‘WHERE WE WOULD EXTEND THE MORAL POWER OF OUR CIVILIZATION’:
AMERICAN CULTURAL AND POLITICAL FOREIGN RELATIONS WITH CHINA,
1843-1856

A dissertation submitted

to Kent State University in partial

fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Mathew T. Brundage

December 2015

© Copyright
All rights reserved

Except for previously published materials
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

PREFACE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTERS

I. Chapter 1: China as Mystery
II. Chapter 2: China as Opportunity
III. Chapter 3: China as a Flawed Empire
IV. Chapter 4: China as a Threat
V. Chapter 5: Redefining “Success” in the Sino-American Relationship

CONCLUSION

APPENDIX

BIBLIOGRAPHY
List of Figures
Figure 1 – “Chinese City” ............................................................... 44
Figure 2 – “Amoy – One of the five ports opened by the late treaties to
foreign commerce” ........................................................................ 44
Figure 3 – “The Emperor of China” .................................................. 50
Figure 4 – “Mandarin receiving seals of office from the Emperor” ....... 50
Figure 5 – “Itinerant Fruit Seller” .................................................. 52
Figure 6 – “Chinese Barber” ............................................................. 52
Figure 7 – “Chinese Ploughing. Macao” ........................................... 52
Figure 8 – “Untitled” image of a Tanka woman .................................. 53
Figure 9 – “The Chinese Family” ..................................................... 55
Figure 10 – “Sampan Girl” ............................................................... 56
Figure 11 – “Head of a Chinese girl” ............................................... 56
Figure 12 – Barnum Broadside .......................................................... 58
Figure 13 – “Dog Seller” ................................................................. 67
Figure 14 – “Stages of Society” ........................................................ 71
Figure 15 – “The Cobbler and his Movable Workshop” ...................... 95
Figure 16 – “Irrigating” ................................................................. 95
Figure 17 – “The Annual Spring Festival” ....................................... 97
Figure 18 – “Dr. Lin’s Celestial Balm” ............................................ 107
Figure 19 – “Chinese School” .......................................................... 122
Figure 20 – “Domestic Scene – Ladies at their usual Employments” .... 140
Figure 21 – “Chinese Lady” .............................................................. 140
Figure 22 – “Infantry Soldier” .......................................................... 173
Figure 23 – “Military Officer” ........................................................... 173
Figure 24 – “Chinese Soldier” .......................................................... 173
Figure 25 – “Foot of an Ancient Chinese Lady/Foot of a Modern Chinese Lady” 184
Figure 26 – “Appearance of the bones of a foot when compressed” ..... 185
Figure 27 – “Cramped Foot and Shoe”......................................................... 185
Figure 28 – “Chinese Tomb”........................................................................ 206
Figure 29 – “Chinese Fortune-Teller”............................................................. 209
Figure 30 – “Tricks played with the queue”.................................................... 259
Figure 31 – “Mode of exposure in the Cangue”.............................................. 259
Figure 32 – “Tract Distribution among the Chinese”........................................ 290
Figure 33 – “Leang Afa, the Chinese Evangelist”.......................................... 298
Americans in the middle of the nineteenth century did not employ any official or standardized methodology for transliterating Chinese characters into English, causing much consternation for historians ever since. As such, Chinese names, places, and words were written in a variety of combinations that roughly phonetically sounded similar to the pronunciation of the character, but without regard to regional and dialectical differences. For instance, Peiping, Peking, Pekin, and Beipin were all given as spellings for the capital of China within the source materials. For the sake of clarity and employing what has become somewhat standard convention, I have used Pinyin romanisation in reference to any specific names, places, or ideas throughout the dissertation. In instances where text is quoted, the original spelling will be maintained with the current Pinyin transliteration following in brackets. Nevertheless, places and names with commonly accepted or understood spellings that do not conform to modern Mandarin romanisation conventions, like Hong Kong [Xianggang] or Canton [Guangdong], will be used to maintain consistency with the original sources.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The route to this dissertation has been circuitous to say the least. A passing chance to take a course in Chinese history as an undergraduate, combined with my existing interest in the history of the British Empire, led me to what I found to be a fascinating period of time in the shared history of both of these nations: The Opium Wars. Understanding British reactions to their role in these conflicts became the cornerstone of my master’s thesis. While deciding to return to academia to complete a PhD, I realized that even less had been written about Americans living in China during the same chronological period. Having lived in China during the run-up to the 2008 Olympics, what struck me was that the public representations of China and the Chinese people in American media sources – that China was a vast country, with a huge population, and that American’s really did not (or even could not) understand their history and culture – could have been written over a century and a half prior and not been out of place within the dominant narrative. And so after a few tentative research steps in various writing seminars, my research agenda took shape and I delved as deeply as possible into the archives.

