

Cultural Defenders and Brokers: Chinese Responses to the Anti-Chinese Movement

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THE ANTI-CHINESE MOVEMENT AGAINST WHICH IMMIGRANTS and American-born Chinese fought during the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries existed simultaneously on several levels. In addition to the numerous mechanisms used to bar Chinese from mainstream American institutions and the physical intimidation and violence that they encountered regularly, the Chinese in America were confronted with an organized campaign to defame them in prose and in illustrations. Thus, the anti-Chinese movement was an early example of what is now often called a "culture war." Much of this "war" was a battle of words, waged in print as well as through other forms of public discourse. The exclusionists published an enormous number of pamphlets, essays, articles, novels, political cartoons, and other literary products advocating the exclusion of Chinese immigrants from the United States. This body of literature expressed the fears of what was known as the "Yellow Peril" in America.

In contrast, the Chinese had little recourse against their accusers. There is not much evidence to indicate that the Chinese physically retaliated against their attackers, although recent scholarship has revealed that the Chinese sought to challenge the discrimination that they faced by going on strike and by filing lawsuits in the American legal system.¹ Another avenue of resistance open to the Chinese was print journalism. By adopting the same rhetorical tactics as their critics—writing in English and publishing in some of the same periodicals, such as the *North American Review* and the *Overland Monthly*—the

Chinese elite in America attempted to gain some control over the images of the Chinese that were being presented to the American public. By offering alternative representations of themselves and by answering some of the charges levied against them, these writers hoped that attacks against the Chinese would lessen, that immigration legislation would be liberalized, and that the Chinese would eventually find acceptance in the American polity.

These writings by Chinese spokespersons in America also revealed how they viewed themselves. Writing in self-defense, they used four distinct, yet overlapping strategies: They denied the anti-Chinese charges and paraded the virtues of Chinese history and culture; they sought equal treatment with other groups in America on the basis of class similarities; they defended the presence of the Chinese in America by comparing themselves favorably with others or by denigrating other immigrant and minority groups, often in Sinocentric terms; and they turned American democratic ideals back on their accusers, demanding that they live up to their own professed standards. The Chinese joined their critics in a "culture war of words" in an attempt to defend their presence in the United States.

To investigate these debates, I focus mainly on competing Chinese positions. I start with a variety of anti-Chinese passages to set the rhetorical context for the Chinese response. Next, I discuss several Chinese-authored pieces that refute the critics; these writings demonstrate that Chinese diplomats, intellectuals, and community leaders, acting as cultural defenders, actively challenged the prevailing negative images of the Chinese created by the exclusionists, while defining their own lives and culture in terms of China's glorious past. Finally, by examining Yung Wing's life and career as a cultural broker, a role that contrasts with that of the Chinese elite spokespersons, I argue, on the basis of his love of American social values and the democratic ideals of inclusion, rather than his being a member of a formerly resplendent civilization, that his life in the United States can be viewed as the earliest recorded attempt by someone to find a niche in American society as a *Chinese American*. Although often at odds with one another, these divergent approaches by the Chinese in America to combat the exclusionists articulate an early Chinese American consciousness or identity—a blend of Sinocentric attitudes and an understanding of and appreciation for American civic ideals. Given the magnitude of anti-Chinese sentiments during this period, these writings reveal that much more effort was expended in attempts to negate unfavorable images than in the expression of a clearly defined Chinese

American sensibility that could develop independently of the anti-Chinese movement. Therefore, these examples of an incipient Chinese American consciousness were usually a form of self-defense rather than a celebration of the value and vitality of the Chinese American community.

The Anti-Chinese Movement: The Rhetoric of Exclusion

American opposition to the Chinese presence in the United States centered on two main issues, economics and race, both of which were usually framed as a critique of Chinese culture. Euro-American politicians, missionaries, labor leaders, and journalists argued that the Chinese degraded American labor by working for wages well below the standards needed to sustain an American family. And, because of the nature of their economic arrangements with their employers or mutual aid societies, the Chinese were accused of fostering a new system of slavery, or coolieism, in the United States. These economic issues were entwined with American racial antipathy toward the Chinese, who were considered immoral and unclean, biologically inferior, and perhaps most important, unassimilable. These two broad categories of opposition to the Chinese contributed to the belief that the Chinese immigrant presence in America was a threat to American institutions and "civilization."

