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SEARCHING FOR GOLD MOUNTAIN

Strangers from a Pacific Shore

BUT CALIBAN COULD have been Asian. "Have we devils here?" the theatergoers heard Stephano declare in *The Tempest*. "Do you put tricks upon's with savages and men of Inde, ha?" The war against Mexico reflected America's quest for a passage to India. During the nineteenth century, this vision inspired Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri to proclaim the movement toward Asia as America's destiny. The "White" race was obeying the "divine command, to subdue and replenish the earth," as it searched for new and distant lands. As whites migrated westward, Benton pointed out, they were destroying "savagery." As civilization advanced, the "Capitol" had replaced the "wigwam," "Christians" had replaced "savages," and "white matrons" had replaced "red squaws." Under the "touch" of an "American road to India," Benton exclaimed, the western wilderness would "start" into life, creating a long line of cities across the continent. Crossing the Rocky Mountains and reaching the Pacific, whites were finally circumnavigating the earth to bring civilization to the "Yellow" race.[1]

The annexation of California led not only to American expansion toward Asia, but also the migration of Asians to America. In a plan sent to Congress in 1848 shortly after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo,

policymaker Aaron H. Palmer predicted that San Francisco, connected by railroad to the Atlantic states, would become the "great emporium of our commerce on the Pacific." Chinese laborers, he proposed, should be imported to build the transcontinental railroad as well as bring the fertile lands of California under cultivation. "No people in all the East are so well adapted for clearing wild lands and raising every species of agricultural product . . . as the Chinese."[2]

Pioneers from Asia

A year later, Chinese migrants began arriving in America, but they came for their own reasons. Many sought sanctuary from intense conflicts in China caused by the British Opium Wars. Significantly, while British colonialism in Ireland was creating conditions of push there, it was also generating pressures for emigration from China. Many migrants were also fleeing from the turmoil of peasant rebellions such as the Red Turban Rebellion and the bloody strife between the *Punti* (Local People) and the *Hakkas* (Guest People) over possession of the fertile delta lands. "Ever since the disturbances caused by the Red [Turban] bandits and the Kejia bandits," a Chinese government report noted, "dealings with foreigners have increased greatly. The able-bodied go abroad."[3]

Harsh economic conditions also drove Chinese migrants to seek survival in America. Forced to pay large indemnities to Western imperialist powers, the Qing government imposed high taxes on peasant farmers; unable to pay these taxes, many of them lost their lands. Floods intensified the suffering. "The rains have been falling for forty days," an 1847 report to the emperor stated, "until the rivers, and the sea, and the lakes, and the streams have joined in one sheet over the land [for miles]." Behind the emigrating spirit was starvation. "The population is extremely dense," an observer explained; "the means of subsistence, in ordinary times, are seldom above the demand, and consequently, the least failure of the rice crop produces wretchedness."[4]

Learning about *Gam Saan,* "Gold Mountain," many of the younger, more impatient, and more daring Chinese left their villages for America. The migrants were mostly men, planning to work away from home temporarily. They were illiterate or had very little schooling, but they dreamed of new possibilities inspired by stories of the "gold hills." To these hopeful migrants, America possessed an alluring boundlessness, promising not only gold but also opportunities for employment. In the port cities, circulars distributed by labor brokers announced: "Americans are very rich people. They want the Chinaman to come and make him very welcome. There you will have great pay, large houses, and food and clothing of the finest description. . . . It is a nice country, without mandarins or soldiers. . . . Money is in great plenty and to spare in America." Chinese who returned to their villages with money they had made in Hawaii and America reinforced the excitement of emigration. Sixteen-year-old Lee Chew recalled the triumphant return of a fellow villager from the "country of the American wizards." With the money he had earned overseas, he bought land as spacious as "four city blocks" and built a palace on it. Then he invited his family and friends to a grand party where they were served a hundred roasted pigs, chickens, ducks, geese, and an abundance of dainties. Young Lee was inspired, eager to leave for this fabulous country.[5]

America seemed so beckoning. "After leaving the village," an immigrant said, "I went to Hong Kong and stayed at a [firm] owned by people named Quan. I stayed there ten days to take care of the paper work for passage. At that time all I knew was that [travelers to the Golden Mountain] who came back were always rich." During the 1860s, a Chinese laborer might earn three to five dollars a month in China; in California, he could work for the railroad and make thirty dollars a month. A folk song expressed the emotions of many migrants:

> *In the second reign year of Haamfung [1852], a trip*
> *to Gold Mountain was made.*
> *With a pillow on my shoulder, I began my perilous*
> *journey:*
> *Sailing a boat with bamboo poles across the sea,*
> *Leaving behind wife and sisters in search of money,*
> *No longer lingering with the woman in the bedroom,*
> *No longer paying respect to parents at home.*[6]

Contrary to the popular stereotype and myth, these Chinese migrants were not "coolies" — unfree laborers who had been kidnapped or pressed into service by coercion and shipped to a foreign country. Actually, they had come to America voluntarily as free laborers: some of them paid their own way, and probably most of them borrowed the necessary funding through the credit-ticket system. Under this arrangement, an individual borrowed money from a broker to cover the cost of transportation and then paid off the loan plus interest out of his earnings in the new country. "The Chinese emigration to California,"

reported a British official stationed in Hong Kong in 1853, "was, by and large, free and voluntary. The Chinese emigration to California is now almost wholly confined to independent emigrants who pay their own passage money, and are in a condition to look to their arrangements." William Speer, who worked as a missionary in San Francisco's Chinatown for decades beginning in the 1850s, never found evidence that Chinese laborers had been "brought over by capitalists and worked as slaves . . . against their will." The claim that the Chinese were "coolies," Speer declared, was "fiction."[7]

The majority of the migrants were married. As they prepared to leave their farms and villages, they realized that they would probably not see their wives again for years. But they promised to return someday.

Right after we were wed, Husband, you set
out on a journey.
How was I to tell you how I felt?
Wandering around a foreign country, when
will you ever come home?
I beg of you, after you depart, to come back soon,
Our separation will be only a flash of time;
I only wish that you would have good fortune,
In three years you would be home again.
Also, I beg of you that your heart won't change,
That you keep your heart and mind on taking care
of your family;
Each month or half a month send a letter home,
In two or three years my wish is to welcome
you home.[8]

And so they left China, by the hundreds of thousands. Three hundred and twenty-five Chinese migrants joined the "Forty-Niners" rushing to California. Like their counterparts from the eastern United States and elsewhere, they came to search for gold. A year later, 450 more Chinese arrived in California; then, suddenly, they came in greatly increasing numbers — 2,716 in 1851 and 20,026 in 1852. By 1870, there were 63,000 Chinese in the United States. Most of them — 77 percent — were living in California, but they were elsewhere in the West as well as in the Southwest, New England, and the South. The Chinese constituted a sizable proportion of the population in certain areas: 29 percent in Idaho, 10 percent in Montana, and 9 percent in California. By 1930,

about 400,000 had made the Pacific crossing to America. Significantly, about half of them stayed and made the United States their permanent home.

