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Race, Immigration, and a Change of Heart: A History of the San Francisco Chinatown

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RACE, IMMIGRATION, AND A CHANGE OF HEART:
A HISTORY OF THE SAN FRANCISCO CHINATOWN

A Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Arts

History

by

Sarah Littman

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CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

RACE, IMMIGRATION, AND A CHANGE OF HEART:

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This thesis examines how the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and subsequent fire affected the local Chinatown and Chinese immigration as a whole. It focuses on communities from the Pearl River Delta of southern China, their motivations for emigration, the industries they found employment in, and the racially charged legislation they had to contend with. By 1902 the Chinese Exclusion Act forbid Chinese immigration indefinitely, but the fire of 1906 destroyed the local City Hall which housed all of the city's immigration records. Chinese immigrants exploited the opportunity, applying for more documentation than they needed and distributing the extras to those who wanted admission to the country. Consequently, Chinese populations in the United States grew after 1906. Anti-Chinese sentiment in California was strong prior to this point due to racial prejudice; concerns over the sharp population increase, labor, organized crime, disease, opium dens, gambling houses, and brothels led many Americans to the assumption that the Chinese immigrants were a financial burden they were forced to support. Because of this, the residents of San Francisco initially forbid Chinese peoples from rebuilding after the fire. However, Chinese immigrants, merchants, investors, and diplomats all proved to be a financial boon to the reconstruction, and several organizations took the opportunity to create better relations between Chinese and American communities. In spite of the deep racial tensions literally months before, Chinatown ended up being rebuilt in 1907 in the same location as before.

Many “exotic” aspects of Chinatown were exaggerated to make it more appealing as a tourist attraction and the organized city planning meant there was far more infrastructure, communication, and transparency than previously possible. Moreover, the increasing number of Chinese immigrants resulted in a more diverse population ratio and less crime. By examining legislation, newspapers, and individual accounts, I argue the financial success of the San Francisco Chinatown resulted in greater racial tolerance and acceptance of Chinese communities. Moreover, the San Francisco Chinatown was used as an archetype around the world, meaning many of the same aesthetics and ideas associated with them had an impact on Chinese immigration well beyond a single city in California.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The San Francisco Chinatown is one of the biggest Chinese ethnic enclaves outside of China itself but its growth was met with extreme hostility and racial discrimination. These sentiments were captured in legislation that reinforced the perceived differences between the local Californian population and the Chinese immigrant population; throughout the 19th century, the state government passed laws restricting the expression of many Chinese cultural customs, targeted Chinese businesses with costly limitations and fines, and ultimately denied the Chinese population access to public resources. By 1882 Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, suspending all Chinese immigration for ten years. The ban on Chinese immigration was renewed for another ten years in 1892 and by 1902 it was renewed indefinitely.¹

It was within this context that in 1906 San Francisco experienced a 7.8 magnitude earthquake that destroyed hundreds of buildings, ruptured the piping beneath the city, and started a devastating fire.² Chinatown was utterly destroyed at, what many would argue, was the height of anti-Chinese sentiment in the United States. The state government, city officials, and local residents all initially forbade the Chinese from rebuilding within the San Francisco limits, much less on the valuable real estate they once occupied in the heart of the financial district. They argued that the city had suffered enough and the Chinese were labeled as an economic and cultural burden. However, within two years the San Francisco Chinatown was rebuilt with

¹ University of Illinois. "Some State of California and City of San Francisco Anti-Chinese Legislation and Subsequent Action." *The Chinese Experience in 19th Century America*. Last modified December 14, 2004. Accessed March 7, 2016. http://atlas.illinois.edu/chinese_exp/resources/resource_2_4.pdf

² "1906 San Francisco Earthquake," University of California Berkeley Seismological Laboratory, last modified October 30, 2014, accessed March 7, 2016, http://seismo.berkeley.edu/outreach/1906_quake.html

overwhelming support from the local citizens. This stark change in public opinion begs the question: how did the San Francisco earthquake and subsequent fire affect the local Chinatown and Chinese immigration as a whole?

Not surprisingly, aspects of this historical question have been discussed by numerous other scholars and their works over the last 150 years. However, many of the texts that make up this library have notable oversights or overly broad arguments that lead to oversimplified conceptions of Chinese peoples and their communities. For some pieces, the issues are rooted in where their analysis begins, leaving unanswered questions about where Chinese immigrants were coming from and why. Other pieces prove problematic because they make claims about Chinese communities with sweeping generalizations, suggesting they were all cohesive groups with like-minded thoughts, goals, and intentions. In doing so, these arguments do not respect the historical agents they claim to represent and ignore the numerous and complex ways individuals and communities impacted the economy, politics, social structures, and culture.³ Moreover, some of these pieces go so far as to perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices of Chinese peoples by claiming they are naturally more industrious, resilient, emotionally distant, or more prone to live in groups than Americans. A common vein among these pieces is the argument that Chinese peoples are naturally inclined towards submission, leading to the very problematic claim that they were not

³ Included among these issues is the frequent historical focus on Chinese elites and Chinese nationalists at the cost of other communities. Of the texts that do discuss the impact of Chinese laborers, many focus simply on their experiences of labor in the United States leaving their experiences of emigration and rising nationalisms largely overlooked. This overwhelming emphasis on Chinese elites' experiences in the United States and their development of modern nationalism overlooks the importance of Chinese American laborers' impacts and their experiences of exclusion, racism, and resistance. However, the experiences of the two communities are by no means exclusive and so in chapter two I discuss the impact of both Chinese elites and Chinese laborers on the reconstruction of San Francisco. In doing so, I intend to address the aforementioned lack of complexity in discussing Chinese American societies. The impact of Chinese political leaders who developed the idea of modern nationalism after encountering the western intellectual world such as Sun Yatsen or Liang Qichao however are not a primary focus of this examination. More information about their experiences at this time can be found in John Fitzgerald's text *Awakening China : Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* or Tang Xiaobing's *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao*.

active participants in their own history, but simply victims of a racially biased system. Therefore, this examination begins by discussing the historiographical approaches of other scholarly works dedicated to the history of Chinese immigration to the United States throughout the 19th century to frame how this work fits within, and responds to, that body of texts.

As noted above, one of the most frequent and prominent issues in these pieces is where and when they begin; many texts start their analyses near the end of the 19th century leaving unanswered questions about where Chinese immigrants were coming from and what motivated them to emigrate. Granted, all examinations limit their scope in some way and this is by no means always problematic for an analysis. However, when discussing Chinese immigration it can lead to an overemphasis of a non-Chinese perspective that prompts more historical questions than it answers. For example, in Alexander Saxton's text, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California*, he examines how Chinese exclusion was understood and justified by Californian law makers throughout the late 19th and early 20th century.⁴ Ultimately, he argues that the way Americans understood Chinese immigration was through "Jacksonian" ideologies and the interactions between Chinese immigrants and Americans has changed the way we identify ourselves in several complex and conflicting ways.⁵ While this focus certainly lends itself towards an American perspective of Chinese communities, the racially charged ideologies of the lawmakers are not critiqued or analyzed as much as they are simply discussed. Through this approach, his historical analysis seems to suggest a level of

⁴ Please note that there are several texts produced in the 1960s and 1970s featured in this historiographical analysis of Chinese immigration of the 19th century. Many of them feature issues of prejudice, racism, and misinterpretation of sources as a result of their racial misunderstandings and ethnocentric judgements. With each example, their issues will be highlighted and critiqued.

⁵ Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 2.

respect, and therefore validity, to the lawmakers' claims. For example, in his discussion of housing provided by several factories that employed Chinese labor, he noted the census information regarding how many people lived in one building to analyze its cost efficiency.⁶ However, at no point did he mention how many people lived in one room, the facilities provided, the living conditions of an average worker, or the general treatment of Chinese individuals; the Chinese people themselves were relegated to numbers on a page. Moreover, this concerning approach is made more problematic by Saxton's additional overgeneralized assertions that Chinese labor communities were, "quiet, peaceable, industrious, economical— ready and apt to learn all the different kinds of work. . . They were in fact a construction foreman's dream."⁷

Another text that prompts more questions about the nature of Chinese immigrant communities is Ping Chiu's text, *Chinese Labor in California, 1850-1880: An Economic Study*. In this analysis, he discusses the economic impacts of Chinese immigrants on the mining, fishing, railroad, agricultural, and textile industries in California throughout the mid-19th century.⁸ The main thrust of his argument is that inexpensive Chinese labor was necessary for the economic boom seen at the turn of the 19th century but higher wages for those workers would have resulted in greater unemployment and bankruptcy for many American companies.⁹ While very informative with regards to labor distribution, census information, and wages, Chiu gives very little information regarding where these Chinese immigrants came from or why they found

⁶ Saxton, 60.

⁷ Saxton, 62.

⁸ Ping Chiu, *Chinese Labor in California, 1850-1880: An Economic Study* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1963), 4.

⁹ Chiu, 129.

employment in those industries.¹⁰ This leads to a complex analysis of the economic impacts these industries had on California but a very simplistic analysis of the laborers themselves. While not entirely problematic, the result is a historical text that refers to Chinese communities largely as faceless and voiceless workers with no real past and very little ambitions beyond their labors. This, in turn, perpetuates the stereotype that Chinese peoples were naturally inclined to be more industrious, emotionless, and resilient in harsh industries.

However, there are many texts in this library that have addressed these concerns in ways that both respect the historical agency of Chinese communities and strengthen their argument overall. For example, Connie Chiang's piece *Shaping the Shoreline: Fisheries and Tourism on the Monterey Coast* does much better to discuss the economic impacts of Chinese immigrants while still respecting the complexity of their various communities. In her text, Chiang discusses the history of the Monterey Coast as it shifted from a tourist attraction, to a fishing town, and then back to a tourism hotspot. Throughout these transitions she demonstrates that fishing, tourism, local communities, and Asian immigrant groups were all entangled and interconnected as their definitions and perceptions were shaped through ongoing and complex interactions with one another.¹¹ Through these interactions, she argues that people and the industries they find employment in cannot be understood through simple dualistic approaches; leisure, labor, work, play, environmental destruction, and environmental reverence are all ideas different communities used to describe each other but, "the public images associated with certain groups and their interactions with nature were neither fully accurate nor descriptive."¹² Not only does this analysis

¹⁰ Chiu, 73-75.

¹¹ Connie Chiang, *Shaping the Shoreline: Fisheries and Tourism on the Monterey Coast* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 8.

¹² Chiang, 9.

discuss the economic impacts of Chinese laborers, but her argument is far more nuanced and persuasive because she includes where the immigrants came from, why they were employed in the fishing industry, how they fit into the social hierarchy of the new environment, the contributing factors to that social organization, and how those understandings of class and race changed over time due to their economic impacts. Where the previous sources discussed had gaps in information commonly filled in with stereotypes, this source presents a stronger historical analysis because it discusses the humanity and individuality of the Chinese immigrants under examination and works that information into how those peoples responded to their environment.

Similar to Chiang's approach, this thesis discusses where the Chinese immigrant communities under consideration came from, what motivated them to emigrate, where they were employed, and the social, political, cultural, and economic impacts of their presence. Particularly, it focuses on the movements and motivations of communities from the Pearl River Delta region of southern China as they emigrated to San Francisco throughout the 19th century. In order to establish their backgrounds and possible motivations for emigration, this text employs four key sources. The first is a documentary directed by Felicia Lowe called *Carved in Silence*. The film details the history of Angel Island (the primary immigration processing facility on the west coast) through interviews with Chinese immigrants who were detained there. The immigrants featured in the film were primarily from the Pearl River Delta region and the documentary captured several of their oral and written histories during the Chinese Exclusion Era.¹³ The second source is Lai Him, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung's text *Island: Poetry and*

¹³ *Carved in Silence*. Directed by Felicia Lowe, 1987 (San Francisco: Center for Asian American Media, 1988. DVD).

History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island 1910-1940. This source contains 135 poems that were carved into the walls of the holding barracks of Angel Island and the compilers note that most of the Chinese immigrants who composed these works also came from the Pearl River Delta district of Taishan.¹⁴ When used in conjunction with the film, it demonstrates how Chinese immigrants understood their own history. Moreover, with oral accounts and the long, artistic prose of traditional Chinese poetry, these sources capture Chinese perceptions of their home, what they left behind, what motivated them to leave, how they understood China, how they understood the United States, their experience of discrimination, and numerous other individual histories that are often silenced in the historical record.

The third source is Janice Stockard's text *Daughters of the Canton Delta* which describes the fairly rare "delayed marriage system" of the Pearl River Delta and its socioeconomic effects on the region between 1860 and 1930.¹⁵ Namely, the notable living arrangement in which married couples were expected to live in separate households in order to support their families economically. This arrangement was conducive to families living farther and farther apart as economic constraints became more of a problem. As the next chapter will demonstrate, massive economic instability in the Pearl River Delta meant that it was acceptable and even preferable that married men would seek out employment regardless of distance, allowing many to emigrate. This leads to the fourth source, Virgil Ho's text *Understanding Canton: Rethinking Popular Culture in the Republican Period*, which argues there are serious misconceptions in the way historians have understood the way urban centers and foreign influence was perceived in

¹⁴ Him Lai, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung, *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island 1910-1940* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 1.

¹⁵ Janice Stockard, *Daughters of the Canton Delta* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 3.

southern China at this time.¹⁶ This text, in part, demonstrates that communities in the Pearl River Delta region were often proud of urban centers and many were even receptive to pro-western mentalities.¹⁷ Where other texts have simply defined the whole of Canton as “anti-foreigner”, these four sources help to argue against this conception. As many married men traveled farther and farther from home to find employment, Ho demonstrates that the cities were well respected, and ultimately, a launching point for emigration once the area became far more active due to the Treaty of Nanjing. Therefore, when used in conjunction, these sources establish a background on this specific area of China and describe how and why it became socially acceptable and, in time, even common for the married males of the Pearl River Delta to emigrate to California for work opportunities.