Two of the richest sources of American images of Chinese immigrants are the 1876 California State Senate hearings and the U.S. congressional hearings on Chinese immigration.² A written memorial from the California Senate to the U.S. Congress argued that the Chinese were unfair competition in the labor market:

The male element of this population, where not criminal, comes into a painful competition with the most needy and most deserving of our people—those who are engaged, or entitled to be engaged, in industrial pursuits in our midst. The common laborer, the farm hand, the shoemaker, the cigar maker, the domestic male and female, and workmen of all descriptions, find their various occupations monopolized by Chinese labor, employed at a compensation upon which white labor cannot possibly exist.³

Besides the belief that the Chinese undercut wages, a strong conviction was held that the Chinese labored for bosses under a system akin

to slavery. This misunderstanding arose when many Euro-Americans failed to distinguish between two streams of Chinese emigrants: the Chinese taken to Cuba and Peru in the coolie trade and those who came to the United States as free or "semifree" emigrants with the aid of the so-called credit-ticket system.⁴ Equating these two groups of emigrants and misunderstanding the credit-ticket system, many commentators called Chinese immigration a new form of slavery—one that enslaved both male laborers and female prostitutes.⁵

Racially and culturally, the Chinese were frequently compared with black Americans and white Americans—comparisons that stressed racial hierarchies, the perceived immorality of the Chinese, their supposed cultural inferiority, and their ultimate unassimilability into American society. On the one hand, Chinese were considered as inferior as black Americans, "incapable of attaining the state of civilization [as] the Caucasian."⁶ On the other hand, Chinese were regarded as less assimilable than black Americans because, it was believed, the Chinese had once had an advanced civilization to which they clung. One witness at the congressional hearings declared:

I think the Chinese are a far superior race to the negro race physiologically and mentally. That may probably not be the case with some neat mulattoes who have white blood; that is different. I think that the Chinese have a great deal more brain power than the original negro. The negro, however, has never had any discipline; he has never had in Africa a regular religion as the Chinese have had. His mind is undisciplined, and it is not as systematic as the Chinese mind. For that reason the negro is very easily taught; he assimilates more readily. The Chinese are non-assimilative because their form of civilization has crystallized, as it were.⁷

These state and federal hearings helped contribute to the national mood that led to the passage of the first Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. However, the anti-Chinese movement continued unabated long after the exclusionists had carried the day. The original exclusion legislation of 1882 was repeatedly extended and strengthened through federal legislation in 1888, 1892, 1894, 1898, 1902, and 1904.⁸ Much of the rhetoric that surfaced in official documents also found expression in popular periodicals and in pamphlets published by labor organizations in their campaigns to extend Chinese exclusion legislation as each act came up for renewal.

In response to an earlier article by Ho Yow, the Chinese consul general in San Francisco, James D. Phelan, then mayor of San Francisco,

published an article in the *North American Review* in 1901 entitled "Why the Chinese Should Be Excluded."⁹ Advocating the renewal of the Chinese Exclusion Act for the second time, Phelan wrote, "Has there been any change in the nature of the evil, or in the sentiments of the people? Certainly not on the Pacific Coast, where the lapse of time has made still more evident the non-assimilative character of the Chinese and their undesirability as citizens."¹⁰ Phelan then proceeded to explain why Chinese exclusion legislation should be continued, basing his argument on American concepts of free labor, civilization, citizenship, and racial hierarchies. Regardless of how much or how little Chinese workers were paid, Phelan declared, "For all purposes of citizenship their usefulness ends with their day's work; and whatever they are paid, they are paid too much, because they make no contribution by service or citizenship or family life to the permanent interest of the country."¹¹ Although ideals of citizenship and family life are frequently linked in American civic discourse, Phelan disregarded the impact of exclusion legislation on the Chinese immigrant community. Such legislation had barred the Chinese from citizenship and greatly curtailed female immigration. The growth of Chinese American families and communities had thus been severely stunted, which rendered Phelan's complaint almost meaningless.

Near the end of his article, Phelan alluded to the Chinese as a disease, another prevalent theme in the anti-Chinese literature of this period. Chinese were often accused of carrying diseases, the men leprosy and the women various venereal diseases.¹² At the same time, the Chinese were deemed a social disease infecting the American body politic. As Phelan stated, "The Chinese may be good laborers, but they are not good citizens. They may in small numbers benefit individual employers, but they breed the germs of a national disease, which spreads as they spread, and grows as they grow."¹³

The idea that the Chinese were diseased or biologically inferior was widely articulated. One of the most subtle but significant examples can be found in the 1880 California Constitution. Its Article II outlined the rights of suffrage and stated: "No native of China, no idiot, insane person, or person convicted of any infamous crime, and no person hereafter convicted of the embezzlement or misappropriation of public money, shall ever exercise the privileges of an elector in this State."¹⁴ In short, Chinese were equated with idiots, insane persons, and convicted criminals, an association that would later find expression in other realms of popular consciousness. For example, "Mongolian" and "Mongoloid," originally anthropological labels used to classify Chi-

nese and other Asians, became code words to denote various forms of mental retardation.¹⁵