Archivists at the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress, the Massachusetts Historical Society, and the Harvey Cushing/John Hay Whitney Medical Library and the Divinity School Library at Yale University proved to be invaluable in helping to identify and retrieve boxes of letters and a seemingly countless number of microfilm reels. Special thanks to Martha Smalley, curator of Special Collections at the Divinity Library, for helping me to navigate the labyrinthine and overlapping collections of Yale’s various, extensive archives. In addition, many thanks to the often unnamed champions of modern historical research – the librarians and archivists who have and continue to digitize materials. Without their work, locating many of my primary sources would have been infinitely more difficult.
The number of debts I owe to friends, colleagues, faculty, and family for their professional and moral support cannot be done justice in a few lines. Matthew Phillips, Sarah O’Keefe Zabic, Bryan Kvet, Jeffrey O’Leary, Emily Wicks, Erika Briesacher, and Denise Jenison at one time or another read, edited, and/or acted as a sounding board for whatever ideas were bouncing around my head. They also tolerated and sometimes incited endless recitations of Eddie Izzard’s famous rejoinder: “Do you have a flag?” Many thanks to Gang Zhao, James Tyner, and Kevin Adams for serving on my dissertation committee, and especially for Dr. Adam’s near encyclopedic historiographic knowledge – serving as a consistent reminder to keep my work connected to the work of others. The greatest thanks in terms of the finished product goes to Ann Heiss, the director of my dissertation project. Her insightful and at times brutally direct editing helped to guide me over these many years. Of course, any and all errors or omissions are my own.

Thanks to my sisters Crista and Martha and their families, my grandparents Thomas and Mary, to my other grandparents Robert and Patricia (both recently passed). They have been steadfast supporters of my interest in history in every way possible. Many thanks to my parents Tom and Joan, who helped their nerdy son figure out what he wanted to do in the world and always encouraged me to look for the answers wherever in the world they may be. And, of course, to my husband Bryan – who had the bad luck of meeting a graduate student right before comprehensive exams and has stuck with me for some reason ever since. He has helped keep me grounded and focused during the entire dissertation writing process – from bouts of writers block to late night brainstorming. My gratitude for his support knows no bounds.
Introduction

“I considered that China is a country as distant as any other; that it is as diverse from ours as any; that the people are as much our antipodes in dress, customs, religion, &c., as in their geographical position.” – Benjamin Ball, M.D.¹

If one can categorize the narratives that resulted from U.S. interaction with China in the mid-nineteenth century, the account of Dr. Benjamin Ball of Boston, Massachusetts is, if anything, fairly unsurprising. Ball’s stated goal was a mix of personal adventure and professional proselytization, an attempt to explore the unknown while expounding the value of American medical practices to the Chinese. The period between the First and Second Opium Wars (1843-1856) saw a flowering of American discourse on the topics of China and the Chinese as a result of increased access, increased trade, and increased opportunities for publication, and Ball’s Rambles in Eastern Asia fits neatly within the experiences of most Americans in China. In accounts coming from this new realm of international exchange, authors consistently expressed their engagement with China in terms of a call to action or duty. Whether that call came from the promise of economic success, governmental duty, religious fervor, intellectual curiosity, or a sense of adventure, the shared result was interaction between Americans and a distant people with whom they had little prior intercourse. What emanated from the personal journals, correspondence, travel narratives, news accounts, missionary reports, and cultural studies was a complex combination of assumptions, observations, assertions, and stereotypes that resulted in multiple characterizations of the Chinese people that Americans

¹ Benjamin Lincoln Ball, Rambles in East Asia, Including China and Manilla, During Several Years’ Residence: With Notes of the Voyage to China, Excursions in Manilla, Hong-Kong, Canton, Shanghai, Ningpoo, Amoy, Fouchow, and Macao (Boston: James French and Col, 1856), 11.
could understand, relate to, and use for their own advantage. These authors provide the counterpoint that allows contemporary scholars to uncover what Americans thought of themselves and their place in the larger world in the mid-nineteenth century by their framing of the Chinese in terms of not just being an “other” but in being the “antipode” of Americans at the time.