As Ho’s text illustrates, analyses of immigration and migrant identity formation are far stronger when they include more than one community’s perspective. However, many of the historical texts on Chinese immigration do not present a balanced representation of communities being discussed, ultimately to the detriment of their analyses overall. One extreme example of this concept comes from the writings of Robert Fortune, a Scottish botanist who traveled throughout China between 1853 and 1856. His text, *A Residence among the Chinese: Inland, on the Coast, and at Sea* is a travelogue in which he provided the names of his destinations, descriptions of the landscape, and documents on the plant life he found, all the while commenting on the Chinese communities that surrounded him.¹⁸ In these comments he

¹⁶ Virgil Ho, *Understanding Canton: Rethinking Popular Culture in the Republican Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6.

¹⁷ Ho, 7.

¹⁸ Robert Fortune, *A Residence among the Chinese: Inland, on the Coast, and at Sea*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5.

demonstrated a deep racial prejudice commonly referring to Chinese peoples as naturally hardworking, nimble, bizarre, mysterious, submissive, group-oriented, untrustworthy, and barbaric. These comments are made all the more unreliable as he gave racist and derogatory descriptions of Chinese peoples regardless of their interactions with him.¹⁹ If it was not immediately apparent, Chinese voices are absent from Fortune's discussion of Chinese communities.

While these prejudices were based around ethnocentric views that were not uncommon in this historical context, this source is useful for demonstrating problematic racial judgements that continue to appear in modern historical interpretations of Chinese communities. That is to say, Fortune's work, and resources like it, are crucial for recognizing the nature of racial tensions at this time. Moreover, they can be used to understand how non-Chinese communities identified and defined Chinese peoples in a cosmopolitan city like San Francisco. However, as demonstrated by Saxton's analysis of California lawmakers, using racially biased texts like Fortune's as a primary source often reproduces those racist stereotypes. Therefore, having Fortune's work as a reference is beneficial for this examination because his conclusions are clearly unsupported and unacceptable and yet some historians in the body of scholarly works on Chinese immigration throughout the 19th century find justification for similar conclusions due to an equally underrepresented Chinese perspective in their works.

One example of a 20th century historian who makes troubling claims of this nature is Gunther Barth in his text, *Bitter Strength: A History of the Chinese in the United States, 1850-1870*. In this text, he discusses the history of recruitment strategies, travel, employment, and labor of Chinese immigrants seeking work in the United States. By focusing on the political

¹⁹ Fortune, 423.

climate, economic policies, and living conditions laborers had to endure, Barth argues that Chinese immigrants had no intention of staying in the United States prior to 1870.²⁰ Instead, they organized themselves into “especially peculiar” living situations with the sole intention of creating short-term accommodations while they made enough money to return home.²¹ This analysis is of concern for several reasons.

First of all, the living conditions Chinese immigrants experienced were extremely varied depending on where in the United States they found themselves, their income, their level of education, their place of employment, and numerous other factors. Second, Barth gives little to no recognition of any Chinese immigrants that were not male laborers between the ages of 16 and 35. Granted, the majority of those who emigrated to the United States at this time fell into that category, but women especially had a huge impact on recruitment strategies, travel, employment, legislation aimed at Chinese immigrants, and labor of Chinese immigrants seeking work in the United States. Third, he provides insufficient evidence to discuss what the goals and intentions of the majority of Chinese immigrants prior to 1870. Fourth, to claim an immigrant group organized itself into “especially peculiar” living arrangements is a difficult historical claim to contend with, as “peculiar,” is a relative term based largely on subjective judgement. At the very least it is a deeply biased term that must be qualified in context. Finally, and most problematic of these concerns, the close-quartered living situations of many Chinese immigrants in San Francisco at this time was the result of legislation and in many cases desperation, not preference to facilitate a short-term occupation. By claiming most (if not all) Chinese immigrants had no intention of staying in the United States prior to 1870 without extensive representation of

²⁰ Gunther Barth, *Bitter Strength: A History of the Chinese in the United States, 1850-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 12.

²¹ Barth, 102.

Chinese voices, it suggests the stereotypes that Chinese peoples are naturally inclined to be more industrious, opportunistic, and live in groups.

However, not all the sources in this library that begin late in the 19th century or have a well-represented American perspective prove to be problematic. Case in point, Erika Lee's text *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* examines the way Americans understood and responded to the Chinese Exclusion Act. In this way, her analysis is similar to Saxton's examination of racially biased California lawmakers, however Lee makes use of immigration records, oral histories, interviews, and letters to represent both the American officials who promoted the Chinese Exclusion Act as well as the Chinese immigrants in the United States who were impacted by it.²² Lee's main argument focuses on the way American understandings shifted, and in time they came to see themselves as "gatekeepers" of the nation.²³ This, in turn, led to a new emphasis on immigrant identification, border enforcement, surveillance, and deportation policies.²⁴ Much like Chiang's examination, her argument is strengthened by the inclusion of Chinese voices even though her discussion does not focus primarily on their communities. As a historian, she recognizes the importance of their inclusion because it contributes to a more complex and in depth discussion of Chinese immigration and the impacts it had on American history.

One of the most pervasive issues among this body of texts, however, is the absence of Chinese perspectives and participation in a history largely about their communities and their movements. It is for this reason that, by and large, the most compelling pieces on Chinese

²² Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) 17.

²³ Lee, 19.

²⁴ Lee, 24.

immigration are those that present Chinese voices and focus primarily on their experiences. In response to sources like Fortune's or Barth's, there are several texts that consciously construct analyses of Chinese immigrant communities predominantly from the perspective of the immigrants themselves. For example, in Roger Daniels' text, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850*, he discusses the significant impact Chinese and Japanese immigrants had on the formation of American culture, politics, and economics throughout the turn of the 19th century. He focuses primarily on the immigrants themselves in conscious opposition to the body of scholarly works that had come before which Daniels claims focuses too heavily on Americans.²⁵ He claims that the history of Asian immigration during the 19th century has, up until this point, focused primarily on what has been done to Chinese and Japanese communities rather than their actual actions, decisions, and accomplishments.²⁶ He argues that American history is a construction of interactions between various immigrant groups over time and the Asian American experience, in their own perspective, is as noteworthy and fundamental as that of any other community.²⁷

Along with texts like Daniels', there are several notable pieces that argue Chinese immigrants were active participants in their own history who advocated for their own rights and used what they had available to empower themselves. For example, both Estelle Lau's text *Paper Families: Identity, Immigration Administration, and Chinese Exclusion* and Sucheng Chan's text *Chinese American Transnationalism: The Flow of People, Resources, and Ideas between China and America during the Exclusion Era* discuss how many Chinese families found ways to

²⁵ Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), 6.

²⁶ Daniels, 4.

²⁷ Ibid.

manipulate the system in order to continue immigration, maintain trade networks, respond to systematized prejudice, and define for themselves what it meant to be Chinese during the Chinese Exclusion Act.²⁸

Particularly in Chan's text, he notes that Chinese diplomats, Chinese-language newspapers, and Chinese-American organizations all actively criticized the anti-Chinese legislation (and their enforcement) throughout the turn of the century.²⁹ He notes that repealing the Chinese Exclusion Act became increasingly unlikely after 1905 because the Supreme Court banned federal courts from hearing Chinese admission cases. Therefore, he uses his sources to demonstrate that Chinese communities instead worked within the laws, educating themselves about any possible details or loopholes they could exploit, and writing letters to the federal immigration office for information.³⁰ Chinese residents in the United States, their attorneys, neighbors, politicians, friends, and family members all networked together to raise funds, work through the bureaucratic processes, and stay updated on changing legal conditions.³¹ Details like these are not included in many of the historical examinations on Chinese immigration which clearly poses a problem for the accuracy of their arguments. Not only did Chinese immigration continue throughout the exclusion era, but Chinese peoples from every class had to be well educated in the laws in order to successfully make the journey to the United States. These responses both demonstrated and shaped many Chinese perceptions of community, family,

²⁸ Estelle T. Lau, *Paper Families: Identity, Immigration Administration, and Chinese Exclusion* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2007), 7.

²⁹ Sucheng Chan, *Chinese American Transnationalism: The Flow of People, Resources, and Ideas between China and America during the Exclusion Era* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 14.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Chan, 15.

language, finances, labor, and education that, in other historical examinations, are either attributed to American influences, or simply omitted.

Another excellent example of a source that discusses how Chinese immigrant communities defined themselves is John Haddad's text, *The Romance of China: Excursions to China in U.S. Culture*. This piece examines museums, panoramic paintings, ceramics, tea advertisements, travelogues, missionary accounts, children's literature, and works from world fairs to discuss how Americans and Chinese peoples understood and interacted with one another between 1776 and 1876.³² He contends that the Chinese peoples who immigrated to the United States were *not* passive in their cultural representation but active participants in "China's exported image". In his own words, he argues that,

the Chinese constructed themselves, accurately or otherwise, in a manner intended to advance their own interests. They viewed self-description for an overseas audience as a beneficial way to increase exports, improve relations with other nations, or refute damaging stereotypes. In sum, the Chinese are far from being passive or silent in this story. Rather, in overt or subtle ways, they exerted real control over their own representation in the United States and, in doing so, often provided a countervailing force that could hold anti-Chinese sentiment somewhat in check.³³

Moreover, he argues that Americans who traveled through China's interior after the Second Opium War often developed an overgeneralized and racially charged conception of Chinese culture coupled with a sincere interest, admiration, and respect for Chinese peoples.³⁴ This discussion complicates the traditionally held historical conception that American perceptions of Chinese peoples imposed an identity upon those communities and amassed it into

³² John Rogers Haddad, *The Romance of China: Excursions to China in U.S. Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 12.

³³ Haddad, xviii.

³⁴ Haddad, 203.

a generally accepted anti-Chinese sentiment. Instead, it is reminiscent of Daniels' text in that it suggests Chinese peoples had a much more active role in their own identification and interactions between Americans and Chinese peoples were as varied as the individuals themselves.

As a final example of a source that discusses Chinese immigrants and their active participation in this history, Nayan Shah's text *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* examines how Chinese immigrants in San Francisco were perceived as "medical menaces" throughout the 19th century and how that perception changed over time.³⁵ He discusses how Chinese communities were targeted with sanitary regulations that, while deepening racial biases socially and politically, led to more modern sewer construction, vaccination programs, and greater public health management.³⁶ Similar to Chan's text, Shah demonstrates Chinese activism through their often overlooked public responses; to counter the racially charged accusations many Chinese peoples gave public speeches, wrote poems, filed lawsuits against the city, organized boycotts, and staged protests.³⁷ Once again, this text argues that Chinese immigrants from every class and level of education were not silent in this history.

Therefore, as this examination discusses the thoughts, motivations, and intentions of Chinese peoples, they will represent themselves. Of course, American sources have their place in this examination as well. They help to develop a more holistic understanding of how different communities perceived each other, however, Chinese peoples are historical agents just as anyone else and their voices should be respected as such. By using both perspectives in conjunction, this

³⁵ Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 2, 26.

³⁶ Shah, 12.

³⁷ Shah, 134-137.

examination aims to avoid many of the issues such as miscommunication or underrepresentation present in pieces like Fortune's or Barth's. Ultimately, by using a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives, this examination demonstrates the importance and benefit of creating a dialogue between Chinese immigrants, California residents, and the various peoples in between when discussing the history of Chinese immigration in the United States.

Many of the sources discussed here, though often problematic in their own right, are wonderfully informative and respond to issues that they have seen in other works. However, there is one aspect of Chinese immigration history this introduction has yet to touch on though its importance is undeniable: the roles and participation of Chinese women who emigrated to the United States. To discuss this aspect of Chinese immigration history this examination employs two major sources. The first is Benson Tong's text *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco*. This piece examines the young girls and women who were shipped to California and forced into prostitution.³⁸ However, this text then goes on to argue that these women were not simply victims, but often used their position to empower themselves to gain wealth or citizenship by starting families in the United States.³⁹

The second source is a text by Judy Yung called *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*. This text is notable because it is one of the few reputable modern sources that discusses female Chinese immigrants without the added complexity of sexual slavery or prostitution as a focus throughout its examination. This text uses oral histories, interviews, autobiographies, newspapers, census records, photographs, public archives, and

³⁸ Benson Tong, *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 3.

³⁹ Tong, 5.

private collections to discuss the movement of “unbinding” feet in Chinese communities in San Francisco.⁴⁰ Yung argues foot binding was understood to be a symbol of subjugation and, as Chinese communities continued to grow in California, women used the movement to define for themselves what it meant to be Chinese American. Moreover, like many of the texts discussed previously, Yung uses Chinese voices and responses to demonstrate that they were active participants in the making of their own histories.

Ultimately, this examination argues a new approach for understanding the shift in anti-Chinese sentiment as there is currently no major scholarly work that focuses on the impact of the San Francisco earthquake and fire on Chinese immigration as a whole. Chinese immigrants, investors, laborers, diplomats, scholars, men, and women were some of the most influential economic contributors to the reconstruction of the city and, as this examination will establish, there were major shifts in immigration law and public opinion of Chinese peoples as a direct consequence of their efforts. This thesis demonstrates how and why this shift happened, and in doing so, establishes that Chinese peoples were understood through their impact on economics and culture in the United States. It further demonstrates that Chinese peoples, particularly Chinese laborers, had an active hand in the construction of their own identities. Moreover, the phenomenon of paper sons and paper daughters began as a result of the city’s destruction and it had an enormous impact on how and why Chinese immigration continued until 1943 when the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed.

The first chapter establishes the historical context of China and the Pearl River Delta during the mid to late 19th century to explain why the population of Chinese immigrants in the

⁴⁰ Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 11.

United States grew so large so quickly. This demonstrates the way those historical agents understood China and the economic opportunities available to them at home and abroad. In the face of famine and homelessness, this background allows greater understanding for how and why many immigrants took employment in some of the United States' most dangerous and brutal industries. Moreover, it also discusses how and why the vast majority of those emigrating to the United States were male laborers, giving a better sense of the population distribution of Chinatown. This is important because it had a major impact on the way Chinese immigrants appeared to California residents and lawmakers and in the end it demonstrates how much Chinatown changed after its reconstruction. This discussion of gender distribution additionally highlights the presence, roles, and impacts of women in these early years of immigration.

From there, it discusses the United States industries Chinese immigrants found employment in, the working conditions of those industries, and ultimately the economic consequences of their employment. Focusing on mining, railroad construction, agricultural work, and urban businesses, it explains the historical context that made Chinese labor so appealing to business owners and so frustrating to American laborers. In this way, this focus establishes some of the first American interactions with Chinese laborers, which in turn, creates the foundation on which a good deal of anti-Chinese sentiment developed thereafter.

