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# McCunn tells of hardship and triumphs of Chinese-Americans

By Alice Thornton  
Emerald Reporter

Ruthanne Lum McCunn, author of *Chinese American Portraits*, brought to life the stories of Chinese citizens who came to America in search of opportunity and prosperity at a Thursday night presentation.

Through a slide presentation accompanied by stories and anecdotes, McCunn told of the odds faced by Chinese immigrants.

"Chinese have been able to survive incredible conditions — not just in America, but all over the world," McCunn said. "The Chinese didn't just learn from America. They had a lot to offer America."

McCunn wrote her book to present the cultural and historical diversity of Chinese immigrants during the past century. Her book is a collection of 17 biographical essays interspersed with over 150 historic photos. The biographies focus on people who represent many

facets of Chinese-American history.

Among those highlighted in McCunn's book are groups of students who immigrated in the later part of the Nineteenth Century. In 1870, the Chinese Education Mission was formed to bring students to America.

Within a year, a group of students came from China to live with host families and attend Harvard University. This program was successful for several years. The program was recalled by the Chinese government because it feared the students were becoming too westernized, McCunn said.

McCunn told the story of a Chinese professor and his family who immigrated several years after the Chinese Education Mission folded. Harvard University arranged for the professor and his family to come to America to teach culture. He brought his family and a servant to Boston and was the father of the first Chinese baby born in Cambridge.

By 1882, the Chinese Exclusion

Act attempted to control the flow of immigrants. During the Exclusion, every port of entry constructed stations where immigrants endured rigorous physical examinations and interrogations.

"This was a very long process," said McCunn. "It was much more complicated than the process that faced immigrants at Ellis Island."

After the Exclusion was repealed in 1943, the number of Chinese immigrants was still limited to 105 per year.

"(The repeal) had to be done because by that time, China and America were allies," McCunn said. "The repeal was really only a technicality. The number of immigrants was still severely limited."

"Ties between Chinese-Americans and China continue to be very strong," she said. "I want my book to show the diversity of Chinese-Americans yesterday and today. I want to show we're only limited by how big we can dream."

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**KAO**

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