The theme of the Chinese as a disease was reiterated in the brochure published in 1902 by the American Federation of Labor (AFL), *Some Reasons for Chinese Exclusion: Meat vs. Rice; American Manhood against Asiatic Coolieism. Which Shall Survive?* Early in the document, the following assertion is found: "An advancement with an incubus like the Chinese is like the growth of a child with a malignant tumor upon his back. At the time of manhood death comes of the malignity."¹⁶ Published as part of organized labor's attempt to influence public opinion in favor of renewing the Chinese Exclusion Act, this text contains many of the fundamental themes of the anti-Chinese movement. Following the title page, an illustration is captioned "The American Gulliver and Chinese Lilliputians." The "American Gulliver," resembling Abraham Lincoln, is being shackled to the floor by hordes of tiny Chinese, complete with queues and buckteeth. They are securing "Gulliver" to the floor with bands and spikes; the words "cheap labor," "heathen competition," and "starvation labor" are written on the bands. In the distance, countless Chinese await entry. The bottom caption asks, "Shall the last spike be driven?" Was the American Gulliver/Great Emancipator/American Workingman to have the last blow dealt him by the relaxation of exclusion legislation? Just as a disease spreads throughout the body, invading cells without discrimination, so the masses of China, undifferentiated in appearance, were poised at the gate to overwhelm the American labor force, already on its back from years of "heathen competition."

Even more important than labor competition was the quality of American life. The main body of the AFL pamphlet concludes with the exclusionary rhetoric of Senator James G. Blaine (1830-1893) from Maine. Blaine, moving the stakes to a level far higher than mere wage differences, declared:

You cannot work a man who must have beef and bread, and would prefer beef, alongside of a man who can live on rice. In all such conflicts, and in all such struggles, the result is not to bring up the man who lives on rice to the beef-and-bread standard, but it is to bring down the beef-and-bread man to the rice standard.

We have this day to choose whether we will have for the Pacific Coast the civilization of Christ or the civilization of Confucius.¹⁷

Blaine's "choices" point to fundamental issues in American immigration history in general, and conflicts over Chinese immigra-

tion in particular. The tension between pluralism and the desire for homogeneity stands here in bold relief. Believing that Americans had to choose between the "civilization" of Christ or Confucius, those advocating exclusion cast the Chinese as perpetual foreigners, who because of their race and culture could never appreciate the fruits of American civilization. Such an attitude set the terms for the interaction between Euro-Americans and Chinese immigrants and placed the burden of proof on the Chinese to demonstrate their desirability as fellow citizens. When the first exclusion legislation was passed in 1882, American immigration policy crossed a line, as did the American self-image: No longer a nation freely open to all immigrants, the United States had chosen homogeneity and racial superiority over pluralism, while the American self-image was recast in response to the presence of an Other.

The Chinese Elite Response: In Defense of Culture

Given the rabidity of the anti-Chinese movement and its accompanying rhetoric, the Chinese had a tremendous task before them in their attempts to maintain a lasting presence in the United States. Appointed Chinese officials in the United States and local Chinese elites sought to lessen the sting of anti-Chinese activities by trying to control and protect the immigrant community through institutional means and moral exhortation. Among other things, they published articles and gave public speeches to defend the immigrant community (in the process developing a self-definition that reflected not only shifts in the worldview of the Chinese elite in America, but also the limits of their racial and cultural discourse), which often placed them in the position of having to define who the Chinese were *not*, rather than who they were.

Of the Chinese foreign ministers assigned to the United States, Wu Tingfang (1842-1922) was the most active in writing and giving public lectures on behalf of the Chinese immigrant community in the United States. Rather than simply attack American exclusion policy as immoral or unjust, Wu tried to convince the American public that the policy was detrimental to U.S. interests. He first stressed the trade potential between the two countries. In the *North American Review*, a periodical that frequently printed anti-Chinese articles, Wu stated: "Let the products of American farms, mills, and workshops once catch the Chinese fancy, and America need look no further for a market. . . . I would suggest that American farmers and manufacturers might find

it to their advantage to study the wants and habits of the Chinese and the conditions of trade in China." ¹⁸

Wu also encouraged using American capital to invest in China's future by providing aid for the construction of railroads and various public works. Wu argued that, seen in the light of reciprocal business relations between the two countries, such trade and investment not only would be a great benefit to both parties, but also would facilitate better relations.

However, full reciprocity could not exist if the United States maintained its exclusionary immigration policies toward China. This recognition framed Wu's second theme: equal treatment for the Chinese. He wanted American immigration policy to reflect parity between the two nations, and he demanded that Chinese immigrants be treated the same as others:

Justice would seem to demand equal consideration for the Chinese on the part of the United States. China does not ask for special favors. All she wants is enjoyment of the same privileges accorded other nationalities. Instead, she is singled out for discrimination and made the subject of hostile legislation. Her door is wide open to the people of the United States, but their door is slammed in the face of her people. I am not so biased as to advocate any policy that might be detrimental to the best interests of the people of the United States. If they think it desirable to keep out the objectionable class of Chinese, by all means let them do so. Let them make their immigration laws as strict as possible, but let them be applicable to all foreigners. ¹⁹

Wu was careful not to challenge the right of the United States to determine the nature of its immigration laws, but he made a strong appeal to ideals of equal treatment. Thus, he placed the onus for the immigration crisis on the American government rather than on the supposed cultural flaws of the Chinese.

