the play? How does that symbolism transform when the car becomes a boat at the end of the play?

# WRITING PROMPTS

Imagine that Harry could write home to Yuet in China about his experiences in America. What would he tell her about the boat trip? About the Poet? About his detention in Seattle? About his journey across America to St. Paul? About his new job as a cook in a restaurant? Write a letter to Yuet from Harry.

Imagine that you have a pen-pal in China. Or better yet, find a pen-pal in China. Write to your pen-pal about your life in America. Be specific about your hometown, your school, your family, your personal interests and activities.

Write a review of the play. A well-rounded review includes your opinion of the theatrical aspects—scenery, lights, costumes, sound, direction, acting— as well as your impressions of the script and the impact of the story and/or themes and the overall production. What moments made an impression? How do the elements of scenery, costumes, lighting, and sound work with the actors' performance of the text to tell the story? What ideas or themes did the play make you think about? How did it make you feel? Did you notice the reactions of the audience as a whole? Would you recommend this play to others? Why or why not? To share your reviews with others, send to: [education.irt@gmail.com](mailto:education.irt@gmail.com)



*Photo of Harry Chin courtesy of Sheila Chin Morris.*





# ACTIVITY

## EXCLUSION IN 19TH CENTURY AMERICA

This activity is an excerpt from Teaching for Change. More information can be found at <https://teachingforchange.org/> and the full unit plan can be found at:

<https://www.teachingforchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Chinese-Exclusion-Act.pdf>

### OVERVIEW

In this unit for grades 6-12, students explore resources and participate in discussions about the Chinese American Exclusion Act of 1882. Starting with open discussions and exploration, the unit focuses on students gaining an understanding of the contributions of Chinese immigrants in the U.S. Students will use print resources provided in the guide to further their understanding.

### OBJECTIVES

Students will:

Know about the lives and contributions of Chinese immigrants in the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.  
Analyze the roots of anti-immigrant sentiment that led to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Acts.

In Part 1 of this lesson, students will reflect on their current perception of a pioneer in the 1800s. Using a blank world map, students will draw where they believe pioneers who settled in the U.S. came from and where they resided in the U.S. Once completed, teachers will guide the students through a summary of what is found in the maps. Students will likely show people coming from Europe to the East Coast, potentially then traveling west. Teachers will then inform students about Chinese immigration during the same time period, using excerpts provided in the unit.

Part 2 of this lesson builds upon student's informed understanding of immigrating Chinese workers in the U.S. Teachers will distribute information about the working and living conditions of immigrants coming from China to the U.S. and the treatment they faced, as well as reasons for growing anti-Chinese sentiment at the time. Using this information, students will stage a debate on the rights of immigrants during the time of the 1882 Exclusion Act. Dividing the students into two groups, students will pretend to be immigrants fighting for better conditions, and the other half will be those opposed to immigration.

### FEATURED RESOURCES

*Chinese in the Gold Mountain* by Debbie Wei

*On Gold Mountain* by Lisa See

*Strangers from a Different Shore* by Ronald Takaki

# ACTIVITY

## SOCRATIC SEMINAR

Through reading this study guide and seeing *The Paper Dreams of Harry Chin*, your students will develop a deeper understanding of Chinese immigration and their exclusion and how it impacts people today. To further enhance your students' experience, discussions can be offered in a peer-to-peer experience.

A Socratic seminar is a discussion in which students take part in an open-ended dialogue. The teacher will ask a question and the students will answer the question, using the material studied. The question that you begin the dialogue with may vary, depending on your focus of study but should be open-ended and provide material for thought.

Some potential prompts for a lesson plan dealing with issues of immigration and expulsion are as follows:

- What were the motivations of the leaders of the anti-Chinese movements?
- What kind of effect did the Chinese Exclusion Act have on the people it targeted? How has it influenced their descendants' lives today?
- What is the role of the United States' government in regards to immigration? What issues are the same as they were in the 1880s and what has changed?

The first question will be asked by the teacher, and the students will lead the rest of the discussion. This is a chance for students to explore the topic in depth. As part of this exercise, students are asked to bring their own questions to the discussion. Be sure to allow time for some of those points to be discussed. Review the guidelines below with your students before they begin.

### GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPANTS IN A SOCRATIC SEMINAR

1. Refer to the text when needed during the discussion. A seminar is not a test of memory. Your goal is to understand the ideas, issues, and values reflected in the text.
2. It's okay to "pass" when asked to contribute.
3. It's okay to be confused at the start of a statement or idea. If you don't understand what someone is saying, ask them to explain further.
4. Stay on the topic currently being discussed. If another idea comes to your mind, make a note about it so that you can come back to it later.
5. Allow one another to take turns while you speak, versus raising your hand.
6. Listen carefully to what everyone has to say. Respect others- you may disagree with their points or opinions but the seminar is for discussion, not argument.
7. Speak up so that everyone can hear you.
8. Talk to the rest of your class, not just to the leader or teacher.