At first, there were signs that the Chinese were welcome in California. "Quite a large number of the Celestials have arrived among us of late, enticed thither by the golden romance that has filled the world," the *Daily Alta California* reported in 1852. "Scarcely a ship arrives that does not bring an increase to this worthy integer of our population." The paper predicted that "the China boys will yet vote at the same polls, study at the same schools and bow at the same altar as our own countrymen." Three years later, merchant Lai Chun-Chuen of San Francisco sanguinely observed that "the people of the Flowery land [China] were received like guests," and "greeted with favor. Each treated the other with politeness. From far and near we came and were pleased."[9]

But Lai failed to notice the rapidly changing political climate that had begun to turn against his fellow immigrants. From the gold fields of the Sierras came the nativist cry: "California for Americans." In 1850, the legislature enacted a foreign miners' tax designed to eliminate Mexican miners. This law was soon repealed, but in 1852, the legislature enacted another foreign miners' tax. Aimed mainly at the Chinese, this tax required a monthly payment of three dollars from every foreign miner who did not desire to become a citizen. Even if they had wanted to, the Chinese could not have become citizens, for they had been rendered ineligible for citizenship by a 1790 federal law that reserved naturalized citizenship for "white" persons. The foreign miners' tax remained in force until it was voided by the 1870 Civil Rights Act. By then, California had collected five million dollars from the Chinese, a sum representing 25 to 50 percent of all state revenue.[10]

During the 1860s, twenty-four thousand Chinese, two-thirds of the Chinese population in America, were working in the California mines. Most of these miners were independent prospectors. Many organized themselves into small groups and formed their own companies. A newspaper correspondent described companies of twenty or thirty Chinese "inhabiting close cabins, so small that one . . . would not be of sufficient size to allow a couple of Americans to breathe in it. Chinamen, stools, tables, cooking utensils, bunks, etc., all huddled up together in indiscriminate confusion, and enwreathed with dense smoke, presented a spectacle." These miners worked mainly placer claims. To extract the gold, they shoveled sand from the stream into a pan or rocker and then washed away the sand and dirt until only the heavy particles of gold

remained. Chinese miners became a common sight in the California foothills, especially along the Yuba River and its tributaries and in towns like Long Bar, North-east Bar, and Foster Bar. They wore blue cotton shirts, baggy pants, wooden shoes, and wide-brimmed hats and had queues hanging down their backs.[11]

Day-to-day life for these miners was competitive and anxious. Telegrams sent from Downieville in the mountains reflected their tense lives:

Quong Chung Shing & Co
724 Com'cl St., San Francisco

Downieville, Cal.,
March 2, 1874

Git Wo. I want you pay your cousin Ah Hoey expenses to come Downieville quick attend to claim. Am afraid there will be big fight. Answer.

Fong Sing
Kim Bayo

Ah Chu

Downieville, Cal.,
March 4, 1874

Trouble about mining claims. I owe a share and all the company want you come. I want you come. Ans yes or no.

Fong Sing
Ah Jake

Yu Wo & Co
717 Dupont St., San Francisco

Downieville, Cal.,
March 28, 1874

What the price of opium. Answer.

Fong Wo & Co[12]

Mining profits had already begun to decrease, however, and the Chinese were leaving the gold fields. Thousands of them joined other Chinese migrants to work on the railroad. In February 1865, fifty Chinese workers were hired by the Central Pacific Railroad to help lay tracks for the transcontinental line leading east from Sacramento; shortly afterward, fifty more were hired. The immigrant laborers were praised by company president Leland Stanford as "quiet, peaceable, industrious, economical — ready and apt to learn all the different kinds of work" required in railroad building. "They prove nearly equal to white men in the amount of labor they perform, and are much more reliable,"

company superintendent Charles Crocker reported. "No danger of strikes among them. We are training them to do all kinds of labor: blasting, driving horses, handling rock as well as pick and shovel." When white workers demanded that the company stop hiring Chinese laborers, Crocker retorted: "We can't get enough white labor to build this railroad, and build it we must, so we're forced to hire them. If you can't get along with them, we have only one alternative. We'll let you go and hire nobody but them." Within two years, Crocker had hired twelve thousand Chinese, representing 90 percent of the entire work force. The savings derived from the employment of Chinese rather than white workers was enormous. The company paid the Chinese workers $31 a month; had management used white workers, they would have had to pay the same wages plus board and lodging, which would have increased labor costs by one-third.[13]

The construction of the Central Pacific Railroad line was a Chinese achievement. They performed the physical labor required to lay the tracks and provided important technical labor such as operating power drills and handling explosives for boring the tunnels through Donner Summit. The Chinese workers were, in one observer's description, "a great army laying siege to Nature in her strongest citadel. The rugged mountains looked like stupendous ant-hills. They swarmed with Celestials, shoveling, wheeling, carting, drilling and blasting rocks and earth." Time was critical to the company's interest, for the amount of payment it received in land and subsidy from the federal government was based on the miles of track it built. Determined to accelerate construction, the managers forced the Chinese laborers to work through the winter of 1866. Snow drifts, over sixty feet tall, covered construction operations. The workers lived and worked in tunnels under the snow, with shafts for air and lanterns for light. Work was dangerous, occasionally deadly. "The snow slides carried away our camps and we lost a good many men in those slides," a company official reported matter-of-factly; "many of them we did not find until the next season when the snow melted."[14]

The Chinese workers struck that spring. Demanding wages of $45 a month and an eight-hour day, five thousand laborers walked out "as one man." The company offered to raise their wages from $31 to $35 a month, but the strikers stood by their original demands. "Eight hours a day good for white men, all the same good for Chinamen," they declared. The *San Francisco Alta* condemned the strike as a conspiracy: "The foundation of this strike appears to have been a circular, printed in the Chinese language, sent among them by designing persons for the

purpose of destroying their efficiency as laborers." The insinuation was transparent: the strikers' demands had been merely drummed up, with agents of the competing Union Pacific behind the Chinese protest. The intent was to nullify the possibility that the workers themselves had minds and wills and were capable of acting in their own interest. Meanwhile, the managers moved to break the strike. They wired New York to inquire about the feasibility of transporting ten thousand blacks to replace the striking Chinese. Superintendent Crocker isolated the strikers and cut off their food supply. "I stopped the provisions on them," he stated, "stopped the butchers from butchering, and used such coercive measures." Coercion worked. Virtually imprisoned in their camps in the Sierras and starving, the strikers surrendered within a week.[15]

Forced to return to work, the Chinese completed the railroad, the "new highway to the commerce of Asia." After they were released by the Central Pacific Railroad in 1869, thousands of them went to San Francisco, where their compatriots were already heavily involved in manufacturing. The formation of an urban Chinese community and the industrial development of the city paralleled each other. In 1860, only 2,719 Chinese resided in San Francisco, representing 7.8 percent of the Chinese population in California. Ten years later, the Chinese population in the city had zoomed to 12,022, a 343 percent increase. Meanwhile, San Francisco had begun to develop as a locus of industry: in 1860, it had about two hundred manufacturing firms employing some 1,500 workers. Ten years later, with nearly one-fourth of California's Chinese population living there, San Francisco had over 12,000 laborers employed in industrial production and was the ninth leading manufacturing city in the United States. Half of the labor force in the city's four key industries — boot and shoe, woolens, cigar and tobacco, and sewing — was Chinese.[16]

These laborers were concentrated in the low-wage jobs. Cigar workers, for example, received only $287 in annual wages, and 92 percent of them were Chinese. In contrast, tailors and seamsters earned $588 a year, and only 9 percent were Chinese. They were also segregated within individual industries and paid less than white workers. In factories where the labor force was racially mixed, whites were the skilled workers and Chinese the menial. Where they were assigned to the same tasks as whites, they were paid less than their white counterparts in a racially based differential wage system: the work was equal but the wages were unequal.[17]

Meanwhile, in the rural regions, the Chinese were helping to develop

California's agriculture. Between 1860 and 1880, as historian Sucheng Chan found, hundreds of Chinese were able to become farmers through tenancy, which offered a way to enter the business with minimum capital. In exchange for the use of the land, equipment, and the marketing of crops, tenant farmers raised fruit and vegetables and then divided the profits with the white landowners. Tenant farmers often organized themselves into companies. Collectively, the partners were responsible for the lease and the operation of the farm. "We found the broad fields apportioned off and rented to separate companies of Chinamen who were working them upon shares — each little company having its own cabin," an observer reported in 1869. "Teams being furnished them, they do all the work, preparing the ground, seeding, tending the crop, and gathering the fruit, leaving nothing for the proprietor to do but to attend to the marketing, and to put into his own pocket half of the proceeds."[18]