In his defense of the Chinese, however, Wu's class and racial biases became evident. His distance from the working classes and his belief in Chinese cultural superiority are obvious in many passages of his writings. While decrying the treatment of Chinese students and merchants in the United States, he drew a clear distinction between desirable and unwanted immigrants:

It [the Chinese Exclusion Act] aimed to provide for the exclusion of Chinese laborers only, while freely admitting all others. As a matter of

fact, the respectable merchant, who would be an irreproachable addition to the population of any country, has been frequently turned back, whereas the Chinese high-binders, the riff-raff and scum of the nation, fugitives from justice and adventurers of all types have too often effected an entrance without much difficulty. This is because the American officials at the entrance ports are ignorant of Chinese character and dialects and cannot always discriminate between the worthy and unworthy.²⁰

Not only did Wu sound like an anti-Chinese exclusionist at times, he also echoed sentiments held by nineteenth-century anti-immigrant nativists. In his published memoir, written in English, *America Through the Spectacles of an Oriental Diplomat*, he wrote:

In a large country like America where a considerable portion of the land remains practically uncultivated or undeveloped, hardy, industrious, and patient workmen are a necessity. But the almost unchecked influx of immigrants who are not desirable citizens cannot but harm the country. In these days of international trade it is right that ingress and egress from one country to another should be unhampered, but persons who have committed crimes at home, or who are ignorant and illiterate, cannot become desirable citizens anywhere. They should be barred out of the United States of America.²¹

Whether or not Wu included Chinese laborers in this group is uncertain, but clearly he embraced class attitudes similar to those of Americans who favored immigration restriction.

On the other hand, Wu often spoke of the Chinese in terms that placed them above other races. Speaking against exclusion, he stated, "So long as honest and steady workmen are excluded for no reason other than they are Asiatics, while white men are indiscriminately admitted, I fear the prosperity of the country cannot be considered permanent."²² More directly, he glorified the past achievements of Chinese civilization vis-à-vis Western achievements, claiming,

It is too often forgotten that civilization, like religion, originally came from the East. Long before Europe and America were civilized, yea while they were still in a state of barbarism, there were nations in the East, including China, superior to them in manners, in education, and in government; possessed of a literature equal to any, and of arts and sciences totally unknown in the West. Self-preservation and self-inter-

est make all men restless, and so Eastern peoples gradually moved to the West taking their knowledge with them; Western people who came into close contact with them learned their civilization. This fusion of East and West was the beginning of Western civilization.²³

Having "established" the origins of Western civilization, Wu took the moral high ground, using language rooted in Sinocentrism to condemn white supremacy:

Those who support such a policy hold that they, the white people, are superior to the yellow people in intellect, in education, in taste, and in habits, and that the yellow people are unworthy to associate with them. Yet in China we have manners, we have arts, we have morals, and we have managed a fairly large society for thousands of years without the bitter class hatreds, class divisions, and class struggles that have marred the fair progress of the West. We have not enslaved our lives to wealth. We like luxury but we like other things better. We love life more than chasing imitations of life.²⁴

Finally, Wu warned the exclusionists, "I only wish to give a hint to those white people who advocate an exclusive policy that in their next life they may be born in Asia or in Africa, and that the injury they are now inflicting on the yellow people they may themselves have to suffer in another life."²⁵

Educated primarily in Western institutions, Wu had adopted many Western attitudes, most notably his respect for the concepts of equal treatment under the law and reciprocity in international relations. In his defense of the Chinese and Chinese culture, however, his Sinocentrism surfaced. By claiming that the Chinese had developed a high civilization long before the West had done so and by castigating the exclusionists as morally deficient, Wu implied that Americans were inferior to the Chinese. Working constantly for the repeal of the exclusionary statutes, Wu was among the most articulate Chinese of his era in his efforts to defend the Chinese, but his writings also reveal the limits of his worldview. Unable to effect changes in U.S. immigration policy, Wu could only protest through his writings, often using Sinocentric rhetoric, unable to bridge fully the cultural gulf between the two nations.

During Wu's first term as minister (1896-1902), his brother-in-law, Ho Yow, served as China's consul general in San Francisco. A graduate of Oxford University, Ho also used the press to defend the Chinese in America.²⁶ He first published an article in 1901 in the *North American*

Review, "Chinese Exclusion, a Benefit or a Harm?" which elicited James Phelan's response two months later. Ho began by denouncing isolationism, equating the Great Wall of China with American exclusion policy. Both, he believed, were obstructions to greater understanding. He wrote,

In the fourteenth century the Ming emperors constructed of brick and mortar in China on the north and west a memorable obstacle to intercourse with the people beyond the border; that barrier is crumbling to ashes, and we have been prone to look upon it as a relic of old China. But this most enlightened nation of the illuminated West, in the height of its glory and splendor, revives what is dead and past with us, and enthrones it into a living, active principle. Bricks and mortar do not comprise [sic] the Great Wall which the United States has built against China. It is the old idea, the folly of which we of China have long seen, rehabilitated and swathed in modern attire; its bricks are printed words, and the base upon which it rests is a solemn code; but its parapets are none the less patrolled, and from its battlements gleam the steel of the mediaeval soldier.²⁷