This chapter also examines the legislation that was either proposed or passed in response to mounting anti-Chinese sentiment. By looking at the intentions behind these laws I argue they reflect the greater population's clear intention to distance and disassociate themselves from the growing Chinese population. Legal action was taken not only to discourage further Chinese immigration and residence, but to send the message that they were not citizens of the United States and assimilation was not possible. Instead they were literally and figuratively seen as a

disease that damaged the culture and economy of the country. This is particularly important to establish because this sentiment was challenged and eventually overturned after San Francisco was destroyed.

The second chapter describes how and why San Francisco was destroyed in the earthquake and fire of 1906. This is particularly important because it establishes the organization of the city prior to that point, the physical placement of Chinatown within the city, and the former processes Chinese immigrants had to endure in order to enter the country. All three of these points become crucial for understanding the significance of the city's reconstruction because they were all at some point contested and resolved in ways that engage with the primary question of how the San Francisco earthquake and subsequent fire affected the local Chinatown and Chinese immigration as a whole. It then examines the conflict Chinese residents faced as they tried to rebuild their homes and businesses after San Francisco was destroyed. Due to continued anti-Chinese sentiment, local residents, city officials, and the state government all initially refused to allow the Chinese residents to rebuild. Several justifications were given for the refusal and I argue that those objections reflect the local population's interests and general perceptions of the Chinese people at that time. Most notably for this discussion, their concerns repeatedly reflect the idea that the Chinese peoples were perceived as an economic and cultural burden on the United States.

In response to these concerns, Chinese individuals and organizations employed various forms of communication and resistance to argue against their displacement. Over the previous sixty years of mass migration and establishment in the United States, the first generation immigrants were not alone in their struggle for recognition and they were not silent on the matter of relocation. Though there remained a disproportionate ratio of males to females among the

Chinese communities in San Francisco, a growing second generation of Chinese Americans had come to represent a powerful voice in the debate. This chapter argues that through their involvement with the Benevolent Six Companies, several Chinese-American organizations, local Catholic and Protestant churches, the California education system, local politics, connections with local businesses, and communication with Chinese diplomats, the first generation and second generation Chinese immigrants, both men and women, ultimately drove the decision to rebuild the San Francisco Chinatown in the same location.

The third and final chapter examines the reconstruction of Chinatown in what I argue is both a change of heart as well as a change of perception as the Chinese peoples were no longer considered an economic burden on the United States. Instead their economic importance became a significant factor in San Francisco's reconstruction, and because of this, their cultural heritage became popularized and widely accepted (or at the very least tolerated). It then describes how the San Francisco Chinatown was rebuilt and how the resulting process reflects a much greater acceptance of the Chinese people. Due to the destruction of the city hall, there was a gap in official documentation that Chinese residents used to smuggle friends and family members into the country during the heart of the Chinese Exclusion Act. This meant the population distribution became much more even as Chinatown predominantly became home to full families for the first time. The rate of crime and disease decreased dramatically with the construction of new facilities and greater access to public institutions. Lastly, Chinatown was reconstructed as a tourist attraction so the "Chinese" elements were exaggerated to match the expectations of American perceptions. This led to a complicated view of Chinese immigrants as the reconstruction both perpetuated evolving "positive" racial stereotypes while simultaneously promoting a general

acceptance, and even appreciation, for Chinese culture, just a few months after it was denounced as an economic and cultural burden.

In conclusion, this examination will contribute to this rich body of scholarly work dedicated to the history of Chinese immigration to the United States throughout the 19th century by recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of the texts that have come before it. It discusses the origins of the Pearl River Delta immigrant communities, what motivated them to emigrate, where they were employed, and the social, political, cultural, and economic impacts of their presence. Furthermore, it demonstrates the importance of creating a dialogue between Chinese immigrants, California residents, and the various peoples in between. It uses Chinese sources to represent Chinese perceptions and discusses the importance of San Francisco's destruction in the history of Chinese immigration in the United States. Finally, the examination will include the roles of Chinese women and how they participated in the history of Chinese immigration in the United States through their involvement with industry and Christian organizations.

CHAPTER II

EARLY CHINESE IMMIGRATION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN SAN FRANCISCO

Between 1848 and 1890, the number of registered Chinese residents in San Francisco increased from just two to 72,472.¹ Initially, these Chinese immigrants occupied a few streets close to the docks around businesses that, prior to that point, had entertained travelers and housed sailors on shore leave.² By 1850, however, they came to be the most prevalent residents of Grant Avenue, Portsmouth Square, and Sacramento Street, creating the loosely imagined space we know today as the San Francisco Chinatown.³ By the time the city was destroyed in 1906 by the infamous earthquake and fire, several Chinese communities, including first generation immigrants as well as second generation Chinese Americans, were well established and refused to abandon their homes. Their active participation in the reconstruction had a massive impact on San Francisco's landscape and the system of Chinese immigration thereafter. This chapter discusses the background of Chinese immigration from the Pearl River Delta, the initial creation of Chinese communities in San Francisco, their encounters with the local population, and their stories of survival in the city. This discussion demonstrates that Chinese immigration was met with a mixture of interest, resistance, and hostility. Moreover, as the population of Chinese peoples in California continued to grow, their presence was understood to be an economic and cultural detriment to the state. With San Francisco's destruction, as discussed in the following chapter, these sentiments will be challenged by many of the same

¹ San Francisco Planning Department, "Chinatown Area Plan" San Francisco General Plan. December 10, 2014. http://www.sf-planning.org/ftp/General_Plan/Chinatown.htm (accessed December 10, 2014).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

communities established here. Therefore, in order to examine how Chinese immigrants and the greater system of immigration to the United States were affected by the San Francisco earthquake and fire, the background for who these people were, where they came from, and what motivated them to emigrate must be established first and foremost.⁴

Many historians who have written on Chinese immigration to the United States have discussed the immigrant communities with broad strokes, painting a big picture of this history. While not inherently flawed, the approach leaves open questions about the nature of those peoples and their specific motivations for emigration. This chapter focuses on the people of the Pearl River Delta, and particularly immigrants from Taishan. It was estimated that by the turn of the century more than 200,000 Taishanese peoples (well over a quarter of the total population) had immigrated to or through California.⁵ Consequently, they represented a large portion of the Chinese presence in San Francisco between 1840 and 1910 and many of their personal writings have been preserved for their historical significance. Moreover, numerous records of where they were employed have survived allowing modern historians to argue for the social, political, cultural, and economic impacts of their presence. Ultimately, this examination focuses on the people of the Pearl River Delta as a representative group, exploring their perspectives, conceptions, motivations, reactions, and arguments in order to better understand why there was such a large spike in immigration at this time and the responses to their presence.

Prior to 1840 the Pearl River Delta region of southern China was largely agricultural and notable for its connection to the Silk Road. As demonstrated by figure 1, it was an outlet for

⁴ For further information on Chinese migration to United States please consult Erika Lee's text *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*.

⁵ Madeline Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 31.

trade through Guangzhou and the ports of Hong Kong, providing steady economic activity for the surrounding area. For those smaller communities in the rural countryside however, sugarcane became a major source of income and stability.⁶ Faced with a growing population, many Chinese farmers expanded their sugarcane fields in order to claim land and establish their legitimacy by employing villagers from the surrounding area to tend to their crops.⁷ With the rise of a money economy and the growing commercialization of agriculture, farms grew bigger and food crops like rice were increasingly replaced by cash crops like tobacco and indigo.⁸ This, ultimately, had devastating consequences on the economy and stability of the area after the First Opium War.

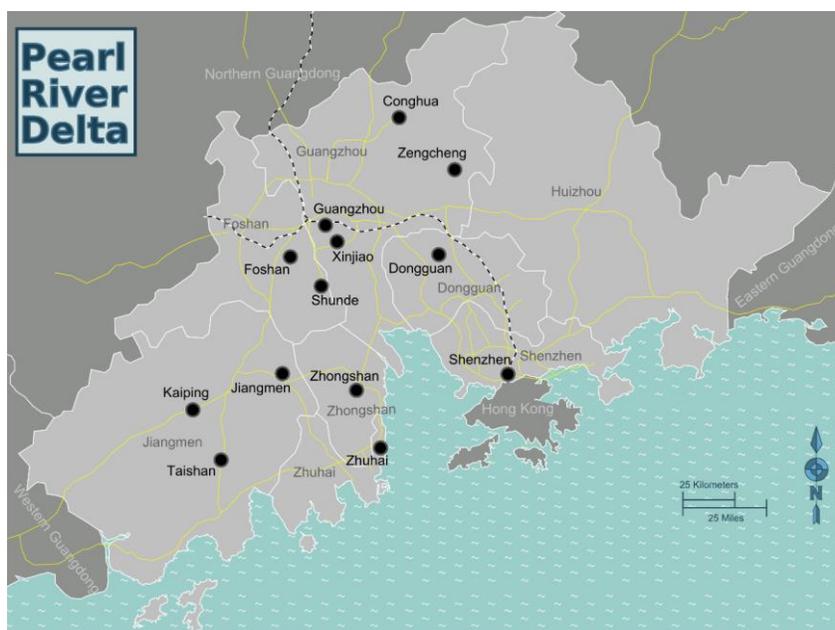


Fig. 1. Claus Hansen, Map of Pearl River Delta, 2010, Digital image. Reproduced from Demis Web Map Server, <http://www.demis.nl/home/pages/wms/demiswms.htm> (accessed May 10, 2016)

⁶ Joseph Needham, Christian Daniels, and Nicholas K. Menzies, *Science and Civilization in China. Volume 6, Biology and Biological Technology. Part III, Agro-Industries: Sugarcane Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 110.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

With the loss of the First Opium War in 1842, the first in a series of unequal treaties began to take effect. Hong Kong became British-controlled territory and the southern port cities were legally required to allow business with foreigners.⁹ Though initially these changes had little to no effect on the rural communities of the Pearl River Delta, in time the consistency of its economic, social, and political stability began to erode. Anti-foreign sentiment and frustrations with the Qing government from all over the Guangdong province escalated into secret societies and rebellions. Many local gentry saw the Opium Wars as a humiliation for China and, consequently, lost faith in the Qing government's abilities to protect the rural countryside.¹⁰

As conditions worsened after demobilization, many local notables became convinced that only by preserving the *t'uan-lien* [local militia hired and controlled by the gentry] could they defend their families, their farms, their villages. Others sincerely believed that the defense of the city, if not the empire, against foreign incursion depended upon such local initiative. Certainly, the banner troops could offer no help after their miserable failure in May of 1841. 'If today's soldiers are like this, then we can see what those of later days will be like; if one province's troops are like this, then we can see what those of the Empire will be like.'¹¹

This response demonstrates a clear disruption of daily life for those living in rural communities at this time. Due to several military conflicts, including the Battle of the Bogue in 1841, the British navy caused massive destruction to cities along the Humen Strait (the strategic river outlet for Guangzhou).¹² This caused intense social disorder for the Pearl River Delta as, "tens of thousands of people were dislocated. One Chinese official estimated that eight or nine of

⁹ Hsu, 24.

¹⁰ Fredrick Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 62.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Amar Farooqui, *Smuggling as Subversion: Colonialism, Indian Merchants, and the Politics of Opium, 1790-1843* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 47.

every ten families living in the suburbs had to flee to the countryside or to such refuge inside walls of the old city.”¹³

With this massive migration towards the Pearl River Delta countryside, there came a considerable increase in crime. Sailors and former soldiers became bandits, vagabonds, and marauding deserters, preying on the fleeing families while they were still vulnerable.¹⁴ Moreover, many secret societies who had already established their nonconformity with the state took the opportunity to reveal themselves and their causes, all the while robbing and plundering from those who had put faith in the government’s protections.¹⁵ Those fleeing from the urban centers in time resettled in the rural countryside, often with friends and family members, though instability still plagued the region.

The sudden population increase, the growing dangers of travel, and the abundance of cash crops over food, famine devastated many communities. Due to the impacts of the First Opium War, in 1846 and 1849 similar rural regions along China’s coastline were swept with two major famines that killed an estimated 22 million people.¹⁶ In 1852, a food crop failure led to a sudden spike in migration to California; in 1851 Angel Island customs saw 2,716 Chinese immigrants, and in 1853 it counted 4,270. In 1852, the crop failures corresponded with the emigration of 20,026 Chinese people from the Pearl River Delta.¹⁷ Matters were only made worse by a series of natural disasters and diseases that swept through the Pearl River Delta over

¹³ Wakeman, 62.

¹⁴ Wakeman, 63.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ferreyra, Eduardo. "Fearful Famines of the Past." Fundación Argentina De Ecología Científica. November 3, 2007. Accessed May 10, 2016. <http://www.mitosyfraudes.org/Polit/Famines.html>.

¹⁷ Hsu, 29.

the next several years: “Between 1851 and 1908, the population of the area suffered from 14 serious floods, seven typhoons, four earthquakes, two severe droughts, four epidemics and five great famines.”¹⁸ Additionally, in 1855 a form of the bubonic plague began to spread rapidly in Yunnan province in what is known as the Third Plague Pandemic.¹⁹ As it moved through China and India it killed over 12 million people.

As the Pearl River Delta communities contended with these issues, many blamed the Qing government for the continued instability. Consequently, in 1850 a Hakka Chinese man by the name of Hong Xiuquan launched the Taiping Rebellion to fight back against, what he argued, was an evil group of Manchu interlopers in power.²⁰ The rebellion lasted for fourteen years and remained one of the bloodiest conflicts of the century; an estimated 70 million people lost their lives largely due to famine caused by the widespread troop movements.²¹ While the rebellion raged on, it sparked other anti-Qing movements further contributing to the instability of Southern China. In 1854 a Guangdong Triad member by the name of Ling Shih-pa launched the Red Turban Rebellion to fight Qing supporters in the neighboring provinces of Heyuan and Foshan.²²

¹⁸ Lorri Carlson, "Asking a Bigger Question: Why Did the Chinese Leave There to Come Here?" (Sharlot Hall Museum Library Archives. July 17, 2005). Accessed May 10, 2016. <http://www.sharlot.org/library-archives/days-past/asking-a-bigger-question-why-did-the-chinese-leave-there-to-come-here/>.