Most of the Chinese engaged in agriculture were workers, however. They helped to transform farming in California from wheat to fruit. "They were a vital factor," historian Carey McWilliams wrote, "one is inclined to state *the* vital factor, in making the transition possible." Experienced farmers in the Pearl River Delta before coming to America, the Chinese shared their agricultural knowledge with their white employers, teaching them how to plant, cultivate, and harvest orchard and garden crops.[19]

Indeed, the Chinese built the agricultural industry of California. In the San Joaquin and Sacramento River deltas, they constructed networks of irrigation canals and miles of dikes and ditches. Wielding shovels and working waist-deep in water, they drained the tule swamps and transformed the marshes into agricultural lands. In 1869, a writer for the *Overland Monthly* acknowledged the change in the landscape wrought by the Chinese: "The ditches and dykes which at present protect only a few little patches here and there of the most fruitful soil that the sun shines on, may be made to perform a like service all over the Tulare swamps; and the descendants of the people who drained those almost limitless marshes on either side of their own swiftly-flowing Yellow River, and turned them into luxuriant fields, are able to do the same thing on the banks of the Sacramento and the San Joaquin." In the Salinas Valley, Chinese laborers dug six miles of ditches to drain the land, cutting the peat soil "with huge knife-like spades and pitching it out with steel forks and hooks." Their work boosted the value of the land from $28 per acre in 1875 to $100 per acre two years later.[20]

Paid by the cubic yard of earth that was dug and used as filler for

the levees, Chinese laborers sometimes resorted to tricks to increase their wages. To calculate how much his laborers should be paid, P. J. van Loben Sels would measure the size of the pit every four or five days. But it was difficult to make accurate measurements, because of the unevenness of the terrain. In order to calculate the depth of the hole, the Chinese workers would leave a column of dirt in the middle of each pit to serve as a ruler. They tended, van Loben Sels noticed, to use the highest point of ground for their column before digging. Occasionally, they gave their column an "operation" during the night, surgically cutting the column crosswise somewhere in the middle and then inserting a new layer of dirt. In the morning, the pit appeared deeper, and the laborers expected their boss to measure the hole and pay them accordingly. Whenever they were caught making these nocturnal adjustments, they were fined.[21]

In 1869, the *Overland Monthly* described the ubiquitous presence of Chinese laborers in California agriculture: "Visit a hop plantation in the picking season, and count its 50, 60, or 70 pickers in the garb of the eastern Asiatics, working steadily and noiselessly on from morning till night, gathering, curing and sacking the crop. . . . Go through the fields of strawberries . . . the vineyards and orchards, and you will learn that most of these fruits are gathered or boxed for market by this same people." In 1880, the Chinese represented 86 percent of the agricultural labor force in Sacramento County, 85 percent in Yuba, and 67 percent in Solano.[22]

Though they were paid low wages, Chinese farm laborers did not always passively accept what their employers offered them. In 1880, fruit pickers in Santa Clara County went out on strike for higher wages. After the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act reduced the supply of farm labor, Chinese agricultural workers demanded higher rates for their wages. In 1900, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported: "Relieved, by the operation of the Exclusion Acts, in great measure from the pressing competition of his fellow-countrymen, the Chinese worker was not slow to take advantage of circumstances and demand in exchange for his labor a higher price, and, as time went on, even becoming Americanized to the extent of enforcing such demands in some cases through the medium of labor organization."[23]

Meanwhile, Chinese workers became targets of white labor resentment, especially during hard times. "White men and women who desire to earn a living," the *Los Angeles Times* reported on August 14, 1893, "have for some time been entering quiet protests against vineyardists and packers employing Chinese in preference to whites." Their protests

soon became violent as economic depression led to anti-Chinese riots by unemployed white workers throughout California. From Ukiah to the Napa Valley to Fresno to Redlands, Chinese were beaten and shot by white workers and often loaded onto trains and shipped out of town. These immigrants bitterly remember this violence and expulsion as the "driving out."[24]

"Ethnic antagonism" in the mines, factories, and fields forced thousands of Chinese into self-employment — stores, restaurants, and especially laundries. Chinese wash-houses were a common sight as early as the 1850s. By 1890, there were 6,400 Chinese laundry workers in California, representing 69 percent of all laundry workers. During this period, the ratio of Chinese laundry workers to all Chinese workers jumped from one out of every seventeen to one out of every twelve.[25]

The "Chinese laundryman" was an American phenomenon. "The Chinese laundryman does not learn his trade in China; there are no laundries in China," stated Lee Chew, who came to America in the early 1860s. "The women there do the washing in tubs and have no washboards or flat irons. All the Chinese laundrymen here were taught in the first place by American women just as I was taught." In China, observed Wong Chin Foo of New York, laundry work was a "woman's occupation," and men did not "step into it for fear of losing their social standing."[26]

Why did Chinese men in America enter this line of work? Unlike the retail or restaurant business, a laundry could be opened with a small capital outlay of from seventy-five to two hundred dollars. The requirements were minimal: a stove, trough, dry-room, sleeping apartment, and a sign. A Chinese laundryman did not need to speak much English to operate his business. "In this sort of menial labor," said one, "I can get along speaking only 'yes' and 'no.' " He could also manage without knowing numbers. "Being illiterate, he could not write the numbers," another laundryman said describing a fellow operator. "He had a way and what a way! See, he would draw a circle as big as a half dollar coin to represent a half dollar, and a circle as big as a dime for a dime, and so on. When the customers came in to call for their laundry, they would catch on to the meaning of the circles and pay accordingly."[27]

But "Chinese laundrymen" were also "pushed" into their occupation. Laundry work was one of the few opportunities that were open to Chinese. "Men of other nationalities who are jealous of the Chinese have raised such a great outcry about Chinese cheap labor that they have shut him out of working on farms or in factories or building railroads

or making streets or digging sewers," explained Lee Chew. "So he opens a laundry." Thus the "Chinese laundry" represented a retreat into self-employment from a narrowly restricted labor market. "You couldn't work in the cigar factories or the jute or woolen mills any more — all the Chinese had been driven out," old Chinese men later sadly recalled. "About all they could be was laundrymen or vegetable peddlers then." In 1900, one out of four employed Chinese men worked in a laundry.[28]

While most Chinese lived in the West, they were present elsewhere in the United States, including the South. A year after the end of the Civil War, a planter declared: "We can drive the niggers out and import coolies that will work better at less expense, and relieve us from the cursed nigger impudence." The plan was to turn from black to Chinese labor. "Emancipation has spoiled the negro and carried him away from the fields of agriculture," the editor of the *Vicksburg Times* in Mississippi complained in 1869. "Our prosperity depends entirely upon the recovery of lost ground, and we therefore say let the Coolies come." That same year, the southern planters' convention in Memphis announced that it was "desirable and necessary to look to the teeming population of Asia for assistance in the cultivation of our soil and the development of our industrial interests." In his address to the convention, labor contractor Cornelius Koopmanshoop announced that his company had imported thirty thousand Chinese laborers into California and offered to make them available in the South.[29]

Planters soon saw that the Chinese could be employed as models for black workers: hardworking and frugal, the Chinese would be the "educators" of former slaves. During the 1870s, Louisiana and Mississippi planters imported several hundred Chinese laborers and pitted them against black workers. They praised the foreign workers for outproducing blacks and for "regulating" the "detestable system of black labor." A southern governor frankly explained: "Undoubtedly the underlying motive for this effort to bring in Chinese laborers was to punish the negro for having abandoned the control of his old master, and to regulate the conditions of his employment and the scale of wages to be paid him." An editor in Kentucky spoke even more bluntly when he predicted that the introduction of Chinese labor would change the "tune" from " 'forty acres and a mule' " to " 'work nigger or starve.' "[30]

Planters welcomed their new workers. "Messrs. Ferris and Estell, who are cultivating on the Hughs place, near Prentiss," a Mississippi newspaper reported in 1870, "recently imported direct from Hong Kong, a lot of Chinese, sixteen in number, with whom as laborers, they are well

pleased." The owner of a plantation near New Orleans had a work force of 140 Chinese. A traveling correspondent offered this vivid account:

> Mounting horses and spreading our umbrellas, we rode out a mile or more through the fields, past countless negroes and mule-teams ploughing, to the spot off by themselves where the picturesque heathens were hoeing cane. . . . Apart, in the middle of the field stood the imperturbable sinecurist who made a faint show of overseeing his countrymen. . . . The Chinamen went on with their work, hoeing the young cane, and doing it very carefully and precisely. Occasionally they would look up at us, but in a very stolid, careless way. Ah Sing approached and greeted us with a polite, "Hallo, how do?" On learning that we were well, he observed . . . , "Belly hot to-day."