However, recognition of the failings of mutual ethnocentrism soon gave way to a defense of the Chinese: "In point of fact the immigration which has come to the United States from Asia has been in all respects as good as that which has come from Europe. In some respects it has been a great deal better; for we have never aided thither paupers, criminals nor insane persons, and this slough comprised so considerable a percentage of the European immigration that it became necessary for Congress to enact a law extending to them the treatment which it visits upon the Chinese."²⁸ Ho Yow thus used a tactic similar to Wu Tingfang's: When cast as the undesirable Other, reverse the gaze and subject your accuser to the same process of alterity.

Ho continued his defense of the Chinese the following month with an article, "The Chinese Question," in the *Overland Monthly*. Illustrated with photographs of San Francisco's Chinatown by Arnold Genthe, this article answered a number of charges against the Chinese.²⁹ Again, Ho compared the Chinese with European immigrants, this time drawing a distinction between "American" labor and immigrant labor. He claimed,

We contend that the Chinese do a different class of work than the true white laborers. The Chinese work at manual, unskilled occupations,

doing a lower class of work than the great majority of the whites. The Americans are more skilled, requiring and possessing technical education and high manipulative and administrative ability, fitting them particularly for foremen, engineers, draftsmen, high-grade mechanics, and the like, while the Chinese do more of fruit picking, truck gardening, and work of a lower type, and are not what would be considered skilled laborers. The Chinese, in a measure, do conflict with the imported pauper labor of Europe, which in no sense can be termed typical white labor.³⁰

In this case, Ho subordinated the Chinese to "American" labor but implicitly placed the Chinese above newly arrived immigrants from Europe. Following a line of thought similar to Wu Tingfang's, Ho appealed to American commercial interests with the hope of lessening the hostility against the Chinese: "By admitting the Chinese, this country would gain many more advantages than it does from the admission of the same classes from other countries. You would get commercial and other beneficial returns from China in a large and profitable measure, while you would not get half as much from the others."³¹ In passages such as these, the Chinese spokespersons, like their detractors, clearly viewed exclusion not merely in terms of race, but also in terms of class.

Answering the charges against the Chinese for being unclean and diseased, Ho further raised issues of class:

As to the question of cleanliness, the Chinese laboring class is just as clean as the corresponding class of any other nationality. If a comparison could be instituted right here in San Francisco of the same classes of all nationalities, my statement would be verified. The Chinese in this country must be regarded, generally, as of the laboring class and adjudged as such. It is unfair to compare the Chinese laboring classes with the white middle or higher classes. There is no reason why the Chinese are likely to introduce more diseases into this country than any similar classes from other countries. Were the Chinese responsible for the great historical plague of London? There were no Chinese in London then. The Chinese are laboring under many disadvantages, but there is no reason why they should be made into bacilli to suit the pleasure of the selfish and spiteful.³²

By depicting Europeans as equally disease prone as the Chinese, Ho was seeking a degree of parity. Although he was committed to the de-

fense of the Chinese, Ho's Sinocentric worldview, based to a large degree on social hierarchies, prevented him from offering any fresh argument as to why exclusion should be repealed. He could see only the differences and the convenient similarities between the two cultures and ranked the Chinese higher than European immigrants to advance the status of the Chinese. In this way, Ho and Wu Tingfang both used European immigrants as a foil to deflect the tensions between the Chinese and the Americans.

In addition to the appointed officials, the resident Chinese elite also published works in response to the exclusionists' rhetoric. Based primarily in San Francisco, but in cities such as New York as well, some of the individuals (often merchants) who served as spokespersons for the community had been educated in American schools or missionary institutions. This training not only provided them with the writing skills needed to challenge their accusers, but no doubt also informed their perception of their situation and shaped their response to it.

One of the earliest statements made by Chinese in San Francisco appeared in response to Governor John Bigler's letter of April 23, 1852, to the Senate and Assembly of the State of California calling for the exclusion of Chinese laborers.³³ Bigler referred to the Chinese as "Coolies," claiming that they were unfit to testify in American courts and, because of their culture and pecuniary interest in mining gold, did not want to become American citizens.³⁴ In a letter dated April 29, 1852, and reprinted in the July issue of *Living Age*, two Chinese met Bigler's accusations and requests for immigration restriction head on. Hab Wa and Long Achick of Sam Wo Company and Ton Wo Company, respectively, claimed to have been educated in American schools and could therefore read the Governor's message and explain it to other Chinese in California.³⁵ These authors first explained that the Chinese laborers in California were not "Coolies" in the pejorative sense of the word. Instead, they pointed out that the word "Cooly" [*sic*] was not a Chinese word, but one of foreign (Indian) origin.³⁶ To the Chinese, the term had come to mean a common laborer, not one "bound to labor under contracts which they can be forcibly compelled to comply with."³⁷ Keeping to this simple definition, the authors maintained, "The Irishmen who are engaged in digging down your hills, the men who unload ships, who clean streets, or even drive your drays, would, if they were in China be considered 'Coolies.'"³⁸ Like the Chinese officials who came after them, these early writers sought to deflect criticism of the Chinese by pointing out that the Chinese were similar to the other working people in America.