# RESOURCES

## BOOKS

*The Making of Asian America: A History* by Erika Lee

*At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* by Erika Lee

*The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America*  
by Beth Lew-Williams

*Forbidden Citizens: Chinese Exclusion and the U.S. Congress* by Martin B. Gold

*The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882* by John Soennichsen

*Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* by Andrew Gyory

*Nativism and Discriminatory Laws: The Chinese Exclusion Acts' effect on Immigration Laws and Immigrants during the 19th and 20th Centuries* by Sandra Ippolito

*The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow Peril Became the Model Minority* by Madeline Y. Hsu

*We the People: The 500-Year Battle Over Who Is American* by Ben Railton

*Ghosts of Gold Mountain: The Epic Story of the Chinese Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad*  
by Gordon H. Chang

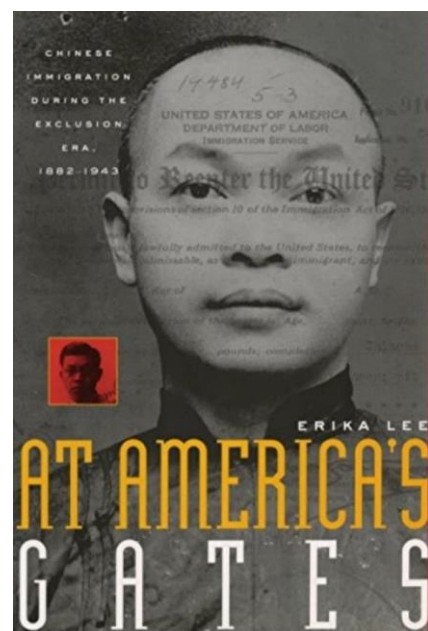
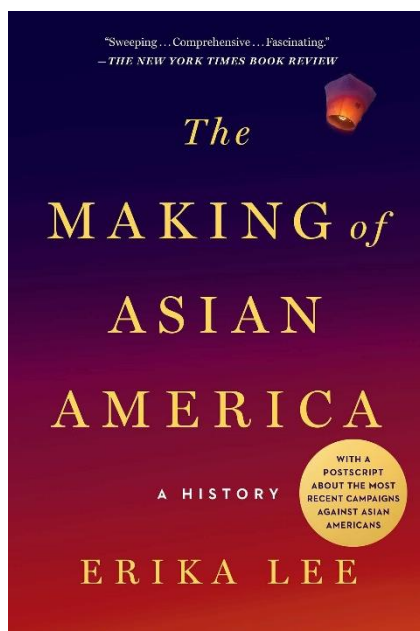
## TV

"The Chinese Exclusion Act" on *American Experience* (PBS, 2018)

## INTERNET

<https://caamedia.org/the-chinese-exclusion-act/>

website related to the PBS documentary above



# PLAY GLOSSARY

## **Buick Super**

The Buick Super was full-sized car produced between 1940 and 1942 and from 1946 to 1958. It was a stylish design that came in a four-door sedan or a two-door coupe.

## **calligraphy**

Calligraphy is a visual art that is related to writing and language. It is often meant not only to convey a linguistic meaning, but to be beautiful and emotional. In China, calligraphy is one of the most popular art practices, and is regarded with high esteem.

## **Cantonese**

The Cantonese language is a variety of the Chinese language originating from the city of Guangzhou (also known as Canton) and its surrounding area in Southeastern China.

## ***Chinese Calligraphy by Chiang Yee***

Chiang Yee (1903-1977) was a Chinese artist and a respected lecturer at Columbia University. His book *Chinese Calligraphy* was first published in 1938.

## **chop suey**

Chop suey is made with meat or seafood and eggs, quickly fried with vegetables such as bean sprouts or celery, and mixed with a thick sauce. It is a dish thought by many to be invented in the United States by Chinese immigrants, perhaps as a variation of chow mein or lo mein.

## **chow mein**

The term chow mein is an English simplification of the original Chinese term chāu-mèiŋ, meaning “stir-fried noodles.” It consists of egg noodles, a protein such as chicken or shrimp, and usually vegetables such as onions and celery.

## **Communist Party**

During the Cold War era of the 1940s and 50s, Senator Joseph McCarthy stirred panic in the American people about the eminent rise of communism. Not only were foreign nations such as China or the Balkans being taken under the wing of the Soviet Union, but many feared that communist supporters were within the United States and corrupting politics on the home front. This widespread fear severely affected artists, politicians, and immigrants. It became somewhat common practice to ask people if they were ever a member of the communist party, as accidentally supporting a communist could spell career disaster.