In recent studies, particularly as the field of diplomatic history has incorporated cultural and linguistic analysis, it is almost taken as a historical truism that the people involved in these kinds of exchanges engaged in rhetorical simplification, or “othering,” in order to reinforce their own perspectives, policies, and opinions. Much of this scholarship focuses on the “Orientalist” processes carried out by Americans and Europeans in order to justify political, economic, and cultural hegemony. As of late, historians have bristled at the approach taken by scholars like Edward Said in Orientalism as undermining agency and masking the complexity of the fluctuating dynamic between different groups, while at the same time overlooking the capability of those being “othered” to work against or even within this rhetorical framework for their own benefit.²

In addition to the difficulties within the field in looking beyond Said, historians have approached diplomatic accounts, missionary reports, mercantile exchanges, and popular publications as separate and discrete means to provide glimpses into the Sino-American

---

² Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). Reina Lewis, Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel, and the Ottoman Harem (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004). Lewis constructs a masterful alternative to the understanding of Orientalism first proposed by Said. Lewis shows how different groups of women from the Ottoman Empire harnessed the rhetoric and European understandings of the ‘harem’ to both defend and challenge the system. They worked within the existing system of representation for their own benefit rather than attempting to create a new paradigm. Also indicative of the capability of the Chinese to create their own categories of “others” are works such as: Emma Teng, Taiwan’s Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006); and, Laura Hostetler, Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).
relationship. Yet, despite differences in occupation and perspective, the diplomats, missionaries, publishers, merchants, historians, and sailors who left records infused their documents with rhetorical trends that speak to certain overarching themes that were universally evident. The idea of “antipodes,” as Bell and others dubbed them, manifested across a litany of writings on subjects ranging from culture, to trade, religion, politics, and diplomacy, but rather than a simple dichotomy between Americans and Chinese, what emerged was a complex framework of multiple representations that fluctuated over time. By engaging with this collective body of sources of cultural content, this dissertation will show how patterns of representation – patterns that utilized this idea of differentness to simultaneously define the mysteriousness of the Chinese, to exhort the opportunities of the China trade, to lament the failures of the bilateral relationship, to warn against the dangers of the Chinese, and to elevate the successes of Americans in addressing and ameliorating Chinese failings – framed and drove diplomatic and cultural exchanges through the needs, desires, and understandings of the contemporary American populace.

Without question, Americans in the mid-nineteenth century organized their perceptions of China and the Chinese in ways that created noticeable distinctions. Nevertheless, these perceptions went deeper than merely applying singular stereotypes that fit American expectations. This dissertation will reveal the multifaceted means by which Americans attempted to create, organize, and interpret their understandings of the Chinese. By no means did this vision remain static, nor were the Chinese always merely passive or unitary figures in these broader understandings, as key moments shifted the dominance of different themes within the larger narrative. On the contrary, the fluctuations within the Sino-American relationship during this time, and the themes that highlighted American responses to the Chinese, show the
interplay between increased interaction and shifting perceptions. While geographic differences among those writing the documents influenced the ways in which these frameworks manifested themselves – for instance Americans living in China saw Chinese labor in terms of profit through transportation, Northern abolitionists worried about the expansion of indentured servitude through the use of Chinese laborers, Southerners showed interest in rallying an alternate source of cheap labor other than slaves, while on the Pacific coast Americans viewed Chinese workers in terms of direct competition for their own labor – all of these viewpoints emanated from the larger discussion of the benefits and drawbacks stemming from the influx of Chinese workers that materialized after the First Opium War. Expanding beyond the domestic reactions to the arrival of Chinese workers in the United States to include international American perceptions of the Chinese in China, all observers, regardless of location, worked within the same frameworks of representation and expectation – focusing on the common notions of mystery, opportunity, reality, threat, and success – and Americans rarely challenged these dominant explanations.