¹⁹ Samuel K. Cohn, *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe* (London: Arnold, 2002), 336.

²⁰ Franz H. Michael, *The Taiping Rebellion; History and Documents* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), 47.

²¹ Michael, 68.

²² Kim Jaeyoon, "The Heaven and Earth Society and the Red Turban Rebellion in the Late Qing China," *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2009), <http://www.scientificjournals.org/journals2009/articles/1473.pdf>. (accessed March 23, 2016).

The rebellion only lasted for three years but it still contributed to devastating crop losses, disruption of trade, and an increase of violence to the region.²³

As for Taishan itself, the area was subject to the particularly destructive Punti-Hakka Clan Wars from 1855 through 1867.²⁴ Though the two communities had lived together peacefully for over 200 years, the sudden population increase from the Opium Wars sparked debates over land rights and tensions began to rise.²⁵ When the Taiping Rebellion gained traction in southern China, Hong Xiuquan appealed to his clan for military support.²⁶ The war between the two clans began when Punti soldiers and the Qing army attacked Taiping rebels and their sympathizers in nearby Hakka villages.²⁷ Consequently, Hakka soldiers, rebels or otherwise, began attacking Punti villages in retaliation. The resulting hostilities between the two groups was both bloody and horribly destructive on the Pearl River Delta. Villages were converted into military forts with walls and trenches, while roads and bridges were destroyed to slow oncoming soldiers.²⁸ Punti fighters greatly outnumbered the Hakka and, what is more, they received weapons and supplies from their relatives in Hong Kong and other Chinese diaspora living abroad.²⁹ Due to these advantages, over 3,000 Hakkas fighters fled the conflict to support the Red Turban Rebellion and the Taiping Rebellion.³⁰ Ultimately, thousands of villages were

²³ Wakeman, 74.

²⁴ Hong Beom Rhee, *Asian Millenarianism: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Taiping and Tonghak Rebellions in a Global Context* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2007), 263.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Rhee, 263.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Rhee, 264.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Rhee, 266.

destroyed in this conflict and over a million people lost their lives to the resulting war, famine, and disease.³¹

Due to these conflicts, agricultural production and trade were no longer viable options for economic stability in the Pearl River Delta. However, where many communities dispersed or developed new strategies for survival in their old environments, it became very common for the people of Taishan to emigrate to the United States for better economic opportunities. In fact, approximately 80 percent of all Chinese immigrants who traveled to the continental United States during the 19th century came from Taishan.³² This trend was the result of two major factors. First was the relatively rare practice of the “delayed marriage system” in the Pearl River Delta. While it was certainly not uncommon for newly married couples to live in separate households in 19th century Chinese societies, the duration of the separation and the perception of the system are both aspects worthy of note. In traditional marriage separation customs elsewhere in China, couples were expected to remain separated for three years before living together.³³ In the delayed marriage system of the Pearl River Delta, spouses would live apart as long as circumstances dictated it was necessary.³⁴ What is more, when a couple conceived a child before circumstances would deem it appropriate for the two to live together it, “brought a loss of prestige and social sanctions, especially ridicule by peers.”³⁵ Consequently, as overpopulation and economic instability plagued the Pearl River Delta after the First Opium War, men of these communities could work abroad for as many years as necessary to support their family, as it was

³¹ Rhee, 263.

³² Carlson, "Asking a Bigger Question: Why Did the Chinese Leave There to Come Here?"

³³ Stockard, 4.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Stockard, 5.

expected that couples would not live together until they were socioeconomically stable enough to do so.

The second factor that contributed to this trend was Taishan's strategic positioning between the rural inland and the bustling treaty ports. Taishan was not one of the major economic contributors to the Silk Road, and as such, it did not expand as rapidly as cities like Guangdong. However, it was the major southernmost city in the Pearl River Delta, connecting rural communities to the complex river systems and Humen Strait. This area had some of the earliest exposure to trade with foreigners due to its proximity to Canton which included a familiarity with English speakers and Christianity.³⁶ Moreover, after the Treaty of Nanjing, the cities along this system were opened to foreign businesses for the first time and a booming factory industry began to grow.³⁷ Consequently, as overpopulation in the countryside came to a head, it became one of the major cities in the area to attract rural laborers seeking employment.³⁸ However, the Pearl River Delta in general had a massive surplus labor force and up to a third of those who found themselves in the urban centers remained homeless.³⁹ However, as the industries of port cities grew, so too did transport ships, piracy, and smuggling operations.⁴⁰

Where many sought economic opportunities in the delta's port cities, the vast majority were sorely disappointed. However, in 1848 transport ship captains traveling between China and

³⁶ Ho, 42.

³⁷ Needham, 112.

³⁸ Chan, 30.

³⁹ Youqin Huang, "Urban Development in Contemporary China," in *Globalization and the Dynamics of Political, Economic, and Social Change*, (Boulder, CO: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 255.

⁴⁰ Robert J. Antony, *Like Froth Floating on the Sea: The World of Pirates and Seafarers in Late Imperial South China* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 2003), 4.

the California coast noted the large number of unemployed laborers and capitalized on the opportunity.⁴¹ The California gold rush had begun and so they distributed maps and pamphlets advertising pictures of California's mountains shining with gold as they traveled through Chinese ports.⁴² An economic opportunity had presented itself, and for thousands of Chinese laborers, it was one they were not willing to pass up.

As increasing numbers of Chinese laborers began emigrating to the United States in hopes of finding economic stability, within a year much of the surface gold was already depleted.⁴³ Masses of hopeful miners from all over the United States began to arrive disappointed at their grim prospects and the Chinese were largely blamed for "stealing" the gold away from Americans. These frustrated Americans appealed to the California government, and in 1850 the state legislature passed the Foreign Miners' License Law which charged a tax of twenty dollars a month for all foreign miners.⁴⁴ Though the intention was to bring in some of the "lost" revenue for the state, thousands of impoverished Chinese miners simply left the industry, flooding major coastal cities with unemployed workers, and damaging the mining economy overall.⁴⁵

Though the gold rush was largely responsible for attracting the attention of Chinese laborers, once in the country, some took it upon themselves to establish businesses of their own.

⁴¹ Henry K. Norton, *The Story of California From the Earliest Days to the Present*, 7th ed. (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1924), Chapter XXIV, 283-296.

⁴² Norton, 283-296.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Library of Congress American Memory Project, "From Gold Rush to Golden State," Early California History: An Overview. Article last modified October 29, 1998. Accessed October 29, 2014. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/cbhtml/cbrush.html>

⁴⁵ Norton, 286.

Using their familiarity with businesses in the Pearl River Delta, many found employment independently through laundries, restaurants, tailors, antique stores, jewelers, barbers, apothecaries, and shops for selling imported goods.⁴⁶ By 1859, some Chinese immigrants used their knowledge of tobacco production to establish themselves within San Francisco's booming cigar industry.⁴⁷ Initially, they were employed simply as laborers on the production line, but by the early 1860s many left to establish cigar companies of their own. Interestingly, Chinese-operated cigar companies from this time capitalized on the American preference for Cuban cigars by naming their brands things like Cabanes and Co. or Ramirez and Co.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Chinese women from the Pearl River Delta largely worked in the fabric, silk, and garment industry.⁴⁹ Using their knowledge and experience with cotton and silk worms, many companies were eager to hire Chinese women and, for a few years, "this situation made some immigrant wives the breadwinners, albeit marginal ones, during a time when their husbands were often left looking for work."⁵⁰

Still, other major American industries were far more receptive to Chinese labor. A case in point is the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad, which began in 1862 with fewer than three hundred Irish laborers. However, with the American Civil War well underway, they quickly faced a race for land rights against the encroaching Union Pacific Railroad.⁵¹ Faced with

⁴⁶ 1870 U.S. Census, Population and social Statistics, Volume I, Table XXIX, 704-715.

⁴⁷ Hsu, 58.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Yung 188

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ PBS. "Timeline: Transcontinental Railroad." American Experience. Last modified October 31, 2014. Accessed October 31, 2014. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/tcrr-timeline/>

a fairly sudden desperate need for workers to dig, clear debris, and lay tracks, in 1865 Charles Crocker sent out recruiters to California and China to employ Chinese men as inexpensive laborers.⁵² Largely due to the gold rush, the Chinese population in the United States grew from fewer than 1,000 in 1850 to over 35,000 by 1860.⁵³ By the time the Central Pacific Railroad was completed the Chinese laborers made up 90% of the workforce.⁵⁴

When the initial explosion of Chinese immigration began in 1848 they were actually welcomed as inexpensive laborers, cooks, farmers, and carpenters. However, by 1854 the majority of American miners abandoned their pursuits and returned to the cities to find their occupations taken by the very same Chinese immigrants who had “stolen” their gold.⁵⁵ These tensions were only heightened after the completion of the Central Pacific Railroad in 1870 as a mounting discomfort towards the Chinese grew with their rising population in the major cities. To keep this in perspective, when gold was first discovered in 1848, there were only fifty-four documented Chinese immigrants in California. By 1876 the population exploded to over 116,000 documented Chinese immigrants in California.⁵⁶

The San Francisco Chinatown was home to the vast majority of these Chinese immigrants. Though many of these Chinese peoples came from the Pearl River Delta, and therefore share cultural ties with one another, it is difficult to determine the prominent clans that

⁵² PBS, “Biography: Charles Crocker (1822-1885)” American Experience, Last modified October 31, 2014. Accessed October 31, 2014. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/tcrr-ccrocker/>

⁵³ *Historical Statistics of the United States: Millennial Edition*, ed. Susan Carter, Scott Sigmund Gartner, Michael Haines, Alan Olmsted, Richard Sutch and Gavin Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 36. <http://hsus.cambridge.org/>, accessed 5 January 2009.

⁵⁴ PBS, “Biography: Charles Crocker (1822-1885)”

⁵⁵ Norton, 284.

⁵⁶ Norton, 283.

came to reside in the city; as the official immigration records were lost when San Francisco was destroyed in 1906, current sources are conflicting and there remains an ongoing debate among historians regarding which ethnic groups were most prevalent throughout the late 19th century.⁵⁷ In the heart of the bustling port city, Chinatown provided a cultural safe haven in which continued travel and communication between the United States and China was still very possible.⁵⁸ The narrow streets were lined with food vendors, shops, street artists, musicians, stone works, pulled carts, and intricate wood storefronts. The alleyways were even narrower and often remained covered in crossed clothing lines, litter, and long beautiful murals. Unfortunately, due to the overpopulation and general poverty, many walls and structures were also visibly cracked and falling apart.⁵⁹ Until the turn of the century, Chinatown was lit predominately by traditional round paper lanterns, and writers often noted the lingering smoky haze which came from a combination of the lights, heavy use of incense, and open fire cooking that often took place outside. Shops were often designated by calligraphy signs and businesses were commonly operated by Chinese immigrants.⁶⁰

Chinatown was also home to several underground organizations and businesses. The Tongs, for example, ran human trafficking rings, opium dens, gambling houses, brothels, firearms trading, and smuggling operations.⁶¹ In response to the Tongs, a group of powerful Chinese business owners came together to form the Consolidated Benevolent Association or the

⁵⁷ Chan, 8.

⁵⁸ Chan, 22.

⁵⁹ *The San Francisco Call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 10 Nov. 1901.

⁶⁰ 1870 U.S. Census, Population and Social Statistics, Volume I, Table XXIX, 704-715.

⁶¹ Jesse B. Cook, "San Francisco's Old Chinatown" *San Francisco Police and Peace Officers' Journal*, *Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco*, June 1931. Accessed March 7, 2016. <http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist9/cook.html>

Benevolent Six Companies.⁶² They were well financed and deeply concerned with the growing hostility that was mounting against the Chinese people in the United States. As a result, they used their influence to help discourage immoral business practices; before and after their official establishment in 1882, they made efforts to deter prostitution, slave networks, and gambling houses.⁶³ Regardless of their efforts however, there remained a strong sentiment that the Chinese immigrant population in San Francisco was a problem that needed to be solved.

Tensions between Chinese immigrant communities and local authorities took several forms, though they were exacerbated by a systematic racial prejudice that led to unresolved injustices in the Chinese communities. One of the most illustrative example of these injustices was the Chinese Theater Tragedy. Due to overcrowding and the small size of the theaters, fires were a real threat to community safety during performances. Consequently, it became common practice for young American children to shout “fire!” through one of the open windows when they wanted free admission to the shows. The resulting evacuation was often fearful and frantic, though injuries as a result of the crowding was almost unheard of.⁶⁴ As the performers, staff, and patrons would reenter the building, the children would join the crowd and gain entrance without a ticket. However, in 1876 a police officer employed by the Chinese property owners was present for one of these evacuations and attempted to “regain control” of the situation. He bludgeoned nineteen Chinese men to death with his nightstick.⁶⁵ To the outrage of many, the

⁶² Judy Young, et al., *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present* (Sacramento: University of California Press, 2006), 17-25.

⁶³ University of Illinois. “Some State of California and City of San Francisco Anti-Chinese Legislation and Subsequent Action.”

⁶⁴ Asian American Artistry, “Asian Pacific American Historical Timeline Details” United States Asians. Last modified December 10, 2014. Accessed December 10, 2014. http://us_asians.tripod.com/timeline-1875.html

⁶⁵ Ibid.

officer in question was not convicted of any crime though the grand jury recommended that the theaters be reconstructed so patrons could evacuate more efficiently.⁶⁶

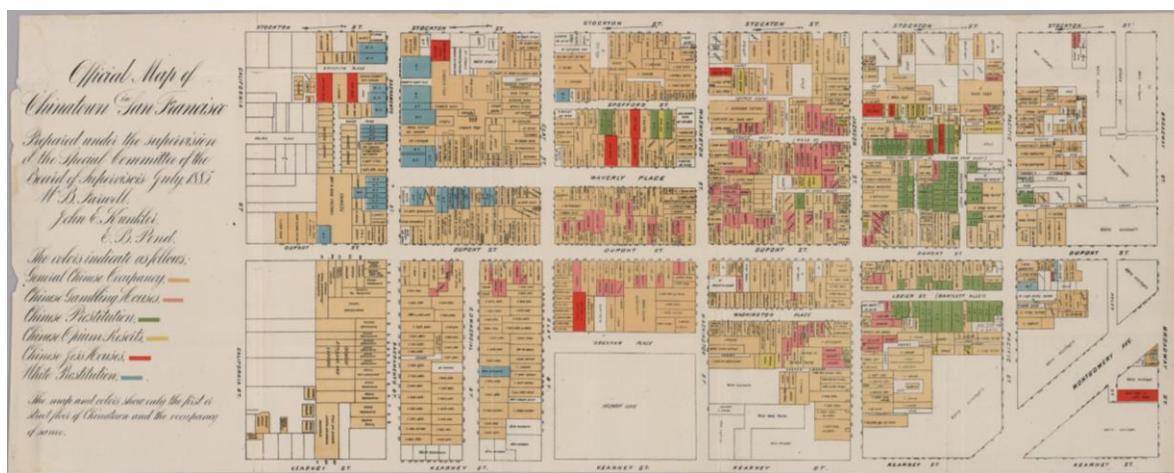


Fig. 2. Willard B. Farwell, Official Map of Chinatown San Francisco, 1885. Print, 22cm x 54cm. David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.

