

Elliott Young,

“Alien Nation: Chinese Migration in the Americas from the Coolie Era to WWII.”

Starting in the mid-nineteenth century hundreds of thousands of Chinese laborers migrated to the Americas, principally the United States, Canada, Cuba, and Peru. Although the study of the so-called “coolie-trade” has focused on Chinese in Latin America, I show how there is no clear dividing line between enslaved coolies and free immigrant laborers. The coolie trade ostensibly ended in 1874, but exploited Chinese laborers continued to migrate to the Americas long afterwards. Following US Chinese exclusion in 1882, Chinese used neighboring countries as springboards to clandestinely enter the US. The transnational networks of hometown associations, political organizations and criminal brotherhoods allowed Chinese to move between nations in the Americas and develop a diasporic identity. By focusing on the complex trajectory of Chinese migrants into and through various countries in the Americas, I hope to remap this geography beyond the fixed boundaries of the nation-state.