

Researching Chinese Genealogy for Paper Sons

Orange County Family History Fair

April 16, 2016

What is a Paper Son?

A Paper Son is a term used for many Chinese immigrants who came to the United States after the passing of the Exclusion Act of 1882. These immigrants claim to be sons of citizens, but in fact were sons on paper only.

“My Father Was a Paper Son”

What created the need for Chinese immigrants to become Paper Sons?

Several exclusion acts and one political event in China perpetuated the practice

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1892 (the Geary Act) extended the exclusion for 10 years

In 1902 all laws relating to Chinese immigration were extended indefinitely

The Chinese exclusion acts were repealed in 1943

China given a quota of 105 individuals per year, no matter their national origin

The advent of the Communist government in China in 1949

Surnames

Many Paper Sons adopted the surname of the paper family.

How do you research your true family roots?

Learn about some of the paper trails created by the government to find your roots

Issues related to researching a Paper Son family roots:

First and foremost, what is your true surname?

Are there immigration files?

What was the surname of the paper son? What name did he use to enter the country?

Follow the paper trail

Are there any immigration case files and where are they located?

National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

Many types of immigration files

A-Files represents the file that contains most documents related to a person's immigration.

How do you start?

Look for case file or case file numbers:

Case files were created for individuals traveling to San Francisco and Honolulu

Immigrants detained at Angel Island Immigration Station all had case files

Search for ships manifest and port of entry (FamilySearch.org)

Using Paper Son name (and surname)

Note the entry date

Start with Regional NARA nearest port of entry

With the name, manifest and entry date, search NARA for case file

Certificate of Identity number: e.g., 60814

I-94 Admission Number (Arrival or Immigration number): e.g., 27659/4-7

A-File number (Alien Registration Number): e.g., A17 278 -038

In most cases, the National Archives do not maintain case files for individuals who

Arrived in the United States after 1955

Participated in the Chinese Amnesty ("Confession") program

Became naturalized citizens after March 31, 1956.

These file were transferred to the National Record Center, check with USCIS

Utilize the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

Files may be located at the National Record Center (NRC) in Lee's Summit, Missouri

Use G-639, Freedom of Information/Privacy Act Request form (Need proof of death)

If your ancestor went through the Confession Program (amnesty) you will know true surname

True family must be disclosed

Learn the Chinese characters for name, surname and ancestral village

Now search for your 族譜 Zupu or 家譜 Jiapu

What are these? Your ancestor's genealogy book

Where do you find them?

Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org, Shanghai Library, University of California Berkeley (East Asiatic Library)

Relatives in ancestral village

Village ancestral halls

Don't need to read and write Chinese to read a Zupu or Jiapu

Use Google Translate, Bing Translator or MDBG.net

There are references to help you decipher your Zupu or Jiapu

Must recognize surname in pinyin and Chinese (both traditional and simplified)

Search Google maps for your village

Must know your village name in Chinese (either traditional or simplified)

Enter village name in Chinese, county or city and province in pinyin

Village will appear in pinyin and simplified Chinese.

If all else fails, pictures of grave stones (usually has real surname and village in Chinese)

In this case, you need to digitize the Chinese characters to search the internet

Another resource: The Chinese Family History Group of Southern California

cfhgsc@gmail.com

www.ChineseFamilyHistory.org