As the population of the already crowded Chinatown continued to grow even larger, many outside observers began speculating about the “true” nature of its inhabitants. Rumors, news stories, and testimonials of the rampant gambling houses, opium dens, brothels, and human trafficking were all used as defining features of Chinatown both inside and outside of it.⁶⁷ Case in point, figure 2 is an official Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of the San Francisco Chinatown and it is notable for how it defines these spaces. The orange squares that comprise the majority of the image are labeled as “Genuine Chinese Occupancy” in the key. While this alone demonstrates the local community’s speculations regarding the legitimacy of Chinatown’s inhabitants, the rest of the key illustrates this even more so. The rest of these Chinese spaces were defined as “Gambling Houses” in pink, “Chinese Prostitution” in green, “Chinese Opium Resorts” in yellow, “Chinese Joss Houses” (temples or similar places of worship) in red, and “White

⁶⁶ Asian American Artistry, “Asian Pacific American Historical Timeline Details”

⁶⁷ Lieutenant of Police William Price, interview by Commissioner of Immigration Hart H. North, 22 September 1898. San Francisco, CA, typed.

Prostitution” in blue. From these definitions, Chinese communities were charged with being a corrupting force on the American culture that could not be trusted or understood. The *San Francisco Call* newspaper ran stories romanticizing the “mystical” nature of the Chinese and their traditions, further solidifying conceptions of them as distant group or “the other”.⁶⁸ This distance was only worsened by the perception that the Chinese were literally dirty people and that Chinatown was a place from which disease and even the plague could spread.⁶⁹

These racially biased misconceptions regarding health concerns and disease were perpetuated largely by local journalists, politicians, and health officials. Residents of San Francisco were informed through newspaper articles and publicized health inspections that the “real” Chinatown was a labyrinth of twisting underground passageways, ultimately connecting to dirty cellars where Chinese men lived.⁷⁰ Other articles suggested that, “dozens of Chinese men slept on narrow wooden shelves squeezed into claustrophobic rooms, ‘which was considered close quarters for a single white man’” perpetuating racial stereotypes and further defining Chinese immigrants as inherently distinct from Americans.⁷¹ The state of Chinatown’s public health became a point of publicity as formal and informal investigations were fed to media outlets. Consequently, descriptions of the area’s disorder were increasingly exaggerated until accounts regularly claimed ideas like,

opium fumes, tobacco smoke, and putrefying waste pervaded the atmosphere in these windowless and unventilated rooms, and ‘each cellar [was] ankle-deep with loathsome slush, with ceilings dripping with percolations of other nastiness above, [and] with walls slimy with the clamminess of Asiatic diseases.’⁷²

⁶⁸ *The San Francisco Call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 23 June 1907.

⁶⁹ *The San Francisco Call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 01 June 1900.

⁷⁰ Shah, 17.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

Moreover, these reports attempted to define Chinese bodies as diseased and therefore dangerous to the health of Americans citizens.⁷³

More and more, the presence of Chinese immigrants was perceived as an invasion of the “other” and a detriment to the economy overall. California Governor John Bigler was a driving force behind the Foreign Miners’ License Law and openly accused the Chinese community of being, “avaricious, ignorant of moral obligations, incapable of being assimilated, and dangerous to the public welfare.”⁷⁴ His “anti-coolie” platform reinforced the misconception that the Chinese were untrustworthy foreigners who undercut white workers’ wages, and leeches off the American economy by sending their income back to their families in China.⁷⁵

Over the course of the next twenty years, animosity towards Chinese peoples led to several pieces of legislation to pass through the California legal system aimed at discouraging their presence. San Francisco residents, noting the significance of ceremonies and celebrations for Chinese holidays, successfully passed several ordinances against the use of firecrackers and ceremonial gongs.⁷⁶ Local representatives attempted to further discourage Chinese immigration by implementing the “Pig-tail Ordinance” that would have permitted the police to shave the heads of any Chinese persons arrested within an inch of their scalp, though the legislation was promptly vetoed by the mayor.⁷⁷

⁷³ Shah, 17.

⁷⁴ Norton, 283

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ University of Illinois. “Some State of California and City of San Francisco Anti-Chinese Legislation and Subsequent Action.”

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Additionally, as a response to the mounting complaints from displaced miners, other laws were constructed with the intention to deny Chinese immigrants the ability to find employment in the same occupations as American citizens. Consequently, the Chinese communities of California faced a revised Foreign Miners' License Tax, an anti-ironing ordinance that targeted Chinese laundries that stayed open at night, and a ban on serving on municipal projects of any kind in San Francisco.⁷⁸ Furthermore, Chinese communities were subject to the Act to Prevent the Issuance of Licenses to Aliens which prohibited the Chinese from being able to legally fish under any circumstance (as a business owner, for sustenance, as an occupation, or otherwise).⁷⁹ The state legislature also attempted to take measures beyond targeting common Chinese occupations, and so in 1862, California passed an "Act to Protect Free White Labor Against Competition with Chinese Coolie Labor" though it was immediately found unconstitutional.⁸⁰

Though the legal restrictions on occupations continued to grow, the number of Chinese immigrants remained in the tens of thousands in the 1860s and well over one hundred thousand in the 1870s.⁸¹ The Chinese were forced to fight for their right to remain within the United States, however the battle took a decisive turn in 1854 with the California Supreme Court case *People vs. Hall*. It found that the Chinese could no longer testify in court since they were, "a race of people whom nature has marked as inferior, and who are incapable of progress or intellectual development beyond a certain point. . ." ⁸²

⁷⁸ University of Illinois. "Some State of California and City of San Francisco Anti-Chinese Legislation and Subsequent Action."

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Latin American Studies, "Main Sources of Immigration to the United States, 1861-1890." 19th Century U.S. Immigration Statistics. Last modified August 8, 2014. Accessed October 30, 2014. <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/immigration-statistics.htm>

There was also intense concern over the growing number of Chinese immigrants who sought citizenship and the right to vote. Newspaper articles and political cartoons, such as the one in figure 3, helped perpetuate racial stereotypes as they raved about the hierarchical nature of Chinese households, warning that they would most likely vote as a mass for one candidate, toppling the delicate balance of the electoral process.⁸³ There were also fears over the election of Chinese candidates who would unjustly target white men while giving favors to the Chinese.

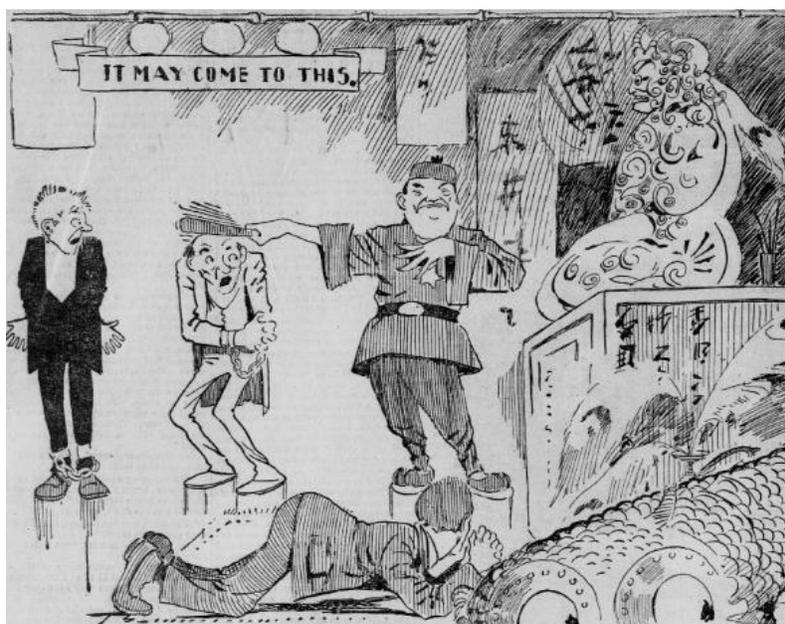


Fig. 3. It May Come to This, 1898. Illustration. *The San Francisco Call*, San Francisco, California. (accessed December 10, 2014).

During this time there were also “anti-coolie” laws that reinforced the sentiment that the Chinese peoples were not American citizens and they could not assimilate into the culture.⁸⁴ San Francisco, for example, successfully barred Chinese children from admission into the public

⁸² Center for Educational Telecommunications, “The People Vs. Hall,” *Ancestors in the Americas*. Last modified April 20, 2009. Accessed October 31, 2014. http://www.cetel.org/1854_hall.html

⁸³ *The San Francisco Call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 15 Nov. 1896.

⁸⁴ In this context, I understand the term “coolie” through Moon-Ho Jung’s definition from *Coolies and Cane*.

school system.⁸⁵ Additionally, Chinese peoples were banned from admission to the San Francisco City Hospital.⁸⁶ Then, in an attempt to reinforce the idea that the Chinese were not afforded the same protections as American citizens, California passed a Police Tax which obligated any Chinese person over the age of eighteen to pay two dollars and fifty cents every month for the right to be protected.⁸⁷

The Chinese population in California continued to grow despite these intensely racially biased restrictions.⁸⁸ Consequently, the state attempted to pass several pieces of even more severe legislation aimed at discouraging any further Chinese immigration. The “Act to Discourage the Immigration to this State of Persons Who Cannot Become Citizens” and the “Act to Prevent the Further Immigration of Chinese or Mongolians to This Site” both garnered enough support to pass in California but they were both ruled unconstitutional by the federal government. Meanwhile, the city of San Francisco attempted to levy a fifty dollar tax on anyone attempting to dock who was “not eligible for naturalization” though it too was found unconstitutional.

Eventually however, the federal government conceded to many of the growing complaints from American communities; in 1880 it legally segregated the Chinese from American citizens in major community spheres like schools, public facilities, and hospitals.⁸⁹ Additionally, the federal government passed an Anti-Miscegenation Law which prohibited

⁸⁵ Daniels, 137.

⁸⁶ Shah, 69.

⁸⁷ University of Illinois. “Some State of California and City of San Francisco Anti-Chinese Legislation and Subsequent Action.”

⁸⁸ 1880 U.S. Census, Population and social Statistics, Volume I, Table XXIX, 704-715.

⁸⁹ University of Illinois. “Some State of California and City of San Francisco Anti-Chinese Legislation and Subsequent Action”

Chinese peoples from marrying outside of their race and then passed the Alien Land Laws which further prohibited them from buying or owning land of any kind.⁹⁰ In addition, California successfully passed an “Act to Prevent Kidnapping and Importing of Mongolian, Chinese, and Japanese Females for Criminal Purposes” which prevented Chinese women from entering the state without special certificates.⁹¹ Though many anti-Chinese acts were repealed through the efforts of Chinese immigrants, investors, diplomats, and Chinese organizations, all of these laws reflected the strong anti-Chinese sentiment that continued to grow until 1882 when the 47th Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act which suspended all Chinese immigration for the following ten years.⁹² Anti-Chinese sentiment only continued to grow as in 1892 the Chinese Exclusion Act was renewed for another ten years, and in 1902 it was renewed indefinitely.⁹³

Those who challenged the laws during the Era of Exclusion saw many elements of racial discrimination during the process of immigration. As thousands of Chinese peoples attempted to be processed through Angel Island’s immigration facility, they were instead subject to, “invasive physical exams, intense interrogations, and often, long detentions” while they waited for the higher courts in the United States to process their appeals.⁹⁴ Figure 4 is a photograph of this process and in many ways captures the disrespectful nature of the policies; these young boys were forcibly removed from their families, stripped to the waist, and examined for possible

⁹⁰ Yung, 169-170.

⁹¹ Yung, 32.

⁹² Creed Haymond, et al., *Chinese Immigration: The Social, Moral, and Political Effect of Chinese Immigration Policy and Means of Exclusion* (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1877), 48.

⁹³ University of Illinois, “Anti-Chinese Legislation and Subsequent Action.”

⁹⁴ Lai, 27.

diseases they may carry. These children became subjects in the gaze of the government officials as they attempted to define their bodies through measurements and racialized stereotypes.