The relationship that Americans had with the ideas and rhetoric of “China” and the “Chinese” is a valuable and unused lens into the way Americans merged foreign relations and domestic concerns, while locating themselves within an emerging international discourse. Discussions about China and the Chinese people help to show the real and imagined status of the United States in a constructed hierarchy of nations where Americans struggled to find a place relative to perceptions of European strength and Chinese weakness. The period between the Opium Wars highlights how the currents of information molded an American self-image and the image of the “other” into more concrete forms. It was this new, albeit limited, connection

---

3 As Rune Svarverud points out, the 1840s represented an important transitional shift in the relationship between the Qing government and foreigners, particularly in the realm of international relations. This shift, according to the author, is indicated by the continued refusal of Chinese rulers throughout this period to allow permanent diplomatic envoys in the capital, something that European and American governments did not obtain until after the Second
between Americans and Chinese in the 1840s and 1850s that allows for a useful and convenient periodization for this work, showing how even limited access inflamed and inspired the imaginations of Americans wishing to reap the benefits of engagement.

Many scholars have described the United States as engaging in “jackal diplomacy” during this phase of diplomatic connection, taking advantage of a weakened Qing government to obtain the same punitive benefits that Britain received through the 1842 Treaty of Nanjing. Yet, unlike Britain, the United States did not exact monetary compensation from China for the loss of trade during the First Opium War (1839-1842). In addition, the United States formally agreed to prohibit its citizens from engaging in the opium trade in the 1843 Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia). Whether or not the United States succeeded in enforcing this prohibitive aspect of the treaty – which even contemporaries recognized as a failure – for Americans attempting to carve out a unique relationship within China, this feature made a difference in their ability to portray Americans, as a whole, as distinctive from successive European regimes purportedly eager to engage in the illicit drug trade and exploit the weakened Chinese, whom Americans claimed they wished to aid.

The fourteen year span selected for analysis represents the burgeoning of Sino-American relations. Before 1842, the Qing dynasty’s Hong system limited foreign trade and interaction to a single port in Canton (Guangzhou) and to a small class of Chinese traders known as the Cohong, or Hong merchants, who maintained imperial rights and responsibilities that permitted them to trade with outsiders while prohibiting others from the exchange. After the First Opium War, while at the same time allowing greater exchange between Chinese subjects and foreigners in treaty ports. Rune Svarverud, *International Law and World Order in Late Imperial China: Translation, Reception, and Discourse* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 16-27.


Dong Wang presents one of the clearest and most concise explanations of the four-tiered system, and the methods used by the Chinese government to ensure maximum distance between the imperial center and the ever intrusive
War the United States gained a significant expansion of rights and access through the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia). Modeled closely after the British Treaty of Nanjing in terms of right of entry into new treaty ports and expansion of economic and mercantile privileges, these treaties resulted in the disintegration of the Cohong. Americans could now trade and interact with any and all Chinese subjects, though geographically foreigners were still legally restricted to the areas immediately around the five new treaty port cities in Shanghai, Amoy (Xiamen), Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Canton, the new British colony Hong Kong, and the Portuguese controlled entrepôt of Macao, with which trade was permitted to continue. Despite the substantial increase of port access along China’s coastline, British, Americans, and other Europeans all failed to secure permanent representation to the imperial court in Pekin (Beijing). The beginning of the Second Opium War, or the Arrow War, in 1856 marks the end of this important phase of early American-Chinese interaction. By 1856 China faced increasing pressure from the United States, as well as Britain and France, to renegotiate their treaties to include access to the capital and to secure more ports for open trade. Whether as a result of these increased expansionists aims, or as other historians argue the continued resistance of the Chinese government to allow the opium trade, China found itself at war with the British, and now the French, for the second time in less than two decades. At the end of the war the Treaty of Tianjin, to which the United States was a

---


7 J.Y. Wong explains the historical contention between using the “Second Opium War” versus the “Arrow War” to describe the Anglo-Franco war with the Chinese from 1856-1860. Scholars who term it an “Opium” war focus on the influx of drugs and trade and the breakdown of diplomatic relations as the primary causation of the conflict, while historians like Wong who emphasize the imperialistic nature of the conflict over the confiscation of the British ship *The Arrow* gravitate toward the latter nomenclature. This dissertation will use the two interchangeably to indicate the conflict, as issues of drugs, trade, diplomacy, and imperialism all found their way into the larger patterns of representation. J.Y. Wong, *Deadly Dreams: Opium, Imperialism, and the Arrow War, 1856-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 31-37.
signatory, secured American access to twice as many treaty ports and an end to prohibitions restricting foreign travel beyond the coastline, as well as providing for an annual audience with imperial officials in the capital to discuss matters of importance between the two governments. Americans thereby gained new and more intricate avenues of interaction with the Chinese that only intensified interests initially cultivated in this inter-bellum period.