In a letter to her daughter, the wife of a Louisiana planter described some Chinese workers: "Yesterday was their Christmas day and they asked for half the day and had prepared themselves a good dinner." One of the "Chinamen" had come into the yard and asked for her. "I went to the porch to see what he wanted. He took off his hat, got down on his knees, and bowed himself his head touching the ground four times very stately then got up. I thought he was drunk but it was a mark of respect he was showing."[31]

The Chinese did not stay long on the plantations, however. As early as 1871, the *New Orleans Times* noted that the Chinese preferred to work in the city rather than do the "plodding work of the plantations." In 1880, about a hundred Chinese were living in New Orleans, where they worked as laundrymen, cigar makers, shoemakers, cooks, and woodcarvers. By then, the southern planters had overthrown Reconstruction; with their political power over blacks restored, they quickly lost interest in Chinese labor.[32]

The use of Chinese labor and its success raised two crucial questions. "What shall we do with them is not quite clear yet," remarked Samuel Bowles in 1869 in his book *Our New West*. "How they are to rank, socially, civilly, and politically, among us is one of the nuts for our social science students to crack, — if they can. . . ." And what would happen to white workers as America's industrial development depended more and more on Chinese labor?[33]

One answer to both questions was the concept of a yellow proletariat in America. According to this view, the Chinese would constitute a permanently degraded caste labor force. They would be, in effect, a

unique "industrial reserve army" of migrant laborers forced to be foreigners forever. Thus, unlike European immigrant laborers, the Chinese would be a politically proscribed labor force. Serving the needs of American employers, they would be here only on a temporary basis. "I do not believe they are going to remain here long enough to become good citizens," Central Pacific manager Charles Crocker told a legislative committee, "and I would not admit them to citizenship." The employers of Chinese labor argued that they did not intend to allow the migrants to remain and become "thick" (to use Crocker's term) in American society.[34]

The advocates of Chinese labor offered assurances to white laborers. They explained that Chinese "cheap" labor would reduce production costs, and the resulting low prices for goods would be equivalent to a wage increase for white workers. They also argued that Chinese labor would upgrade white labor, for whites would be elevated to foremen and directors. "If society must have 'mudsills,' " they elaborated, "it is certainly better to take them from a race which would be benefited by even that position in a civilized community, than subject a portion of our own race to a position which they have outgrown." Charles Crocker explained:

> I believe that the effect of Chinese labor upon white labor has an elevating instead of degrading tendency. I think that every white man who is intelligent and able to work, who is more than a digger in a ditch . . . who has the capacity of being something else, can get to be something else by the presence of Chinese labor. . . . There is proof of that in the fact that after we got Chinamen to work, we took the more intelligent of the white laborers and made foremen of them. I know of several of them now who never expected, never had a dream that they were going to be anything but shovelers of dirt, hewers of wood and drawers of water, and they are now respectable farmers, owning farms. They got their start by controlling Chinese labor on our railroad.[35]

Chinese Calibans: The Borders of Exclusion

What enabled businessmen like Crocker to degrade the Chinese into a subservient laboring caste was the dominant ideology that defined America as a racially homogeneous society and Americans as white. The status of racial inferiority assigned to the Chinese had been prefigured in the black and Indian past.

Indeed, the newcomers from a Pacific shore found that racial qualities previously assigned to blacks had become "Chinese" characteristics. Calling for Chinese exclusion, the *San Francisco Alta* warned in 1853: "Every reason that exists against the toleration of free blacks in Illinois may be argued against that of the Chinese here." White workers referred to the Chinese as "nagurs," and a magazine cartoon in California depicted the Chinese as a bloodsucking vampire with slanted eyes, a pigtail, dark skin, and thick lips. Like blacks, the Chinese were described as heathen, morally inferior, savage, childlike, and lustful. Chinese women were condemned as a "depraved class," their immorality associated with a physical appearance "but a slight removal from the African race."[36]

Like blacks, Chinese men were viewed as threats to white racial purity. At the 1878 California Constitutional Convention, John F. Miller warned: "Were the Chinese to amalgamate at all with our people, it would be the lowest, most vile and degraded of our race, and the result of that amalgamation would be a hybrid of the most despicable, a mongrel of the most detestable that has ever afflicted the earth." Two years later, lawmakers prohibited marriage between a white person and a "negro, mulatto, or Mongolian."[37]

In the minds of many whites, the Chinese were also sometimes associated with Indians. The editor of the *California Marin Journal* declared that the winning of the West from the "red man" would be in vain if whites were now to surrender the conquered land to a "horde of Chinese." Policies toward Indians suggested a way to solve the "Chinese Problem." "We do not let the Indian stand in the way of civilization," stated former New York governor Horatio Seymour, "so why let the Chinese barbarian?" In a letter published in the *New York Times*, Seymour continued: "Today we are dividing the lands of the native Indians into states, counties, and townships. We are driving off from their property the game upon which they live, by railroads. We tell them plainly, they must give up their homes and property, and live upon corners of their own territories, because they are in the way of our civilization. If we can do this, then we can keep away another form of barbarism which has no right to be here." A United States senator from Alabama "likened" the Chinese to Indians, "inferior" socially and subject to federal government control. The government, he argued, should do to the Chinese what it had already done to the Indians — put them on reservations.[38]

All three groups — blacks, Indians, and Chinese — shared a common identity: they were all Calibans of color. This view was made explicit in the 1854 California Supreme Court decision of *People v. Hall*. A year before, George W. Hall and two others were tried for murdering Ling

Sing. During the trial, one Caucasian and three Chinese witnesses testified for the prosecution. After the jury returned a guilty verdict, the judge sentenced Hall to be hanged. Hall's lawyer then appealed the verdict, arguing that the Chinese witnesses should not have been permitted to testify against Hall. An existing California statute provided that "no black or mulatto person, or Indian, shall be permitted to give evidence in favor of, or against, any white person," and the question was whether this restriction included the Chinese. In its review, the California Supreme Court reversed Hall's conviction, declaring that the words "Indian, Negro, Black, and White" were "generic terms, designating races," and that therefore "Chinese and other people not white" could not testify against whites.[39]

This view of a shared racial status among all three groups led President Rutherford Hayes to warn Americans about the "Chinese Problem." The "present Chinese invasion," he argued in 1879, was "pernicious and should be discouraged. Our experience in dealing with the weaker races — the Negroes and Indians . . . — is not encouraging. . . . I would consider with favor any suitable measures to discourage the Chinese from coming to our shores."[40]

Three years later, Congress prohibited Chinese immigration, closing America's borders to these strangers from a different shore. Actually, there was very little objective basis for viewing Chinese immigrants as a threat to a homogeneous white society. The Chinese constituted a mere .002 percent of the United States population in 1880.