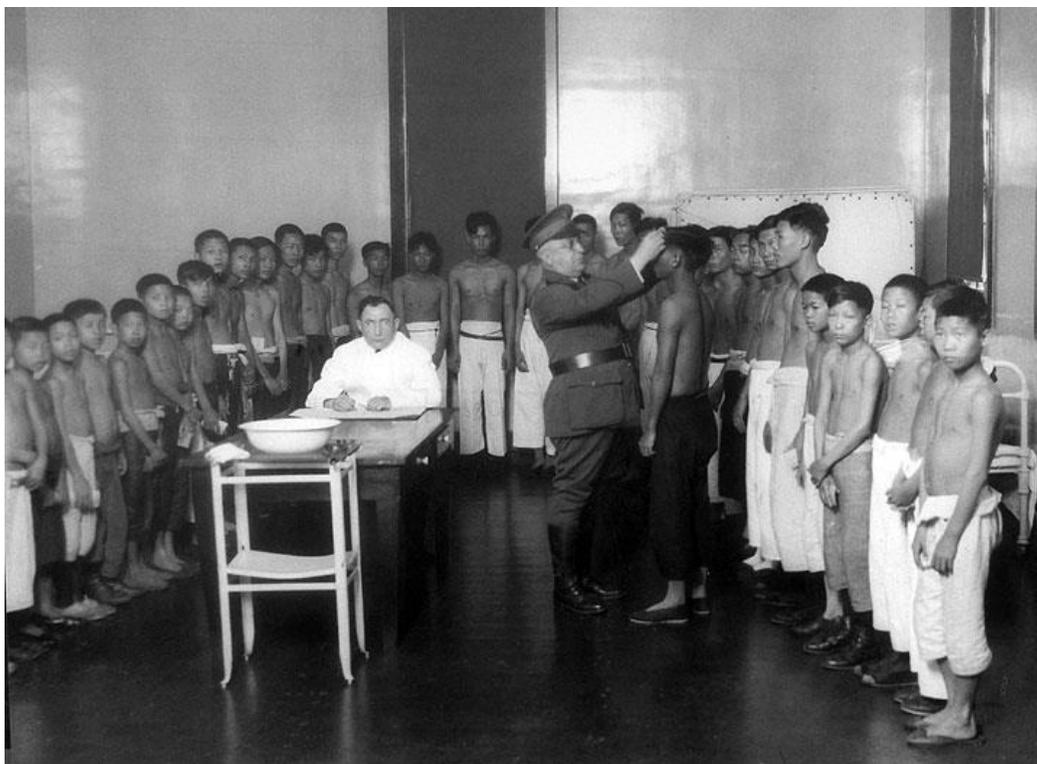


Fig. 4. Angel Island Medical Examination of Boys, c.1920. Photograph, 19cm x 14cm. National Archive. Reproduced from San Francisco's Digital archive (accessed May 10, 2016)

During many of these long interludes, Chinese immigrants were locked in small wooden cells that several individuals had described as a prison.⁹⁵ Li Poi Yu, for example, was detained on Angel Island for 20 months while waiting for a decision on her appeal. In an oral interview she remarked that, “everybody said that coming to America was like going to heaven but at Angel Island they treated us Chinese like criminals. Day in and day out, eat and sleep, eat and sleep, so much mental anguish.”⁹⁶ Individuals from Taishan, in particular, noted their

⁹⁵ *Carved in Silence*. Directed by Felicia Lowe, 1987 (San Francisco: Center for Asian American Media, 1988. DVD).

⁹⁶ Lai, 28.

experiences of this history through poetry they carved into the walls of their cells. Some pieces demonstrate the desperation Chinese immigrants faced due to economic hardships at home. For example, one such poem states, “this place is called an island of immortals, when in fact this mountain wilderness is a prison. Once you see the net open, why throw yourself in? It is only because of empty pockets I can do nothing else.”⁹⁷

Others discuss their perception of the United States and how it changed as a result of their incarceration. One poem reads, “America has power, but not justice. In prison, we were victimized as if we were guilty. Given no opportunity to explain, it was really brutal. I bow my head in reflection but there is nothing I can do.”⁹⁸ Another states, “I thoroughly hate the barbarians because they do not respect justice. They continually promulgate harsh laws to show off their prowess. They oppress the overseas Chinese and also violate treaties. They examine for hookworms and practice hundreds of despotic acts.”⁹⁹ In both cases, it seems that there was an expectation that the United States would be a place of just laws and jurisdictions. As discussed in the previous chapter, regardless of economic standing, social organization, or political ties of particular communities, the Pearl River Delta was plagued with instability. These poems demonstrate that the peoples emigrating from the Pearl River Delta shared a sense of urgency in their need to find stability as the idea that the United States was understood to be a place of justice suggests that many Chinese peoples were frustrated and felt that China was lacking in that regard. Therefore, in spite of intense racial bigotry, due to various factors such as the Taiping Rebellion, the Red Turban Rebellion, secret societies, famines, disease, and natural disasters,

⁹⁷ Lai, 96.

⁹⁸ Lai, 33.

⁹⁹ Lai, 43.

many Chinese peoples immigrated to the United States as a way to better provide for their families by seeking out stability.

However, there was also great variation in their responses to detention and discrimination. Some were angry and became disillusioned with the prospects of emigrating stating, “I am distressed that we Chinese are in this wooden building. It is actually racial barriers which cause difficulties on Yingtai Island. Even while they are tyrannical they still claim to be humanitarian. I should regret my taking the risks of coming in the first place.”¹⁰⁰ Others, however, remained hopeful and left words of encouragement for others being detained. One such poem reads, “this is a message to those who live here not to worry excessively. Instead, you must cast your idle worries to the flowing stream. Experiencing a little ordeal is not hardship. Napoleon was once a prisoner on an island.”¹⁰¹

Ultimately, the racially charged sentiments of the United States legal system were met with a wide range of responses, and at no point were Chinese communities silent or disinterested in their own histories or identifications. Aside from artistic expression, they organized public demonstrations and legal actions to respond to the mounting injustices. For example, when Chinese communities were targeted with slander by local newspapers claiming they were “medical menaces” the community responded with public speeches, poems, lawsuits against the city, boycotts of American goods, and protests against the agencies willing to spread the lies.¹⁰² When legislation made Chinese immigration to the United States more and more difficult, Chinese peoples used everything at their disposal to challenge the laws. Some “hired [American]

¹⁰⁰ Lai, 77.

¹⁰¹ Lai, 52.

¹⁰² Shah, 28.

lawyers and used the courts to affirm the rights of merchant families, returning laborers, and the American citizens of Chinese descent and their families to enter or reenter the country.”¹⁰³ As many Chinese immigrants did not have the means to afford these court hearings on their own, many of these cases were covered by the Benevolent Six Companies and the Chinese consulate.¹⁰⁴ Through these efforts, thousands of immigration denials were overturned between 1882 and 1892. Though many sought to challenge the Chinese Exclusion Act itself, in 1892 the Greary Act renewed the ban on Chinese immigration for another ten years and Chinese-American citizens sued the government on the grounds that the law was unconstitutional. The case made it to the Supreme Court before it was shot down.

Throughout the Era of Exclusion Chinese diplomats, “sent petitions, memorials, and letters to Presidents William Howard Taft, Theodore Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson, arguing that the exclusion laws and their enforcement were unjust.”¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, Chinese-language newspapers and Chinese-American organizations all actively criticized the continued anti-Chinese legislation throughout the turn of the century.¹⁰⁶ As repealing the Chinese Exclusion Act became increasingly unlikely after 1905 when the Supreme Court banned federal courts from hearing Chinese admission cases, Chinese communities instead worked with the laws, educating themselves about any possible details or loopholes they could exploit, and writing letters to the federal immigration office for any further information that may have helped their cause.¹⁰⁷ Chinese residents in the United States, their attorneys, neighbors, politicians, friends, and family

¹⁰³ Shah, 13.

¹⁰⁴ For a more in depth discussion on the Benevolent Six Companies, see chapter two.

¹⁰⁵ Shah, 13.

¹⁰⁶ Chan, 14.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

members all networked together to raise funds, work through the bureaucratic processes, and stay updated on changing legal conditions. Though all of these interactions shaped and defined the history of Chinese immigration in the United States, the beginnings of a profound shift began in 1906 with the destruction of San Francisco.

CHAPTER III

SAN FRANCISCO'S DESTRUCTION AND THE STRUGGLES TO REBUILD

In 1906, the infamous San Francisco earthquake and fire destroyed the vast majority of the city, leaving over 3,000 dead, 225,000 injured, and hundreds of thousands homeless.¹ The 7.8 magnitude earthquake ruptured nearly all of the water lines beneath the city, making the fire virtually impossible to extinguish.² As figures 5 and 6 demonstrate, Chinatown, like the rest of the city, was burnt to the ground, leaving little to nothing that could be salvaged. The vast majority of those who lived in the San Francisco Chinatown fled to the nearby Oakland Chinatown for refuge.³



Fig. 5. San Francisco, California, 1906. U.C. Berkeley Bancroft Library Manuscripts Collection, Hart Hyatt North: BANC MSS 81/55c. (accessed December 10, 2014)

¹ "1906 San Francisco Earthquake," University of California Berkeley Seismological Laboratory

² Ibid.

³ Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco, "Chinese Colony at Foot of Van Ness: The Plan to Remove Celestials to San Mateo County is Opposed." San Francisco Chronicle, April 27, 1906. Last modified July 16, 2004. Accessed October 29, 2014. <http://www.sfmuseum.org/chin/4.27.2.html>



Fig. 6. San Francisco, California, 1906. U.C. Berkeley Bancroft Library Manuscripts Collection, Hart Hyatt North: BANC MSS 81/55c. (accessed December 10, 2014)

The city's eventual reconstruction started almost immediately after the devastation ended, but as this chapter will demonstrate, the organization of the city prior to that point, the physical placement of Chinatown within the city, and the former processes Chinese immigrants had to endure in order to enter the country all became subjects of debate and major areas of change. All three of these aspects are crucial for understanding the significance of the city's reconstruction because they establish how the San Francisco earthquake and subsequent fire affected the local Chinatown and Chinese immigration as a whole. This chapter argues this change was predominately prompted by first generation Chinese immigrants and second generation Chinese Americans in their resistance to the government's proposed relocation of Chinatown; through their involvement with the Benevolent Six Companies, several Chinese-American organizations, local Catholic and Protestant churches, the California education system, local politics, connections with local businesses, and communications with Chinese diplomats, both the men and women of the Chinese communities ultimately drove the decision to rebuild the San Francisco Chinatown in the same location. Furthermore, this chapter argues that the anti-Chinese sentiment these communities were responding to reflected the local population's interests and

general perceptions of the Chinese people at that time. Most notably, they reflect the sentiment that the Chinese peoples were still perceived as an economic and cultural burden on the United States. This is notable because, in the following chapter, I argue the eventual reconstruction of the San Francisco Chinatown demonstrates a change of heart in respect to this perception.

After the fire was finally extinguished, most San Francisco residents began rebuilding as soon as they were able to do so. However, the Chinese were denied reentry to the properties they once lived on. The streets Chinatown was built on were identified as prime real estate in the heart of downtown San Francisco right next to the financial district. Consequently, the mayor of San Francisco and the governor of California refused to allow the Chinese to rebuild in the same location.⁴ A local newspaper by the name of *The Overland Monthly* boldly stated that, "fire has reclaimed to civilization and cleanliness the Chinese ghetto, and no Chinatown will be permitted in the borders of the city."⁵

Instead, the city formed A General Committee for the Chinese Relocation, and appointed Reverend Filben, a Methodist pastor and an active member of the community, to be its chairman.⁶ Filben and his committee established a camp at the foot of the Van Ness Avenue to temporarily house the Chinese though the decision involved a great deal of debate. Initially, committee member James D. Phelan, an active California Senator at the time, suggested they establish the camp at Hunter's Point, however another committee member:

Gavin McNab did not favor the establishment of the permanent Chinatown at Hunter's Point, which, he pointed out, was just across the line in San Mateo County. He said San Francisco needed the property taxes and poll taxes of the Chinese more than ever before,

⁴ *The San Francisco Call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 11 May 1906.

⁵ Mae M. Ngai, "How Chinatown Rose from the Ashes" *New York Times*, April 17, 2006. Accessed December 10, 2014. Web.

⁶ Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco, "Chinese Colony at Foot of Van Ness"

and did not believe the city could afford to entertain an Oriental city just outside its boundaries.⁷

This argument and eventual decision by this committee marks an incredibly important change in the perception of the Chinese people. For the first time since 1849, the presence of the Chinese is not seen as a drain on the economy, but a boon. Granted, anti-Chinese sentiment remained a massive issue; the military that was sent to aid the displaced Chinese community instead forced them to march to a different encampment three different times because of their reported smell.⁸ However, the enormous economic loss from the earthquake and fire had sparked a debate among California lawmakers over whether or not the city needed the financial boost from the Chinese population.⁹ Meanwhile, the Chinese peoples who faced displacement were not silent on this issue.

Indeed, the Chinese immigrant communities of San Francisco were very vocal about the fact that they did not want to leave their old properties and actively lobbied through several avenues for the right to rebuild in the same location.¹⁰ By the turn of the century they had established numerous outlets for Chinese-American relations and channels for communication with the lawmakers. Additionally, despite anti-miscegenation laws and the disproportionate ratio of men and women among the Chinese communities in the city, the first generation immigrants from the Pearl River Delta had found additional support through their families in the form of second generation Chinese Americans.

⁷ Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco, “Chinese Colony at Foot of Van Ness”

⁸ Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco, “New Chinatown Near Fort Point: Oriental Quarter Removed from Presidio Golf Links at Request of Property Owners” San Francisco Chronicle, April 28, 1906. Last modified July 16, 2004. Accessed March 7, 2016. <http://www.sfmuseum.org/chin/4.28.html>

⁹ Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco, “Chinese Colony at Foot of Van Ness”

¹⁰ *The San Francisco Call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 11 May 1906.

Some of the most prominent outlets both first generation immigrants and second generation Chinese Americans had for communication and self-expression were Chinese language newspapers, periodicals, magazines, and other similar print media.¹¹ With the forced segregation of public facilities, as discussed in chapter one, Chinese schools and universities became primary purveyors of print material that distributed and discussed major arguments regarding Chinese American politics, culture, and identity throughout the late 19th century and early 20th century.¹² Additionally, periodicals such as the *Chinese Digest* or the *Chinese Press* often engaged with Chinese women's issues, discussing modern conceptions of femininity and challenging traditional Chinese perceptions of women.¹³ Through these resources, many second generation Chinese Americans found a place to communicate and organize their ideas regarding the unequal treatment of Chinese peoples in San Francisco. When faced with the possibility of a relocation, many used print media to organize public demonstrations, protests, boycotts of American goods, and discuss whether or not they should take their businesses elsewhere.¹⁴

Religious institutions and the educational facilities themselves also offered a space for both first generation Chinese immigrants and second generation Chinese Americans to communicate and organize. Prior to San Francisco's destruction many schools within Chinatown were established with help from the local Protestant and Catholic churches. There had been somewhat cordial connections between the two communities since Chinatown's early establishment as one of the first buildings erected by Chinese immigrants was Old St. Mary's

¹¹ Daniels, 52.

¹² Daniels, 244.

¹³ Yung, 11.

¹⁴ Chan, 169.