After making lengthy comparisons that favored Chinese laborers over other immigrants in America and after praising the economic possibilities of Sino-American trade relations, Hab Wa and Long Achick addressed Bigler's charge that the Chinese were neither fit for nor desirous of American citizenship. After forcefully defending the integrity and honesty of the Chinese, qualities that would make them good citizens, the authors concluded:

There is a Chinaman now in San Francisco who is said to be a naturalized citizen, and to have a free white American wife. He wears the American dress, and is considered a man of respectability. And there are, or were lately, we are informed, Chinamen residing in Boston, New York, and New Orleans. If the privileges of your laws are open to us, some of us will, doubtless, acquire your habits, your language, your ideas, your feelings, your morals, your forms, and become citizens of your country—many have already adopted your religion as their own—and we will be good citizens. There are very good Chinamen now in the country, and a better class, will, if allowed, come hereafter—men of learning and of wealth, bringing their families with them.³⁹

This document, and this passage in particular, is an important testimony to the depth of conviction that some Chinese held with regard to living in the United States. It demonstrates a willingness on the part of the Chinese, as early as 1852, to adapt to American social mores and embrace American civic values in order to live a life of equal status in America. Also apparent are the beginnings of a rhetorical strategy that would be used for years to challenge the exclusionists and to attempt to claim a place for the Chinese in American society: refuting anti-Chinese charges, offering alternative readings of the Chinese presence in the United States, equating Chinese immigrants with other immigrant groups, and stating a desire to sink roots among the people of America.

Three years after the letter in *Living Age*, Norman Asing also responded to Governor Bigler's call for exclusion by writing a letter to the *Daily Alta California*. Asing argued that China's ancient civilization was an indication of China's cultural superiority. He remarked, "But we would beg to remind you that when your nation was a wilderness, and the nation from which you sprung barbarous, we exercised most of the arts and virtues of civilized life."⁴⁰ This all-too-common Sinocentric attitude was then followed by a rather eloquent dismissal of racial hierarchies based on skin color:

As far as regards the color and complexion of our race, we are perfectly aware that our population have been a little more tan than yours. Your Excellency will discover, however, that we are as much allied to the African race and the red man as you are yourself, and that as far as the aristocracy of skin is concerned, ours might compare with many of the European races; nor do we consider that your Excellency, as a Democrat, will make us believe that the framers of your declaration of rights ever suggested the propriety of establishing an aristocracy of skin.⁴¹

Asing's response to those who advocated restriction or exclusion was consistent with the tone and approach of many of the publications of that era, as well as those that appeared later.

Also speaking to Bigler's call for exclusion, Lai Chun-chuen, representing the Chinese merchants of San Francisco, wrote: "But of late days your honorable people have established a new practice. They have come to the conclusion that we Chinese are the same as Indians and Negroes, and your courts will not allow us to bear witness. And yet these Indians know nothing about the relations of society; they know no mutual respect; they wear neither clothes nor shoes; they live in wild places and in caves."⁴² Lai thus shared Asing's tactic of privileging Chinese culture to downplay the achievements of the West and to degrade other peoples.

Nonwhite peoples were not the only groups that the Chinese cited as inferior in their attempts to deflect criticism. Yan Phou Lee, a former student brought to the United States by the Chinese Educational Mission in Hartford, Connecticut, a graduate of Yale University, and a naturalized citizen, remarked in the *North American Review*: "Why is it that the American laborer was soon raised to a higher social and industrial plane, and ceased to fear Irish competition, while the Irish still dread the competition of the Chinese? It is simply because the Irish are industrially inferior to their competitors. They have not the ability to get above competition, like the Americans, and so, perforce, they must dispute with the Chinese for the chance to be hewers of wood and drawers of water."⁴³ Thus, Lee denigrated the Irish in order to find acceptance for the Chinese. Employing a discourse that was influenced not only by Confucian concepts of social hierarchy, but also by Western notions of racial hierarchy and the progressive development of culture, these Chinese spokespersons were often unable to provide any alternative to the prevailing popular discourse in which American race relations were framed.