Behind the exclusion act were fears and forces that had little relationship to the Chinese. Something had gone wrong in America, and an age of economic opportunity seemed to be coming to an end. This country had been a place where an abundance of land and jobs had always been available. The problem for employers had always been the need for more labor. But suddenly, during the closing decades of the nineteenth century, society was experiencing what historian John A. Garraty called "the discovery of unemployment." This new reality plunged society into a national crisis. Enormous expansions of the economy had been followed by intense and painful contractions: tens of thousands of men and women were thrown out of work, and social convulsions such as the violent 1877 Railroad Strike rocked the nation.[41]

Within this context of economic crisis and social strife, Congress made it unlawful for Chinese laborers to enter the United States for the next ten years and denied naturalized citizenship to the Chinese already here. Support for exclusion was overwhelming. In the debate, lawmakers

revealed fears that went much deeper than race. They warned that the presence of an "industrial army of Asiatic laborers" was exacerbating class conflict between labor and capital within white society. They claimed that white workers had been "forced to the wall" by corporations employing Chinese. The struggle between labor unions and the industrial "nabobs" and "grandees" was erupting into "disorder, strikes, riot and bloodshed." "The gate," nervous men in Congress declared, "must be closed." The specter of the "giddy multitude" was haunting American society again.[42]

Six years later, the prohibition was broadened to include "all persons of the Chinese race," although exemptions were provided for Chinese officials, teachers, students, tourists, and merchants. Renewed in 1892, the Chinese Exclusion Act was extended indefinitely in 1902.[43]

Meanwhile, contrary to the stereotype of Chinese passivity, the Chinese fought discrimination. Time and again, they took their struggle for civil rights to court. Believing that the Chinese should be entitled to citizenship, they challenged the 1790 Naturalization Law. In 1855, Chan Yong applied for citizenship in San Francisco's federal district court. The local newspapers noted that Chan Yong was more "white" in appearance than most Chinese. The court denied him citizenship, however, ruling that the 1790 law restricted citizenship to "whites" and that the Chinese were not "white." Seven years later, Ling Sing sued the San Francisco tax collector, challenging the $2.50 head tax levied on Chinese. In *Ling Sing v. Washburn*, the California Supreme Court ruled that while the Chinese could be taxed as other residents, they could not be set apart for special taxation. Significantly in this case, a state law was invalidated on the grounds that it violated the United States Constitution.[44]

The *Ling Sing* decision underscored the need for the federal protection of civil rights for the Chinese. During the negotiations between the United States and China regarding a treaty between the two countries in 1868, the Chinese Six Companies, the powerful organization of district associations, lobbied for the inclusion of provisions for the protection of Chinese. They contacted Daniel Cleveland, a San Francisco lawyer and adviser to the federal officials involved in the treaty negotiations, and explained to him that federal legislation was greatly needed to "free" the Chinese in the United States from "wrongs" and to protect Chinese lives and property. Federal protection of Chinese property would also encourage Chinese investments in this country as well as promote American trade with China. The outcome of the negotiations was a major victory for the Chinese Six Companies. The 1868 Burlingame Treaty

recognized the "free migration and emigration" of the Chinese to the United States as visitors, traders, or "permanent residents," and the rights of Chinese in the United States to "enjoy the same privileges, immunities, and exemptions in respect to travel or residence, as may there be enjoyed as the citizens or subjects of the most favored nation."[45]

Buoyed by the Burlingame Treaty, Chinese merchants sought federal legislation to abolish discriminatory state laws. They successfully lobbied Congress to include protections for them in the 1870 Civil Rights Act, which declared that "all persons" within the jurisdiction of the United States shall have "the same right" to "make and enforce contracts, to sue, be parties, give evidence, and to the full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and property as is enjoyed by white citizens." Furthermore "no tax" shall be imposed "by any State upon any person immigrating thereto from a foreign country which is not equally imposed and enforced upon every person emigrating to such State from any other foreign country, and any law of any State from any other foreign country is hereby declared null and void."[46]

But guarantees of equal protection by treaty and by federal law had little effect on what actually happened in society. The Chinese continued to be vulnerable, victims of racial violence. Blamed as "the source of the troubles" of white working men, the Chinese suffered from racial attacks. They had to flee from boys who threw rocks at them and screamed, "God Damn Chinamen." "When I first came," Andrew Kan recounted, "Chinese treated worse than dog. Oh, it was terrible, terrible. At that time all Chinese have queue and dress same as in China. The hoodlums, roughnecks and young boys pull your queue, slap your face, throw all kind of old vegetables and rotten eggs at you." "The Chinese were in a pitiable condition in those days," recalled Huie Kin in his account of San Francisco Chinatown during the 1870s. "We were simply terrified; we kept indoors after dark for fear of being shot in the back. Children spit upon us as we passed by and called us rats."[47]

The Chinese saw the source of their oppression as racism. "Up to 800,000 Europeans enter the United States per year, yet the labor unions hardly cared," the Chinese Six Companies noted. "A few thousands of the Chinese arrivals would irritate American workers . . . and European immigrants get citizenships and voting rights often immediately after their arrival in the United States." Similarly, a Chinese worker explained that what separated them from the other immigrant groups was race. "The cheap labor cry was always a falsehood," argued Lee Chew. Chinese labor was "never cheap" and "always commanded the highest market price." But "it was the jealousy of laboring men of other nationalities — especially the Irish — that raised all the outcry against the Chinese. No one would hire an Irishman, German, Englishman or Italian when he could get a Chinese, because our countrymen [were] so much more honest, industrious, steady, sober, and painstaking. The Chinese were persecuted, not for their vices, but for their virtues." Noting the flaws of other immigrant groups, Lee Chew continued: "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. . . . More than half the Chinese in this country would become citizens if allowed to do so, and would be patriotic Americans."[48]

But Chinese migrants were generally apprehensive about settling in America. They had been "warned" not to come to America, a Chinese merchant in San Francisco explained, and consequently they did not find "peace in their hearts in regard to bringing families."[49]

Twice a Minority: Chinese Women in America

The migrants lived in a virtually womanless world. Very few Chinese women came to Gold Mountain. In 1852, of the 11,794 Chinese in California, only seven were women. Eighteen years later, of 63,199 Chinese in the United States, 4,566 were female — a ratio of fourteen to one. In 1900, of the 89,863 Chinese on the United States mainland, only 4,522, or 5 percent, were female.

Chinese tradition and culture limited migration for women. Confucianism defined the place of a woman: she was instructed to obey her father as a daughter, her husband as a wife, and her eldest son as a widow. According to custom, the afterbirths of children were buried in different places, depending on the sex of the baby — in the floor by the bed for boys and outside the window for girls. This practice symbolized what was expected to happen to a woman: she would leave her home to join the family of her husband. As a daughter-in-law, she would take care of her husband's aging parents. A daughter's name was not recorded on her family tree; it was entered later next to her husband's name in his genealogy.[50]

Women of all classes were regarded as inferior to men and were expected to remain at home, attentive to family and domestic responsibilities. The "bound feet" of women of "gentle birth," while indicating

social rank and considered "beautiful," symbolized their subordinate gender and served to prevent them from wandering. In 1855, a Chinese merchant of San Francisco explained why many men did not bring their wives: the women of the "better families" generally had "compressed feet" and were "unused to winds and waves." While peasant women did not have bound feet, they, too, were confined to a narrow world circumscribed by gender. Tied to family and home, they stayed within the walls of their villages. For the Chinese, family and home were synonymous: they even shared the same character in written Chinese.[51]