Church in 1853.¹⁵ Moreover, Chinese communities from the Pearl River Delta had established a familiarity with Christian missionaries and church organization due to their extensive history of western contact as established in the previous chapter. Their Presbyterian congregation formed the first Asian church in North America and was a welcomed sight for many local Californians concerned about the growing Chinese population.¹⁶

When the California government passed legislation aimed at preventing assimilation between Chinese peoples and Americans, many communities responded with condemnation and resistance to the laws. Among these were the local Protestant and Catholic churches who began reaching out to the Chinese communities in attempts to “modernize” traditional Chinese customs and culture.¹⁷ Consequently, several churches of various denominations began cropping up in Chinatown throughout the late 19th century and almost all of them made attempts to establish schools and education centers. By working with the Benevolent Six Companies, the local churches helped establish a “Y.M.C.A., a Y.W.C.A., the St. Mary’s Chinese Mission School, and The Cameron House, a Presbyterian home for “rescued” Chinese prostitutes.”¹⁸ In general, most Chinese communities responded positively to the churches’ efforts and there was a relatively high rate of conversion among second generation Chinese Americans. These educational facilities and organizations were recognized and respected even outside of Chinatown due to their affiliation with the local churches.¹⁹ Because of this, they provided a space in which

¹⁵ Michelle Chow, "History of the San Francisco Chinatown," History of San Francisco Chinatown. November 2012. (accessed December 10, 2014).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ John Beierle and Xiaojian Zhao, "Chinese Americans," International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. January 2008. (accessed December 10, 2014).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Daniels, 136.

Chinese peoples could congregate and voice their concerns regarding the relocation after San Francisco's destruction.

In fact, many of these congregations were so influential throughout the reconstruction process (due to their mobilization potential) that their meetings were publicized. For example, before a meeting of the old Chinatown property owners, Ng Poon Chew, the founder and editor of the *Chung Sai Yat Po* or *China West Daily* newspaper, was quoted in the *San Francisco Call* stating,

The Chinese will not move to any other part of San Francisco. They are united in this sentiment and desire to occupy the old Chinatown district. We intend to fight any attempt to move us, and will not be moved except by official action. . . the sentiment which I express is expressed by every Chinaman in San Francisco. All are eagerly waiting the rebuilding of Chinatown, when they will flock from all parts of the State, to which they have fled in this hour of trouble.²⁰

This quote not only demonstrates the passion with which many Chinese peoples fought the relocation, but it also reveals the importance of collaboration and organization among these communities. The dislocated Chinese population recognized their strength in coordination and formed a much stronger argument by making their concerns as clear as possible while presenting themselves to the public as reputable sources of information.

This being the case, Chinese women, in particular, organized and mobilized through many of these facilities as well. Several Christian organizations, especially the Y.W.C.A., prompted many second generation Chinese women to redefine and “modernize” female roles in the political and economic spheres in the United States.²¹ The Y.W.C.A. offered Chinese women an outlet for self-expression and self-identification as its major tenets emphasized “female identity, independence, education, and spiritual equality, Protestant institutions like the YWCA

²⁰ *The San Francisco Call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 17 May 1906.

²¹ Yung, 98.

drew Chinese girls and women into the public sphere, familiarized them with Western customs and beliefs, and encouraged them to participate more actively in civic affairs.”²² Consequently, many of these women became active participants in “salvation work,” fund-raising for disaster relief programs in both China and the United States.²³ This, “opened up opportunities for women to become involved in the community, develop leadership abilities, and move into the male-dominated public sphere.”²⁴ Through their fund-raising efforts and close affiliation with the Presbyterian Church, young Chinese women in the San Francisco area became well respected economic contributors through their consistent ability to organize and produce aid for those in need.²⁵ Hence, when the California government denied Chinese peoples the right to rebuild in San Francisco, these same women employed their network through the church and Chinese American relief organizations to mobilize public demonstrations and garner support from Chinese diplomats (who eventually threatened economic consequences if the government had followed through with the relocation).²⁶

Educational facilities also provided a space where Chinese peoples could stay updated on the state of the reconstruction process as well as the current discussion of Chinese culture, modernity, and nationalism that had become a point of intense debate among Chinese communities in the United States.²⁷ Moreover, the second generation Chinese Americans that experienced the segregated education system became acutely aware of the way Chinese peoples

²² Yung 108

²³ Yung, 99.

²⁴ Yung, 98.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ John Beierle and Xiaojian Zhao, "Chinese Americans"

were understood by the local government as “inferior”.²⁸ Additionally, many Chinese Americans were confronted with the government’s stance that Chinese peoples were an economic and cultural burden on the United States through the California’s continued defense of their segregation policies. Consequently, many agreed with the Benevolent Six Company’s attempt to modernize the Chinese communities of San Francisco through a policy of “Americanization.”²⁹

With assistance from the Benevolent Six Companies, many second generation Chinese Americans received a higher education, became more involved in the economics of San Francisco, and adopted more “American” values (including conversion to Christianity) to help establish their legitimacy.³⁰ Even with a higher education however, many Chinese Americans were frustrated by the legislation that kept them from being employed in several potential occupations. Consequently, many turned to the world of business and investment in San Francisco and abroad as the Benevolent Six Companies had won several court cases allowing those occupations certain acceptances in the legislation.³¹ This meant that by San Francisco’s destruction, many Chinese Americans found themselves in a very powerful position to relocate their investments if the state government would not let them rebuild in the same location. Moreover, their access to print media, educational facilities, and religious institutions meant they were also in a position to communicate and organize with other Chinese immigrants, effectively allowing them to mobilize a counter argument to the relocation without the assistance of official institutions.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ For a more in depth discussion on this policy, please see chapter three.

³⁰ John Beierle and Xiaojian Zhao, "Chinese Americans"

³¹ Daniels, 26.

It is important to note, however, that this position of the second generation Chinese Americans does not suggest a shame or disassociation from the values of their families as many texts on Chinese immigration in the United States have suggested.³² The earlier focus of this examination on the Pearl River Delta background was meant to serve both as a means of giving a greater sense of agency and identity to the immigrant communities being discussed, as well as provide a possible explanation for why so many second generation Chinese Americans from these heritages fought so fiercely to stay in San Francisco, in spite of the intense racial bigotry. The industries many Chinese peoples found employment in were reflections of their homes and heritages; the rural communities of the Pearl River Delta (that many of the first generation Chinese immigrants came from) sustained themselves through specific agricultural trades. These trades were interwoven with the social, cultural, political, and economic spheres those peoples identified themselves through; marriage practices and family businesses were just two major examples given for how those trades affected those communities and allowed for farther and farther emigration. Moreover, these ties can be seen in San Francisco through the industries many Chinese communities found employment in. When those Chinese peoples worked with tobacco products, cotton, silk, or any of the other major San Francisco industries that shared links with the Pearl River Delta, they were reinforcing their own identities and establishing a sense of familiarity with their new surroundings.

Therefore, as, historically, there is no cohesive “Chinese” identity this examination can refer to, the Pearl River Delta’s traditional values, cultures, and industries serve as a case study for the concepts many of these second generation Chinese Americans identified themselves

³² John Beierle and Xiaojian Zhao, "Chinese Americans"

with.³³ The communication and organization of these groups is especially significant as many Chinese communities that had ties with the Pearl River Delta continued to empowered themselves through networking throughout the process of reconstruction. Consequently, the so called “Americanization” of their cultural values demonstrates the complexity and hybridity of these communities. For that reason, the adoption of “American” values cannot be conflated with a rejection of traditional values from the Pearl River Delta; the second generation Chinese Americans in particular fought vehemently against the relocation of the San Francisco Chinatown because it was a unique home for this cross section between the values of these two major regions, and as such, a reflection of themselves.

Their passion can be seen in in numerous sources through interviews and print media.

One *San Francisco Call* article, for example, states,

Celestial landowners hold that they cannot be deprived of their rights. Fifty Chinese owners of property in old Chinatown have decided to rebuild on the sites where their buildings were destroyed. Legal advisers of the Chinese, the Chinese Consul General, and the Vice Consul, King Ow Yang, give it as their opinion that the owners or lessees of land in Chinatown cannot be deprived of the right to rebuild if they so desired. It has been decided to resist any attempt of the authorities to compel the Chinese to establish themselves at Hunters Point against the wishes of those who owned property in the old territory.³⁴

Beyond arguing their case, these Chinese peoples (though most certainly second generation Chinese Americans based on their titles as “landowners”) resisted the government’s policies by outright rejecting the legislation that kept them from rebuilding on the grounds that they were within their rights to do so. In this action, these Chinese peoples asserted both their legal equality with other Americans and their rights as citizens to call out the racial prejudice in the laws.

³³ Examples of these values can be seen in the discussion of Pearl River Delta communities in chapter one.

³⁴ *The San Francisco Call*. (San Francisco [Calif.], 1 May 1906.

However, they were not without representation in this fight. The most prominent of the official organizations fighting the relocation was the Benevolent Six Companies which had been officially established since 1882 (though they had represented Chinese communities in the United States and abroad well before this date).³⁵ Though publically they were often represented by the American attorneys, Chinese diplomats, or Chinese-American investors they hired to establish official responses to racially charged legislation, their membership was predominantly comprised of those who sought their representation; Chinese immigrant laborers and merchants.³⁶ They, “served as community spokesman, playing a role that would have been appropriate for Chinese consular and diplomatic representatives if their government had much interest in immigrant protective activities.”³⁷ Originally, as immigrants from all over Guangdong province entered the city, they became members of various district associations (and possibly family associations as well) to seek representation and protection while in the United States.³⁸ However, as early as 1853 many of those representative organizations had consolidated into four major companies in order to better serve their communities.³⁹ By the turn of the century, the Benevolent Six Companies was well established as an umbrella organization over all the Chinese district associations in the United States and their headquarters was located in San Francisco.⁴⁰

³⁵ University of Illinois. “Some State of California and City of San Francisco Anti-Chinese Legislation and Subsequent Action.”

³⁶ Daniels, 23.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Daniels, 24.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

When the city was destroyed, the organization listened to the various Chinese communities and helped represent their concerns to the state government.

Near the end of 1906, in response to growing complaints from the displaced Chinese communities, the Benevolent Six Companies began corresponding with the Chinese government for support. Consequently, delegates as well as Chinese nationalists began visiting the country to argue why the Chinese should be allowed to move back to the same location in San Francisco. Appealing to the argument that it would be in line with “true American values” many Chinese delegates met with local officials and sent open letters to the governor asking for the right to rebuild.⁴¹ Finally, at the beginning of 1907, the Chinese government claimed it had rightfully bought and still owned the land the old Chinatown was built on. Sending several highly respected Chinese officials to fight the attempted relocation, they threatened to end trade between California and China if they did not allow the Chinese community to move back.⁴² The Chinese communities of San Francisco had shown their collective intention to stay and used their connections with the Benevolent Six Companies and the Chinese government to strong-arm the California government into allowing them to rebuild in the same location.

Where trade with China affected the overall state economy, local businesses affected San Francisco far more directly. For this reason, many Chinese laborers and merchants did not rely on representation from the Benevolent Six Companies alone. Adding pressure to the city of San Francisco, hundreds of Chinese began taking their business and emigrating elsewhere in the

⁴¹ Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco, “Chinese Make Strong Protest” San Francisco Chronicle, April 30, 1906. Last modified July 16, 2004. Accessed March 7, 2016. <http://www.sfmuseum.net/chin/4.29.html>

⁴² Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco, “Relocation of Chinatown” Gladys Hansen, June 1, 1996. Last modified July 16, 2004. Accessed March 7, 2016. <http://www.sfmuseum.org/chin/relocate.html>

United States.⁴³ The city governments of both Portland and Seattle, for example, sent representatives inviting the displaced Chinese communities to come and bring their businesses to their respective Chinatowns.⁴⁴ Others, recognizing their position to bargain, openly argued that the city should allow them to rebuild because they would prefer not moving away from their homes, but noted that they clearly had other options.⁴⁵ Many even felt that their quality of life was so poor in the United States, they moved back to China.⁴⁶ According to a census conducted after the San Francisco Chinatown's reconstruction, the population of Chinese immigrants in California had dropped to 45,753 and did not break 50,000 until after the Chinese Exclusion Act ended in 1949.⁴⁷

Many of these arguments were, again, captured by the words of Ng Poon Chew in a *San Francisco Call* article. There he states,

Property owners from Portland and Seattle have approached me in an attempt to secure my co-operator in getting the Chinese to move north. The Chinese do not want to leave San Francisco. They do not want to live anywhere but in old Chinatown. They believe that they have aided in the upbuilding of the San Francisco of the past and will certainly assist in the great work of reconstruction of San Francisco of the future. The Chinese were doing a business of \$30,000,000 a year. Our pugnacious spirit is aroused and we will fight bitterly any attempt to abolish the old Chinatown district.⁴⁸

⁴³ *The San Francisco Call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 17 May 1906

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco, "Want Chinese on the Front: May be Sent East of Telegraph Hill" *San Francisco Examiner*, May 4, 1906. Last modified July 16, 2004. Accessed March 7, 2016. <http://www.sfmuseum.org/chin/5.4.html>

⁴⁷ San Francisco Planning Department, "Chinatown Area Plan" San Francisco General Plan. December 10, 2014. http://www.sf-planning.org/ftp/General_Plan/Chinatown.htm (accessed December 10, 2014).

⁴⁸ *The San Francisco Call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 17 May 1906.

Here it is once again clear that the displaced Chinese communities of San Francisco were largely uninterested in moving elsewhere. San Francisco was their home, and they asserted that their home would benefit economically from their presence and business.

In the end it was the combined efforts of Chinese laborers, merchants, and elites that pushed the state's ultimate decision to call off the relocation. The second generation Chinese Americans in particular mobilized their efforts, recognizing that the reconstructed Chinatown would be their home, their city, and their legacy. They fought the idea that Chinese peoples were inferior, and further demonstrated that they were not an economic burden on the state. "Chinese Americans established their roots in Chinatowns, fought racism through aggressive litigation and diplomatic channels, and participated actively in various economic development projects and political movements to modernize" and as a result, the relocation was called off.⁴⁹ By June of 1907, the Chinese were finally allowed to return to their old property and begin rebuilding.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ University of Illinois. "Some State of California and City of San Francisco Anti-Chinese Legislation and Subsequent Action."