The year 1856 also holds special import when considering domestic understandings of the Chinese. California’s “Gold Rush” in 1849 and its rapid accession to statehood not only resulted in a westward dash of Americans attempting to find fortune but it also triggered a rising eastward flow of people across the Pacific, particularly from southern China. While never a high percentage of the population, the economic impact of the Chinese was noticeable. First levied in 1850, the foreign miners tax applied to non-citizens working in the gold fields of California. The tax amounted to a significant portion of state income during this period, and the Chinese – as a group that could not become citizens, and therefore evade the tax – bore the heaviest brunt of the tax burden. It was not until 1857 that Chinese communities began to move outside of California and into other states and territories in recorded numbers. Historians have thoroughly noted how this geographic expansion of the Chinese into the United States intensified and nationalized the extant anti-Chinese sentiment beyond the western seaboard. Thus, 1856 is

---

8 On a number of occasions American naval forces aided British and French military actions violating the blanket order of neutrality for Americans during the conflict. Despite the new access to the capital, the treaty still did not permit a permanent residence, and required forewarning of American access to the capital, that they travel on non-military vessels, that the representative not bring “trivial occasions” and that “his entire quite shall not exceed twenty persons, exclusive of his Chinese attendants, none of whom shall be engaged in trade.” “Treaty of Tientsin [Tianjin]” in American Diplomatic and Public Papers: The United States and China. Ed. Jules Davids, Vol. 15: The Treaties of Tientsin (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1973).

9 Robert Lee notes that in the 1850s fifty percent of the entire population of San Francisco was of immigrant origin, but the increasing numbers of Chinese laborers – almost all of which originated from Guangdong province in the south, challenged the American narrative of westward expansion. Robert Lee, Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999).

10 Alexander Saxton explains that many Chinese were driven out of California’s gold regions by hostile Americans, while at the same time they were drawn away to other states and territories by the need for labor in the construction
an important diplomatic watershed as the United States began taking a much more aggressive position in China, while at the same time reactions to expanding Chinese immigration triggered domestic responses. The period from 1842 to 1856, while representing an era of limited interaction compared to the end of the nineteenth century, highlights a situation whereby American and Chinese contact expanded exponentially beyond the Hong system and beyond China itself, thereby giving new impetus to American expectations for the relationship. Focusing on these fourteen years makes it possible to see the processes through which Americans constructed and disseminated representations of the Chinese on a national scale.

Scholars have not missed the lack of historical research into inter-Opium War Sino-American relations. In his seminal study of early Chinese immigration to the United States, Stuart Miller notes that, “The development of an unfavorable American image of the Chinese [in China] was an evolutionary process that accelerated noticeably between 1835 and 1850. No single event, person, or group can be isolated as being primarily responsible for this development.” Miller noted the complexity of this era decades ago, yet the multifaceted relationships among events, groups, and individuals involved in this process have remained unclear. This dissertation will draw attention to a variety of groups that propelled and directed American relations with China after the First Opium War: Americans living in China (diplomats, travelers, and missionaries); those traveling to China on temporary business (merchants, sailors, and naval officials); and those at home with concerns regarding the American position in China of railroads, and Loren Chan notes many Chinese workers entered Nevada after 1856 to work as ditch diggers. In, Chinese on the American Frontier, ed. Arif Dirlik, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).

11 Jack Beeching, The Chinese Opium Wars (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976). This text is a frequently cited work that lays out the general causes, instances, and outcomes of these two conflicts. He notes that while direct and permitted American involvement in either war was limited, the influence of the United States in the region increased between the two conflagrations.