## **cross**

In the Catholic tradition, sacramentals (religious talismans that have been blessed by a priest) are used to expel demons.

**garlic**

Garlic has long been used in many cultures to repel vampires and other evil spirits.

**hapa**

Hapa is a Hawaiian word that means “part” or “half.” It is often used as a slang term to refer to people who are of mixed ethnic heritage; in the continental states, it is more commonly used to refer specifically to mixed race people of East Asian ancestry.

**holy water**

In the Catholic tradition, sacramentals (religious talismans that have been blessed by a priest) are used to expel demons.

**lo-mein**

The term lo-main translates as “stirred noodles.” It contains egg noodles, protein, and vegetables. Similar noodles are used in chow mein and lo-mein. The main difference is than in chow mein, the noodles are fried to be crispy; in lo-mein, they are boiled to be soft.

**mirror**

Chinese vampires are said to be terrified of their own reflections. In feng shui, a bagua mirror (a round mirror framed in an octagon) is commonly placed on a window or the front door of the home to repel negative energy, including ghosts and spirits.

**mourning ceremonies**

Before a traditional Chinese funeral ceremony, family members take turns sitting with the person who has died in a vigil or wake known as shou ling. This shows loyalty to the person who has died, keeping them company as they are prepared to journey into the spiritual afterlife. Shou ling usually takes place in the family home or at the local temple over a period of up to seven days. The period of mourning lasts for 49 days, with weekly prayers recited by the family every seven days. A final ceremony, signifying the end of the mourning period, may be held after 100 days.

**rosary**

In the Catholic tradition, sacramentals (religious talismans that have been blessed by a priest) are used to expel demons.

**Sailor Chui**

The story of Sailor Chui told by the Poet is adapted from “The Land of the Cannibals,” a story in *Lioazhai (Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio)* by Pu Songling (1640-1715).

**Seattle INS**

Built in 1932, the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service building served as the first stop for immigrants arriving from the Pacific. Many were held here for months before they were evaluated, and most were detained or deported. In order gain entrance to the United States, immigrants had to pass an interrogation test held in the basement of the building. In the 1920s and 1930s, more than 90% of people detained there were Chinese.

### Seven Mysteries

In Chinese calligraphy, almost all words are based around one or more of the seven standard strokes. These are referred to as the Seven Mysteries. Coincidentally, the number seven is also believed by some to be unlucky, because the seventh month of each year is Ghost Month.

### S.S. Empress of Russia

The *Empress of Russia* was an ocean liner built in 1913 that regularly traversed the route between East Asia and Canada. Steerage class was very cramped, often without even beds.

### St. Paul

St. Paul is the capital of Minnesota and a business hub of the Upper Midwest. It is the second largest city in the state, and adjoins the most populated city, Minneapolis. In 1945, the city was still suffering the effects of the Great Depression; its population was around 300,000. In the 1970 census its population was around 310,000; only 0.2% were Asian.



*Laura + Harry Chin June 13, 1946*

*Photo of Laura & Harry Chin  
courtesy of Sheila Chin Morris.*

# THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

*You, the audience are one of the most important parts of any performance. Experiencing the theatre is a group activity shared not only with the actors, but also with the people sitting around you. Your attention and participation help the actors perform better, and allow the rest of the audience to enjoy the show. Here are a few simple tips to help make each theatre experience enjoyable for everyone:*

Masks must be worn the entire time you are in the building and must cover your nose and mouth.

Leave mp3 players, cameras, mobile phones, and other distracting and noise-making electronic devices at home.

You may think texting is private, but the light and the motion are very annoying to those around you and on stage. Do not text during the performance.

Food and drink are not allowed in the building during student matinees.

The house lights dimming and going out signal the audience to get quiet and settle in your seats: the play is about to begin.

Don't talk with your neighbors during the play. It distracts people around you and the actors on stage. Even if you think they can't hear you, they can.

Never throw anything onto the stage. People could be injured.

Remain in your seat during the play. Use the restroom before or after the show.

Focus all your attention on the play to best enjoy the experience. Listen closely to the dialogue and sound effects, and look at the scenery, lights, and costumes. These elements all help to tell the story.

Get involved in the story. Laugh, cry, sigh, gasp—whatever the story draws from you. The more emotionally involved you are, the more you will enjoy the play.

Remain at your seat and applaud during the curtain call; this is part of the performance too. It gives you a chance to recognize a job well done and the actors a moment to thank you for your attention.