Women were also left behind because it would have been too expensive for them to accompany their husbands, and the men thought they would be gone only temporarily. Moreover, according to an explanation sometimes known as the "hostage theory," women were kept home in order to ensure that their absent husbands would not become prodigal sons in America. The Chinese system of patrilineal descent provided for the equal division of a family's land among all adult sons and the sharing of responsibility for their elderly parents. By keeping the wives and children of their sons at home, parents hoped they would be able to buttress family ties and filial obligations: their wandering sons would send money home and also return someday. "The mother wanted her son to come back," explained a Chinese woman. "If wife go to America, then son no go back home and no send money."[52]

There were also conditions in America that discouraged women from joining their husbands. In California, Chinese men entered a society of harsh frontier conditions and racial hostility. As railroad and farm workers, they were viewed by employers as temporary and migratory. The very nature of their work rendered it difficult to have families here. But even if they had wanted to bring their wives, the men discovered that many whites viewed America as a "white man's country" and perceived the entry of Chinese women and families as threatening to racial homogeneity. Federal immigration policies had been enacted to bar Chinese women. Passed in 1875 to prohibit the entry of prostitutes, the Page Law was enforced so strictly and broadly that it excluded not only Chinese prostitutes but also Chinese wives. The 1882 prohibition of "Chinese laborers" included women.[53]

Earlier, however, some Chinese men had been able to bring their wives to America or to have women sent here to become their wives. Ah Chew came to California in 1854 when he was fifteen years old. After he decided to settle down in the Sacramento Delta, his grandson explained, he went back to "China on a sailboat to marry, and then brought his

wife over here." Similarly, in 1862, Chin Gee-Hee came to Washington Territory, where he worked in a lumber mill. Within a few years, he sent for a wife and got her a job as a cook in the mill's cookhouse. In 1875, Mrs. Chin gave birth to their son, Chin Lem, believed to be the first Chinese born in the Washington Territory. In 1869, A. W. Loomis reported the case of "a wife coming all the way alone across the stormy sea" to be with her husband. "Friends at home besought her not to do a thing so in conflict with Chinese custom; the husband and his relatives in this country, when they heard of her purpose, wrote entreating her not to expose herself to the hardships and perils on the sea, and to the trials which would be liable to befall her here; but she answered that where the husband was there she had a right to be." She came to California where she supported herself and her child by sewing garments and making cigarettes while her husband worked for a mining company in the Kern River area.[54]

In America, Chinese families were gradually forming as men began to leave mining and railroad construction and enter more stable pursuits like farming and shopkeeping. One area of enterprise that encouraged the formation of Chinese families was the fishing industry in Monterey. In the fishing village of Point Alones, for example, nearly half of the Chinese were female. According to a description published in the 1870s, the village was organized into "companies," but most of these companies were actually groups of families: "Man Lee Company, three men and three women; Sun Sing Lee Company, three men, two women and three children. . . ." As early as 1876, in its memorial to President Ulysses Grant, the Chinese Six Companies noted the presence of "a few hundred Chinese families" in the country, and added: "There are also among us a few hundred, perhaps a thousand, Chinese children born in America."[55]

During the early decades, most of the Chinese women came alone, often forcibly transported to America as prostitutes. In the 1870 census manuscripts, 61 percent of the 3,536 Chinese women in California listed their occupation as "prostitute."[56]

One prostitute, Lilac Chen, was only six years old when she was brought to San Francisco. Years later, at the age of eighty-four, she recalled the day her father said he was taking her to her grandmother's house: "And that worthless father, my own father, imagine . . . sold me on the ferry boat. Locked me in the cabin while he was negotiating my sale." Chen kicked and screamed; when she was finally let out, she could not find her father. "He had left me, you see, with a strange woman." Another prostitute, Wong Ah So, described her tragic experience: "I

was nineteen when this man came to my mother and said that in America there was a great deal of gold. . . . He was a laundryman, but said he earned plenty of money. He was very nice to me, and my mother liked him, so my mother was glad to have me go with him as his wife. I thought that I was his wife, and was very grateful that he was taking me to such a grand, free country, where everyone was rich and happy." But two weeks after Wong Ah So arrived in San Francisco, she was shocked to learn that her companion had taken her to America as a "slave" and that she would be forced to work as a prostitute.[57]

Most of the Chinese prostitutes were in debt peonage, under contracts like this one signed by Xin Jin:

> The contractee Xin Jin became indebted to her master/mistress for food and passage from China to San Francisco. Since she is without funds, she will voluntarily work as a prostitute at Tan Fu's place for four and one-half years for an advance of 1,205 yuan (U.S. $524) to pay this debt. There shall be no interest on the money and Xin Jin shall receive no wages. At the expiration of the contract, Xin Jin shall be free to do as she pleases. Until then, she shall first secure the master/mistress's permission if a customer asks to take her out. If she has the four loathsome diseases she shall be returned within 100 days; beyond that time the procurer has no responsibility. Menstruation disorder is limited to one month's rest only. If Xin Jin becomes sick at any time for more than 15 days, she shall work one month extra; if she becomes pregnant, she shall work one year extra. Should Xin Jin run away before her term is out, she shall pay whatever expense is incurred in finding and returning her to the brothel. This is a contract to be retained by the master/mistress as evidence of the agreement. Receipt of 1205 yuan by Ah Yo. Thumb print of Xin Jin in the contractee. Eighth month 11th day of the 12th year of Guang-zu (1886).[58]

Called *lougeui* (always holding her legs up) and *baak haak chai* (hundred men's wife), Chinese prostitutes worked in the mining outposts, railroad camps, and agricultural villages and in the Chinatowns of Sacramento, Marysville, and San Francisco. Dressed in fancy clothes and jewelry, some prostitutes worked in high-class brothels. "And every night, seven o'clock, all these girls were dressed in silk and satin, and sat in front of a big window," recalled Lilac Chen, who had been brought to San Francisco in 1893 by a brothel owner, "and the men would look in and choose their girls who they'd want for the night." Most prostitutes worked in lower-grade brothels or in "cribs" — 4-by-6-foot street-level

compartments with their windowed doors covered with bars or heavy screens. Dressed in cotton tunics and trousers, women peered from the windows, promising men pleasure for twenty-five or fifty cents: "Lookee two bits, feelee floor bits, doee six bits." They were fed two or three times a day, their dinner usually consisting of rice and a stew of pork, eggs, liver, and kidneys. These prostitutes were enormously profitable to their owners. "At an average of 38 cents per customer and seven customers per day," Lucie Cheng Hirata has calculated, "a lower-grade prostitute would earn about 850 dollars per year and 3,404 dollars after four years of servitude. Since women in the inferior dens were kept at the subsistence level, the cost of maintaining them must not have exceeded 8 dollars per month or 96 dollars per year per person." The average capital outlay, or purchase price, of a woman was usually about $530. "These calculations indicate that the owner would begin to make a profit from the prostitute's labor in the first year of her service!"[59]

Virtual slaves, many of the prostitutes became opium addicts, seeking a drug-induced psychic sanctuary from the daily abuse and degradation. "My owners were never satisfied, no matter how much money I made," a prostitute complained. Her owners would often beat her with wooden clubs, and once they threatened her with a pistol. "My last mistress was very cruel to me," another prostitute said; "she used to whip me, pull my hair, and pinch the inside of my cheeks." Disease was a constant threat: syphilis and gonorrhea were widespread. Life was dangerous and sometimes short. Occasionally, prostitutes were beaten to death by their customers or owners, and others committed suicide by taking an overdose of drugs or drowning themselves in the San Francisco Bay.[60]

Chinese prostitutes in California decreased in numbers significantly after 1870. By 1880, only 24 percent of the 3,171 Chinese women in the state were designated as "prostitute" in the census. The number of adult Chinese females listed as "housekeepers" (women who did household chores without pay) doubled from 21 percent in 1870 to 46 percent in 1880. Many prostitutes had been able to pay off their debts and free themselves. Others escaped from their bondage by fleeing to the Presbyterian Mission in San Francisco's Chinatown. Later known as Cameron House, this refuge for Chinese prostitutes was operated by white women. A Chinese folk song urged Chinese prostitutes to seek husbands and a safer life:

> *Prostitution ruins the body most harmfully.*
> *Come ashore, the sooner the better.*

My advice is to get hitched to a man, and don't
ever forget, dear young lass:
It's no shame to have a decent meal with plain tea.
All in all—
You'd also gain a husband.
We've all witnessed the frequent raids of brothels
in the Golden Gate;
You need not to worry about these roughnecks
once you live with a man.[61]

Perhaps one of these women was Min Que. She was living in Wadsworth, Nevada, in 1874, when Fook Sing of Downieville, California, was told about her and decided that he would like to marry her. On July 25, 1874, he sent a telegraph to Kaw Chung in Wadsworth, Nevada: "Don't you let her go. I will come tomorrow and see her. I want to bring her to Downieville to live with me. What time does the train start? Answer quick." The next day he sent another message to Chung: "I will start for Wadsworth today and meet her. . . . Tell her to wait for me to come and if she wants to go I will let her. Don't care. Answer." But she went off with or was taken by another man. On August 12, Ah Tom sent a telegram to Ting Yeu of Downieville: "Fook Sing's woman has gone to Marysville." The next day, the disappointed and anxious Fook Sing sent telegrams to Sing Lung in Marysville: "Bring woman up right away will pay three hundred dollars. Answer." "Is man who took woman there? Answer." At 11:05 A.M. the same day, Sing Lung wired Tie Yuen in Downieville: "Tell Fook Sing Min Que is here. What you going to do? Answer quick." Fook Sing had found the woman, but would Min Que agree to marry him? At 4:20 P.M. Sing Lung telegraphed Fook Sing: "She wants you to come right away and get warrant with officer, friends will help. You don't be afraid. We will get her sure." Fook Sing rushed to Marysville, and on August 15, he wired Tie Yuen: "I saw the woman but have not [taken her away from the other man]. Send marriage certificate." Immediately, Tie Yuen responded: "Will send the certificate next stage."[62]

While these telegrams contain a silence by leaving out the voice of Min Que, they tell the story of what appears to be Fook Sing's successful search for a wife. But he was one of the lucky few. "In all New York there are less than forty Chinese women," Lee Chew commented bitterly, "and it is impossible to get a Chinese woman out here [to the United States] unless one goes to China and marries her there, and then he must collect affidavits to prove that she is really his wife. That is in the case of a merchant. A laundryman can't bring his wife here under any circumstances." Protesting the legislation prohibiting the entry of Chinese women, a Chinese man asked: "What Chinese going do for wife?" For the overwhelming majority of Chinese men, their future would not include a family in their adopted country. "Pathetic the lonely bachelors stranded in a foreign land," reflected a Cantonese rhyme.[63]

A Colony of "Bachelors"

Though they generally considered themselves sojourners, the Chinese showed signs of settling down from the very beginning. During the 1850s, Chinatown in San Francisco was already a bustling colony of thirty-three general merchandise stores, fifteen apothecaries, five restaurants, five herb shops, three boardinghouses, five butcher stores, and three tailor shops. "The majority of the houses were of Chinese importation," observed a traveler, "and were stores, stocked with hams, tea, dried fish, dried ducks, and other Chinese eatables, besides copper pots and kettles, fans, shawls, chessmen, and all sorts of curiosities. Suspended over the doors were brilliantly-colored boards covered with Chinese writings, and with several yards of red ribbon streaming from them; while the streets thronged with Celestials, chattering vociferously as they rushed about from store to store." A Chinese immigrant, arriving in San Francisco in 1868, found a thriving and colorful Chinatown, "made up of stores catering to the Chinese only." The people were "all in their native costume, with queues down their backs," and the entire street fronts of the stores were open, with groceries and vegetables overflowing on the sidewalks. Every morning, vegetable peddlers could be seen in the streets, wearing "loose pajamalike" clothes and "carrying two deep baskets of greens, fruits, and melons, balanced on their shoulders with the help of a pole."[64]

Nine years later, the Chinese quarter of San Francisco was six blocks long, running from California Street to Broadway. All day long and often until late at night, the streets were crowded with people. According to Reverend Otis Gibson, they had shaven crowns and neatly braided queues, and they sauntered "lazily along, talking, visiting, trading, laughing, and scolding in the strangest, and, to an American, the most discordant jargon." Here and there, they gathered in groups on street corners. Frequently, "a group of these fellows" would amuse themselves for a long time at "the expense of some party of 'white people,' who,

passing through 'Chinatown' to see the sights, all unconscious to themselves," presented to the Chinese "a show quite as novel as they themselves [could] boast of seeing."[65]

The stores and shops had signs with euphonious and poetic names. Adorning the entrances of wholesale houses were signs for "everlasting harmony, producing wealth," "unitedly prospering," "the flowery fountain," and "ten thousand profits." Apothecary shops offered assurances: "The hall of the approved medicines of every province and of every land." Restaurants described their culinary delights: "Fragrant almond chamber," "Chamber of the odors of distant lands," "Fragrant tea chamber." Fan-tan saloons enticed men with dreams of quick wealth: "Get rich, please come in," "Riches ever flowing." On the glass windows and doors of their stalls, opium dealers pasted red cards: "Opium dipped up in fractional quantities, Foreign smoke in broken parcels, No. 2 Opium to be sold at all times." Scrolls on the walls of stores announced: "Ten thousand customers constantly arriving, Let rich customers continually come."[66]

The immigrants also built Chinatowns in rural towns like Sacramento, Marysville, and Stockton, where these business communities served the needs of Chinese miners and farmers. By 1860, there were 121 Chinese merchants, storekeepers, and grocers in the three counties of Sacramento, Yuba, and San Joaquin. Twenty years later, their number had increased by 44 percent, to 174. In addition, there were 22 restaurant keepers, 54 butchers and fish sellers, and 564 laundrymen and laundresses.[67]

Organizations abounded in Chinatowns. Tongs were present almost from the very beginning: in 1852, the first secret society, the Kwangtek-tong, was founded in California. Originally underground antigovernment movements in the homeland, the tongs served a particular need in Chinese America. "We are strangers in a strange country," explained a tong member. "We must have an organization to control our country fellows and develop our friendship." Tongs also provided protection. "Occasionally members of the tongs use their organization to take advantage of non-members of tongs," said a Chinese. Meeting the needs of immigrants, tongs proliferated in the United States. Extending their activities beyond mutual assistance, they came to control the opium trade as well as gambling and prostitution in the Chinese communities.[68]

The immigrants also formed fongs, organizations composed of family and village members, and clans, larger groups of village associations. These associations maintained clubhouses, which functioned as residences and social centers. They established temples, transmitted letters

to villages in China, and shipped home the bodies or bones of the deceased. In addition, district associations were responsible for receiving migrants, providing initial housing, and finding employment. They also administered the "credit-ticket" system, checking migrants to make certain all their debts had been paid before they returned to China. In San Francisco, the Chinese Six Companies helped settle interdistrict conflicts and provided educational and health services to the community. The leaders of the Chinese Six Companies were merchants who interacted with the city's white business community and had access to public officials.