Yan Phou Lee also engaged in a brief dispute with publisher and Chinese-rights activist Wong Chin Foo over the supposed benefits of Christianity.⁴⁴ In the August 1887 issue of the *North American Review*, Wong had published an article, "Why Am I a Heathen?" in which he pointedly attacked what he saw as the hypocrisy of American Christians who preached the doctrines of equality and good will and yet supported the exclusion of Chinese. Remarking on the practice of the New Dispensation (the forgiveness of sins), Wong pondered, "Applying this dogma, I began to think of my own prospects on the other side of Jordan. Suppose Dennis [*sic*] Kearney, the California sand-lotter, should slip in and meet me there, would he not be likely to forget his heavenly songs, and howl once more: 'The Chinese must go!' and organize a heavenly crusade to have me and others immediately cast out into the other place?"⁴⁵

Wong continued in a similar vein, casting Christianity as a doctrine of deception. And, like others before and after him, Wong claimed that Western civilization was "borrowed, adapted, and shaped from our [Chinese] older form."⁴⁶

Yan Phou Lee, a devout Christian, took exception to Wong's views. Writing in the next issue of the *North American Review*, Lee argued that the Americans who supported exclusion policies were not true Christians. His Christian faith was so deep that he answered Wong Chin Foo by stating, "Such, indeed, is its [Christianity's] power to change the heart of man, that even if Dennis [*sic*] Kearney should slip into the Heavenly Jerusalem, he would be lamb-like and would be heard to say: *The Chinese must stay!* Heaven is incomplete without them."⁴⁷ In the remainder of the article, Lee extolled the virtues of Christianity, maintaining, "It is the Christian who looks on me as his equal and who thinks that the Chinese are as well endowed, mentally, as he."⁴⁸

The content of the exchange between Wong and Lee is perhaps less significant, however, than the fact that their conflicting views appeared in English in a popular periodical of the time. The publication of these articles is important because it publicized the views of two Chinese writing in English in competing discourses, but both grappling with the problems of exclusion and the attempt by the Chinese to establish themselves in America. Therefore, the Chinese response to the anti-Chinese movement was not monolithic but, rather, multifaceted, disclosing both Chinese and Western influences on an emerging Chinese American consciousness.

Most of the time, the local elite used the same approach as the appointed officials: They refuted the charges made against the Chinese

and stressed the ideals of equality and fair treatment. Writing President Ulysses S. Grant in 1876, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA, also known as the Chinese Six Companies) declared that not all Chinese women in the United States were prostitutes and that white men were a part of this sordid business as well; that the Chinese diet, although different from that of many Americans, was hardly a cause for immigration restriction; that the Chinese Six Companies was not a secret tribunal; and that the Chinese in America were wage earners, not slaves. As the CCBA stated, "If these men are slaves, then all men laboring for wages are slaves."⁴⁹ These authors also pointed out that the United States had a policy to "welcome immigration," that the Burlingame Treaty of 1868 provided for Chinese immigration to America, and that the Chinese had "neither attempted nor desired to interfere with the established order of things in this country, either of politics or religion."⁵⁰ In other words, no cause existed for the Chinese to be singled out for exclusion.

These views on race and justice were apparently shared by some Chinese working people. One of the few writings left by a Chinese launderer from this period stated:

Irish fill the almshouses and prisons and orphan asylums, Italians are among the most dangerous of men, Jews are unclean and ignorant. Yet they are all let in, while Chinese, who are sober, or duly law abiding, clean, educated and industrious, are shut out. There are few Chinamen in jails and none in the poor houses. There are no Chinese tramps or drunkards. Many Chinese here have become sincere Christians, in spite of the persecution which they have to endure from their heathen countrymen. More than half the Chinese in this country would become citizens if allowed to do so, and would be patriotic Americans. But how can they make this country their home as matters are now? They are not allowed to bring wives here from China, and if they marry American women there is a great outcry.

All Congressmen acknowledge the injustice of the treatment of my people, yet they continue it. They have no backbone.

Under the circumstances, how can I call this my home, and how can any one blame me if I take my money and go back to my village in China?⁵¹

For the most part, however, the diplomats, intellectuals, and local elite who spoke out against exclusion and American attitudes toward the Chinese maintained a Sinocentric worldview, playing the role of cultural

defenders. Coming from a country that had traditionally considered itself the center of the civilized world, these members of the Chinese elite protested American immigration policy because it offended their Chinese sensibilities. They demanded fair treatment for themselves and their lower-class compatriots on the basis of China's great civilization and past achievements. When seeking treatment equal to that of other immigrant groups, these individuals often resorted to denigrating the other groups to elevate the status of the Chinese. Even their appeals to American standards of justice and fairness were a tactic designed to make Americans live up to the rhetoric of democracy, but there is little indication that these Chinese spokespersons personally believed in democratic practices. One man, Yung Wing, however, stood in contrast to most of his peers. Acting as a cultural broker between Chinese and American worldviews, he rejected Sinocentrism, embraced American political and civic values, and made the United States his adopted home.

Yung Wing: Challenging Sinocentrism and American Ideals of Inclusion

Yung Wing and a number of the young Chinese who were educated in the United States underwent a cultural metamorphosis during their time in America. Those who returned to China with a Western education to serve their country aided China's entry into the modern family of nations, which underscores the fact that China's modern transformation was shaped in part by the Chinese experience in America. This process produced a new model of Chinese intellectuals and immigrants through hybridization.⁵² No longer exclusively Chinese subjects in America, Yung Wing and the others who remained in or later returned to the United States were among the first transplanted Chinese in America who clearly demonstrated that psychocultural development could occur despite legal constraints.