⁵⁰ *The San Francisco Call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 23 June 1907.

CHAPTER IV

RECONSTRUCTION AND A CHANGE OF HEART

Chinatown that began reconstruction was very different from its predecessor in several ways. The old Chinatown was predominantly filled with Chinese men who were often single unskilled laborers due to the restrictive legislation on citizenship, marriage, and immigration. However, one of the buildings destroyed in the fire and earthquake was the City Hall, the one place where citizenship papers, census documentation, and individual records were stored.¹ Consequently, tens of thousands of Chinese immigrants living in the San Francisco area could claim citizenship illegally by arguing their records were destroyed in the fire.

The Chinese who were able to claim their citizenship in this way were then called paper sons or paper daughters because their lineage in the United States was rooted not by an American-born ancestor, but by a piece of paper.² This phenomenon took place several years after 1902 when the Chinese Exclusion Act was renewed indefinitely, so there was a much greater demand for Chinese citizenship papers. As a consequence, thousands of Chinese citizens began requesting citizenship papers even when theirs were present and accounted for so they could give them to friends, family members, new mothers, smuggling operations, or even to sell.³ Young children were renamed based off of the name on received papers, mothers were able to stay with the children they gave birth to, and hundreds of Chinese families changed their surnames to fit their new citizenship papers.⁴

¹ David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, March 20, 2001), 67.

² Hansi Lo Wang, "Chinese-American Descendants Uncover Forged Family Histories" *NPR*, December 17, 2013.

³ Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco, "Paper Sons" Thomas Chin, 1969. Last modified December 18, 2004. Accessed March 7, 2016. <http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist11/papersons.html>

As a result of all of this, the new Chinatown being built had a much greater population of women and children, making the whole environment much more approachable and family oriented. In fact, most of the changes Chinatown experienced after rebuilding made it more welcoming to non-Chinese citizens and much more transparent. In the old Chinatown, buildings were erected as they were needed and the hasty construction meant that the narrow streets were often haphazardly lined with Chinese and American structures of various sizes and shapes.⁵ When the new Chinatown was built, they had city plans, blueprints, and maps to guide the process from start to finish.⁶ The result was a much more ordered, well-maintained, and clean Chinatown with a higher population of families and a lower rate of crime.⁷

Though the first generation Chinese immigrants and the second generation Chinese Americans were the ultimate voices that made way for the reconstruction of Chinatown in the same location, they were not only the major forces funding the project. There were several Chinese entrepreneurs, organizations, and independent companies who supported the Chinese communities' efforts to rebuild. The Benevolent Six Companies took advantage of the opportunity and argued that the apprehension behind the reconstruction was due to concern over a reestablishment of crime and unsanitary living conditions.⁸ Though this fed into the stereotypes imposed on Chinese peoples at the time, Chinese Americans used those conceptions to their benefit. The Benevolent Six Companies openly worked with the City of San Francisco and the

⁴ Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco, "Paper Sons" Thomas Chin, 1969. Last modified December 18, 2004. Accessed March 7, 2016. <http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist11/papersons.html>

⁵ *The San Francisco Call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 30 July 1905.

⁶ Lenore Kothe, "Chinatown: The New and the Old." Library of Congress. October 16, 1910.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Shah, 299.

government of California to fund a reconstruction effort with the conscious intention to prevent the “same issues” from arising in order to improve relations between the Chinese communities and Americans.⁹ Additionally, the Six Companies also funded the reconstruction with an emphasis on “Americanizing” the Chinese people living in San Francisco so they would be less of a target for persecution. Through their efforts, Chinatown finally received a Chinese hospital that worked with Western medicine exclusively, a reestablished Y.M.C.A., and Y.W.C.A., a Chamber of Commerce, and a building dedicated to the Chinese-American Citizens Alliance.¹⁰

Another major investor interested in the reconstruction was Look Tin Eli. He was a wealthy American-born Chinese man that founded the Bank of Canton branch in San Francisco.¹¹ He formed business relationships with local Chinese merchants, the Benevolent Six Companies, and the General Committee for Chinese Relocation, explaining that he would help fund the reconstruction effort. Working together with the Six Companies to “Americanize” Chinese peoples in San Francisco and improve relations between the Chinese communities and Americans in general, Look intended to make the new Chinatown into a massive money-making tourist attraction. In his own words, he wanted to create a city of “veritable fairy places.”

As a consequence of Look’s involvement, the typical building in Chinatown was painted with bright colors and Chinese calligraphy storefront signs were made much larger in order to be more visible as they jutted out from the walls.¹² Bright images of dragons and other Chinese zodiac animals were painted on the front of buildings, and the generally western style structures were made especially distinct from the rest of the city as they were often given pagoda roofs and

⁹ Hansi Lo Wang, “Chinese-American Descendants Uncover Forged Family Histories”

¹⁰ Mae M. Ngai, “How Chinatown Rose from the Ashes”

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

marked with stone lions to seem more “authentically” Chinese.¹³ It is because of his efforts that such faux-Chinese aesthetics, such as those depicted in figures 7, 8, and 9, are still seen today in the San Francisco Chinatown, and in other Chinatowns around the world.¹⁴



Fig. 7. Michael Maslan, Grant Street, 1885. Photograph, CORBIS, San Francisco, California. (accessed December 10, 2014)

¹³ Mae M. Ngai, “How Chinatown Rose from the Ashes”

¹⁴ Ibid.



Fig. 8. Grant Street, 1910. Post Card, Pacific Novelty Company. (accessed December 10, 2014)¹⁵



Fig. 9. David Gilmore, Grant Street, 2012. Photograph, David Gilmore's Studio. (accessed December 10, 2014)

¹⁵ Despite the address printed on the post card itself, this image is entitled "Grant Street" in the Pacific Novelty Company's archives.

Ultimately, this reconstruction of the San Francisco Chinatown marked a turning point for Chinese immigration in the United States. Newspaper articles, legislation, government documents, and personal accounts of racial discrimination prior to 1907 demonstrated that the presence of Chinese peoples was often met with resistance from local communities in California. Legislation discussed in the previous chapters specifically targeted Chinese communities, discouraging their presence, suppressing further immigration, limiting their freedom of expression, restricting the industries in which they could find employment, and ultimately rejecting any attempts at assimilation. Regardless of the efforts of organizations such as the Benevolent Six Companies, for outsiders, crime, disease, and immorality largely defined Chinese bodies and the spaces in which Chinese peoples lived. Crimes against Chinese peoples were often overlooked or treated as inconsequential, demonstrating that, even in the eyes of lawmakers, there was a perceived racial distinction of inferiority. In the words of the California governor John Bigler, Chinese peoples were untrustworthy foreigners who undercut white workers' wages, and leeches off the American economy by sending their income back to their families in China.¹⁶

After the San Francisco Chinatown's reconstruction however, newspaper articles, legislation, government documents, and personal accounts all demonstrated there was a change of heart. As *The San Francisco Call* proclaimed in 1910,

Chinatown has come back, new, brilliant, barbarously gorgeous. Chinatown of today is not a medley of old tumbled down houses, artistic rubbish and bad smells of our fond recollections, the delight of the artist, the despair of the health officer. . . before long the Chinese, if left to their own devices, will have another Chinatown as queer, as gorgeous, as beautiful, as barbaric, as mysterious, as full of strange sights and sounds as any artist or tourist could wish. The old smells are gone; may they never return.¹⁷

¹⁶ Mae M. Ngai, "How Chinatown Rose from the Ashes"

¹⁷ *The San Francisco Call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 16 Oct. 1910.

As Chinese investment became one of the key factors for San Francisco's general reestablishment and economic recovery, it forced politicians and lawmakers to reevaluate the way they understood Chinese peoples. While reconstruction was fresh in the minds of the local population, newspapers could no longer claim that the Chinese leached off the American economy or that they were somehow distinct from civilized society as they had claimed only months earlier. Legislation could no longer afford to discourage the presence of Chinese communities, and as such, the intention to suppress further immigration fell by the wayside. Amazingly, this meant that just five years after the Chinese Exclusion Act was renewed indefinitely, the movement of paper sons and daughters went largely uncontested even as the population of Chinese immigrants began to rise.¹⁸

The resistance from local communities that had met Chinese peoples throughout the last seventy years began to dissipate. However, this notable shift in attitude still had its limitations. Chinatown, along with all of its exaggerated elements of Chinese culture, was put on display for tourists and by 1910 several California travel agencies and postcards actively promoted Chinatown's existence as an attraction.¹⁹ While this meant there was a complete reversal on the legal limitations of Chinese self-expression, it also meant a perpetuation of several frustrating stereotypes that still plague many communities to this day. Namely, Chinese peoples were perceived as an oddity and their cultural expressions became spectacles of wonder and amusement. In many respects, a positive racism of supposed exoticism replaced the negative racism of the past several decades. One article from the *San Francisco Call* for example stated, "The oriental surrounds himself with mystery. It is the air he breathes. It emanates from his

¹⁸ University of Illinois. "Some State of California and City of San Francisco Anti-Chinese Legislation and Subsequent Action."

¹⁹ Mae M. Ngai, "How Chinatown Rose from the Ashes"

personality. It is part of him. . . the oriental drew about him all the mystery of the east and made of his restricted, tawdry district a land of romance.”²⁰ But where many articles prior to this date had continued this line of thought with racially biased assumptions about opium dens or brothels, this one goes on to say, “Did the Chinese live like poverty-stricken refugees during this past year? Not a bit of it. They have fared the same as ever.”²¹

From sources like these, it appears that some racial assumptions began shifting as many Chinese communities were no longer simply assumed to be a financial burden. Where articles before this point had described Chinese peoples as a disease, this one describes their transition from the Oakland Chinatown by stating, “. . .it came in a night. It will also go in a night, like some tropic plant that springs from the dank ground to its full height, spreads out the gaudy coarse petals of its heavily perfumed blossom, then withers and turns black and is gone.”²² This shift in public opinion can be characterized as a change of heart more than a tentative change of mood largely due to this issue of racial acceptance and tolerance. It seems that in some cases, the perception of racial inferiority weakened as a result of the San Francisco Chinatown’s reconstruction. Case in point, by August of 1907 the *San Francisco Call* ran a story called “The High Society of Chinatown” in which the author discusses the wealth, fineries, customs, and civility of Chinese society.²³ Naming several prominent Chinese women like Fook Lung Chang, it discusses how Chinese matrons serve their guests and how western society could learn from them in order to become more refined. In reference to these women, it states,

They are the leaders of Chinese society! And such society! We, in our occidental self complacency and content, have given but little heed to our neighbor or if by chance we

²⁰ *The San Francisco Call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 23 June 1907.

²¹ *Ibid*.

²² *Ibid*.

²³ *The San Francisco Call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 11 August 1907.

have ever given the matter a thought it has been with a secret scorn and derision. In reality we would so well to emulate these ladies in their hospitality and courteous entertainments. . . our social perceptions are far too delicate not to recognize such differences.²⁴

Moreover, it refers to the destruction of Chinatown as, “the obliteration of that picturesque and artistic portion of San Francisco known throughout the world as ‘Chinatown’ . . .”²⁵ Through examples like these, it can be argued that crime, disease, and immorality were slowly shifting away from how American media sources defined Chinese bodies and the spaces in which Chinese peoples lived. Additionally, after the reconstruction governmental records show a spike in the number of reported petty crimes against Chinese peoples in San Francisco, demonstrating those communities were no longer as overlooked or treated as inconsequential as before.²⁶ Through the efforts of organizations such as the Benevolent Six Companies, investors like Look Tin Eli, and the second generation Chinese Americans, the perceived racial inferiority of Chinese peoples could no longer be as widely accepted as it once was.

²⁴ *The San Francisco Call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 11 August 1907.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Elmer Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 112.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the San Francisco earthquake and subsequent fire had a profound impact on the local Chinatown and Chinese immigration as a whole. Chinese men, women, laborers, bankers, investors, diplomats, and scholars were some of the most influential economic contributors to the reconstruction of the city and, as this examination has demonstrated, there were major shifts in immigration law and public opinion of Chinese peoples as a direct consequence of their efforts. This thesis demonstrates how and why this shift happened, and in doing so, establishes that Chinese peoples were understood through their impact on economics and culture in the United States. Moreover, it further demonstrates that Chinese peoples had an active hand in the construction of their own identities while the phenomenon of paper sons and paper daughters began as a result of the city's destruction and it had an enormous impact on how and why Chinese immigration continued after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1902.

This examination has contributed to the rich body of scholarly works dedicated to the history of Chinese immigration to the United States by recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of the texts that have come before it. It discussed the origins of the Pearl River Delta immigrant communities, what motivated them to emigrate, where they were employed, and the social, political, cultural, and economic impacts of their presence. Furthermore, it demonstrated the importance of creating a dialogue between Chinese immigrants, California residents, and the various peoples in between. It used Chinese sources to represent Chinese perceptions and discussed the importance of San Francisco's destruction in the history of Chinese immigration in the United States. Finally, this examination has included the roles of Chinese women and how they participated in the history of Chinese immigration in the United States.

After the San Francisco earthquake and fire, Chinese communities still faced great prejudice and racially biased misconceptions. However, there was a change of heart in the way they were perceived by the local population. The argument that Chinese immigrants were leeches on the American economy dissipated when their contributions helped to rebuild San Francisco. Though they were not allowed to rebuild Chinatown without enormous assistance from the Chinese government, within a few months the California legislature could no longer afford to discourage the presence of Chinese communities, and as such, the intention to suppress further immigration largely ceased. The movement of paper sons and daughters went essentially uncontested even as the population of Chinese immigrants began to rise, and consequently, the San Francisco Chinatown housed mostly families for the first time.¹

The most important change however was that the perception of racial inferiority weakened as a result of the San Francisco Chinatown's reconstruction. Through the "Americanization" efforts of the Benevolent Six Companies and Look Tin Eli, Chinese bodies and the spaces in which they lived became largely defined by second generation Chinese Americans and their values. In the end, the supposed racial inferiority of Chinese peoples was challenged by San Francisco's reconstruction and, as it served as a model for Chinatowns the world over, it helped spread greater racial tolerance elsewhere in the country through economic codependence.

¹ Lau, 131-132.

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