Gradually, the Chinese were creating their own communities in America. They built altars to honor their gods and celebrated traditional holidays. During Chinese New Year in January or February, they first did their *Dah Faw Hom Muy,* or "housecleaning." The house could not be cleaned again until after the celebration, or else any good fortune arriving with the New Year would be swept away. "Oh yes — we cleaned the house upside down," an immigrant recalled. "You know it was good luck to have plenty at the start of the New Year. We couldn't buy too much, but a bit of everything. And then there would be oranges and lishee [gifts of money wrapped in red paper for good luck]. We didn't have money for the lishee — we used dried nuts for money." Then the people ushered in the New Year with lion dances and firecrackers. During the celebration, whites also joined the festive throngs in Chinatown. "The merchants," observed Reverend A. W. Loomis of San Francisco in 1869, "appear highly delighted to see and to welcome all of our citizens whom they can recognize as friends, and all with whom they have had any kind of business connections." As soon as the clock tolled off the last minute of the departing year, firecrackers exploded in a roaring, crackling din, filling entire streets with columns of smoke and sheets of fire to frighten away the evil spirits for the New Year.[69]

For recreation, many men attended the Chinese theater. The first Chinese play in America was presented in 1852 when 123 actors of the Hong Fook Tong performed at the American Theater in San Francisco. In 1879, a Chinese theater was erected, a three-story brick building with a seating capacity of twenty-five hundred people. The price of admission was thirty-five cents. During performances, the men — sometimes a few hundred, sometimes a thousand — sat on benches in the gallery. Smoking cigars and cigarettes and eating mandarin oranges and melon seeds, they listened to the Chinese orchestra and watched the drama.

On Sundays, most of the men had no families to take on outings.

They had "no *homes* in this country," observed Otis Gibson of San Francisco. They strolled the streets, he added, for they had "nothing to do, and nowhere else to go." When asked about what he did during his free time, a waiter at a restaurant replied: "Yes, go to theater. When I no work? I sleep. Sometimes gamble a little." At night and during the weekends, men played mah-jongg, fan-tan, and *baakgapbiu*, a game similar to keno. "Gambling is mostly fan tan," reported Lee Chew, "but there is a good deal of poker, which the Chinese have learned from Americans and can play very well. They also gamble with dominoes and dice." Tom Lee, a cook and houseboy, said: "No get lonely for home China, many China boys all same one family. Sometime have holiday. Put on Merican hat, shoe, tie, all same White man, walk to Stockton have good time."[70]

Mostly, the men spent their leisure hours in the backrooms of stores. There "all Chinese came," a migrant recalled. "Not just relatives. They all just like to get together. They talk together." Cut off from their wives, men spent endless hours talking about their lives. The future had seemed so promising when they had left their villages for Gold Mountain:

> *If you have a daughter, marry her quickly to a*
> *traveller to Gold Mountain,*
> *For when he gets off the boat, he will bring*
> *hundreds of pieces of silver.*

Sometimes "Letters for the colony" would arrive from China, directed in care of the store that served as a community post office. "Our village had something to do — they send a letter over here, we get together and talk it over — and send it back," a migrant stated. "We communicate, see, otherwise you're alone. You know nothing."[71]

One sojourner received a letter from his mother, a wailing reminder to fulfill his filial obligations:

> I hear that you,———, my son, are acting the prodigal. . . . For many months there has arrived no letter, nor money. My supplies are exhausted. I am old; too infirm to work; too lame to beg. Your father in the mines of the mountains suffers from a crushed foot. He is weak, and unable to accumulate money. Hereafter, my son, change your course; be industrious and frugal, and remit to me your earnings; and within the year let me welcome home both your father and yourself.[72]

Married men received letters from their "widows" in China. Stranded sojourners, they read "letters of love, soaked with tears" that complained about their long absence. Since most of the men were illiterate, they relied on the store proprietors to write letters for them. One migrant dictated a letter that began, "My Beloved Wife":

> It has been several autumns now since your dull husband left you for a far remote alien land. Thanks to my hearty body I am all right. Therefore stop your embroidering worries about me.
>
> Yesterday I received another of your letters. I could not keep tears from running down my cheeks when thinking about the miserable and needy circumstances of our home, and thinking back to the time of our separation.
>
> Because of our destitution I went out, trying to make a living. Who could know that the Fate is always opposite to man's design? Because I can get no gold, I am detained in this secluded corner of a strange land. Furthermore, my beauty, you are implicated in an endless misfortune. I wish this paper would console you a little. This is all what I can do for now. . . .

This letter was never finished and never mailed, left in a desk drawer of the Kam Wah Chung Store in Oregon.[73]

What happened to the nameless writer of this unmailed letter might have paralleled the life stories of the owners of the store where it was found. Lung On and Ing Hay had come to America as sojourners in the 1880s. At first, they worked as wage-earners and then opened their own general store. Gradually over the years, as they built their business and developed personal and social ties to their new community, they came to feel detached from their homeland and their families. In 1899, Lung's father commanded in a letter: "Come home as soon as you can. Don't say 'no' to me any more. . . . You are my only son. You have no brothers and your age is near forty. . . . You have been away from home for seventeen years, you know nothing about our domestic situation. . . . Come back, let our family be reunited and enjoy the rest of our lives." In a letter to "My Husband-lord," Lung's wife scolded her absent mate: "According to Mr. Wang, you are indulging in sensuality, and have no desire to return home. On hearing this I am shocked and pained. I have been expecting your return day after day. . . . But, alas, I don't know what kind of substance your heart is made of. . . . Your daughter is now at the age of betrothal and it is your responsibility to arrange her

marriage." Her appeal must have moved her husband, for Lung wrote to his cousin Liang Kwang-jin on March 2, 1905: "We are fine here, thank you. Tell my family that I will go back as soon as I accumulate enough money to pay the fare." But a few weeks later, Lung learned from a letter written by his cousin, dated March 4, that certain family events had already passed him by: "Two years ago your mother died. Last year your daughter married. Your aged father is immobile. He will pass away any time now. Your wife feels left out and hurt. . . . Come back as soon as you receive this message." Meanwhile, Ing's father had also written to his son in 1903: "Men go abroad so that they might make money for support of their families, but you have sent neither money nor a letter since you left."[74]

Separated from their families in China, these two men missed the company of their own children — their sounds and laughter. Perhaps this was why Lung On and Ing Hay regularly cut pictures of children from calendars, advertisements, and newspapers, and placed them safely in a box. Discovered decades later in a desk drawer of the abandoned store, this box of pictures told a sad tale of Chinese immigrant fathers living far away from their children. The two shopkeepers also pampered the white children in the neighborhood. Years later, one of them, Mrs. John W. Murray, recalled: "Doc Hay always gave us children Chinese candy, oranges and other goodies."[75]

But returning home was not easy for many sojourners. Ing Weh-teh, for example, lost his hard-earned savings when a friend invested it without his consent. "Because you took away that money," he wrote to Ing Pang-chi, "I could not return home. I came to America — to labor, to suffer, floating from one place to another, persecuted by the whites, for more than twenty years. . . . Do you know that both the old and the young at my home are awaiting me to deliver them out of starvation and cold?" Liang Kau-tsi, who had also been in America for two decades, was scolded by his brother in a letter: "Because of our family's poverty, you went out of the country to make a living. You still haven't made any money during all of these twenty years? I am afraid that you are Americanized and totally forget about us."[76]

Ing Weh-teh and Liang Kau-tsi and thousands of their fellow Chinese had come to America in search of Gold Mountain, but many of them found themselves "eating bitterness." The venture had turned out to be a sad failure:

> *My life's half gone, but I'm still unsettled;*
> *I've erred. I'm an expert at whoring and*
> *gambling.*
> *Syphilis almost ended my life.*
> *I turned to friends for a loan, but no one took*
> *pity on me.*
> *Ashamed, frightened —*
> *Now, I must wake up after this long nightmare. . . .*[77]

In America, the Chinese found their lives circumscribed in new and different ways. As strangers from a different shore, they had been denied equality of opportunity and were separated from their homeland by the "tyrannical laws" of exclusion. "They called us 'Chink,' " complained an old laundryman, cursing the "white demons." "They think we no good! America cut us off. No more come now, too bad!" Though they could not become citizens, they felt they had earned the right to claim their adopted country. "Since I have lived and made money in this country," Andrew Kan argued in 1924, after forty-four years of working in America, "I should be able to become an American citizen."[78]