Yung Wing was born on November 17, 1823, in the village of Nam Ping on Pedro Island, about four miles southwest of the Portuguese colony of Macao. When Yung was seven years old, his father, for unknown reasons, enrolled him in a missionary school in Macao run by the Reverend Charles Gutzlaff's wife. Yung would henceforth receive mainly an American education, primarily in English. This alone set him apart from most of the Chinese of his time, and his life foreshadowed the cultural evolution that many Chinese would undergo in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

After Yung Wing had attended this school for about four years, Mrs. Gutzlaff returned to the United States and the school was disbanded. Yung then returned to his village and resumed studying Chinese. During this period, his father died and the children had to support the family. Yung sold candy on the street and gleaned rice in the fields. Soon, he found employment in the office of a Catholic priest who needed someone who could read Arabic numerals to assist in various clerical duties. After four months in this position, Yung was able to resume his education. He received word from one of Mrs. Gutzlaff's friends that he could attend the Morrison Education Society School in Macao, then under the direction of the Reverend Samuel R. Brown (Yale, 1832) and his wife.

The Morrison School had opened in 1839; when Yung entered it in 1841, five other Chinese boys were already enrolled, Wong Shing, Li Kan, Chow Wan, Tang Chik, and Wong Foon.⁵³ The students studied arithmetic, geography, and reading, and attended classes in English-language training in the morning and Chinese in the afternoon. At the end of the first Opium War in 1842, the school was moved to Hong Kong, where it remained until it closed in 1850. In 1846, the Reverend Brown announced that he was returning to the United States because of ill health but hoped that a number of his students would accompany him to complete their education in America. Yung Wing, Wong Foon, and Wong Shing volunteered and received permission from their families to go abroad. Several patrons were found in Hong Kong who pledged to support the students' families during their expected two-year sojourn in the United States. These patrons also helped defray the students' expenses. Yung and his classmates arrived in America in April 1847 and were enrolled in the Monson Academy in Monson, Massachusetts, under the direction of the Reverend Charles Hammond (Yale, 1839).

Wong Shing had to return to China in the spring of 1849 because of his failing health, but he subsequently played important supporting roles in Sino-American diplomacy.⁵⁴ Wong Foon and Yung Wing, however, did not want to return to their native country at the completion of their studies at the Monson Academy. To prolong their stay abroad, Yung and Wong had to gain permission and further aid from their benefactors in Hong Kong, who agreed to continue to support their education if they would attend the University of Edinburgh. Wong Foon accepted this offer, but Yung Wing chose to remain in the United States, hoping to attend Yale University. Wong Foon graduated from the University of Edinburgh and returned to China in 1857 as China's first Western-trained physician.⁵⁵

That Yung decided to remain in the United States, rather than to return to China or continue his education in Scotland, reveals his strong attraction to American life. His serious reevaluation—and rejection—of Chinese culture led to his decision. In a letter to Samuel Wells Williams, the American chargé d'affaires in China and a Morrison Education Society trustee, a lifelong friend whom Yung had first met when he was a student in Hong Kong, Yung explained his desire to remain in the United States:

Of course you are aware that my feelings would not allow me to leave my mother and the brothers and sisters, since I promised them all when I left China to return in two or three years and you know full [sic] well the prejudice of the Chinese, how they misrepresent things, and that they are not able to see as you or any enlightened mind do, the object, the advantage, and value of being [Western] educated. Ignorance and superstition have sealed the noble faculties of their minds, how can they appreciate things of such worth?⁵⁶

This passage reveals that Yung had already distanced himself from a strictly Chinese worldview and was privileging Western learning. He contrasted what he saw as Chinese "prejudice" and "ignorance and superstition" with the "enlightened mind" produced by an American education. He believed that fundamental differences existed in the manner in which Chinese and Americans viewed the world and that the American approach was better.

Yung Wing entered Yale soon after Wong Foon departed for Edinburgh. There, his appreciation of American culture became even more pronounced. He became a naturalized American citizen on October 30, 1852, in New Haven,⁵⁷ a fact that spoke strongly of his changing self-perception: He was no longer simply a Chinese student in America; he was formally staking his claim as a Chinese American.

Another indication of Yung's embrace of Western culture was his active Christian affiliation. According to his friend, the Reverend Joseph Twichell, Yung's conversion to Christianity occurred while he was attending the Monson Academy, when he became a member of the Monson Congregational Church.⁵⁸ Yung's faith appears to have been sincere; his personal writings are replete with references to God and the importance of good works. His conversion was more than a break with fundamental Chinese cultural traditions; it marked a conscious separation from his family and a significant break with Confucian tenets of filial piety. Yung did not even return to China in 1850 to mourn the death of