

**Tentative Title of Dissertation:**

Exclusive Dining: Immigration and Restaurants during the Era of Chinese Exclusion, 1882-1943

**Abstract:**

My dissertation, "Exclusive Dining: Immigration and Restaurants during the Era of Chinese Exclusion, 1882-1943," interrogates how changes undertaken within Chinese American foodways by urban restaurateurs in the early twentieth century, particularly the transformation of chop suey restaurants from "low-class" to luxury establishments, impacted the sociopolitical status of Chinese immigrants living under a regime of anti-Chinese legislation. As a result of the Chinese Exclusion Act's race-based prohibition on most Chinese immigration, the Chinese living in the United States became endowed with a permanent alien status, relegating them to the margins of American society. During this era of anti-Chinese hostility, Chinese American cuisine and restaurants suddenly surged in popularity in the early decades of the twentieth century. In cities like New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, and Seattle, Chinese immigrants took advantage of a national craze for Chinese food and established palatial restaurants that offered palatable "Chinese" cuisine and atmosphere to middle- and upper-class white Americans. Lacking access to formal institutions of political mobility, these immigrants utilized restaurant spaces to positively render and commoditize Chinese culture, thereby altering their alien status in the eyes of their white neighbors. In doing so, they created sites for inter-racial exchange and challenged existing stereotypes about Chinese immigrants, facilitating a shift in public perception of China and Chinese Americans by the end of the 1930s.