(missionary organizations, journalists, and historians). Each group and its subsequent contributions reflected the political, economic, religious, cultural, and diplomatic interactions between Americans and the China within the larger discourse. And while each approached China and the Chinese through its own unique perspective and ever mindful of its own particular interests, the language used by these seemingly disparate groups and individuals remained strikingly similar and cohesive in its rhetorical construction. This repetition of language indicates the limited knowledge with which Americans had regarding China, and it also highlights the flexibility with which Americans approached the relationship. As Christopher Jespersen explains, “the history of Sino-American relations contains a range of varied and long-standing cultural constructions on the American side, ranging from racism and xenophobia to naïveté, paternalism, and awe,” and that “images of China have largely come from Americans’ assumptions about themselves and not from the reality of Chinese linguistic, historical, or cultural similarities.” He concludes that American solutions and representations were most commonly parsed in terms of existing solutions and American gain. Thus, it did not matter what type of “encounter” Americans had with the Chinese – be it in person, via hearsay, or through “armchair travels” – these different authors maintained a culturally constructed vision of America and its place in the world, which led them toward similar conclusions about the Chinese.

---

14 One such work that exemplifies this penchant for combining foreign and domestic gain is: Robert E. Herzstein, Henry R. Luce, Time, and the American Crusade in China (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). While Herzstein focuses on the impact that one influential person, Henry Luce the editor of Time magazine, he illustrates how Luce framed calls for increased intervention in China after WWII in terms of American economic, religious, and national security interests.
15 Kristin Hoganson, Consumer’s Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). Hoganson highlights the innumerable ways that Americans experienced the outside world from reading clubs, to home decoration, to food consumption. The “armchair travels”
When analyzing the historiographic tradition of Sino-American relations, it is clear that the earliest works in the subject area focused primarily on the overt economic and political relationship. Triggered by research such as Miller’s *The Unwelcome Immigrant*, scholars have written much since the 1970s about perceptions of Chinese immigrants and Chinese-Americans in the broader American social context. Many scholars, most notably Sucheng Chan in *This Bittersweet Soil*, have delved quite deeply into the role that non-mining Chinese labor and Chinese communities played along the Pacific coast in an attempt to locate the importance of Asian immigration within American history. A number of more recent texts, such as Robert Lee’s *Orientals* and John Kuo Wei Tchen’s *New York Before Chinatown*, utilize the frameworks established by Edward Said in order to analyze the orientalist arguments surrounding Chinese immigration from a domestic American standpoint, leaving connections to foreign policies mostly unmade. Recently historians began to look at the way publications about China in the nineteenth century helped to create ingrained perceptions of the empire and its people. Jonathan Spence’s *The Chan’s Great Continent* takes a very broad approach to this topic by looking at China’s place in the West’s (combining Western Europe and the United States) changing public perception of the Middle Kingdom from the seventeenth century onward. John Haddad’s *The
Romance of China: Excursions to China in U.S. Culture, 1776 to 1876 perhaps takes the most similar theoretical approach to the one that will be applied in this dissertation. Haddad argues that American travel writers’ perceptions of China were highly biased toward a romanticized perspective, presenting a counterweight to the negative perceptions that Miller, Tchen, and others so thoroughly outlined. The Romance of China shows that during the period analyzed, the image of China was neither static nor universally accepted, and that the way subsequent generations of travel narratives and public events portrayed China reflected both previous preconceptions and the contemporary objectives of the writers. Yet, Haddad offers instances of this romanticism using broad strokes, often utilizing single, though notable examples of entire genres, to cover his century span, where this dissertation focuses on a much narrower chronological period in order to convey the extent to which multiple rather than singular patterns of representation penetrated the discourse on China regardless of the sources. Haddad’s recent text, America’s First Adventure in China: Trade, Treaties, Opium, and Salvation ameliorates some of the issues of limited perspective, this time emphasizing the biographies of important individuals involved in different thematic events in Sino-American relations during the same century-long time period, from the establishment of the United States through the signing of the Burlingame Treaty. Nevertheless, Haddad’s emphasis on narrative structures over this chronological period in which the “fog of ignorance” between the two peoples lifted, continues

to only graze the surface of the issue of how American rhetoric regarding the Chinese found itself intertwined with debates over national expansion and the usefulness of the China trade.

While cultural analysis has opened the gates to better understanding nineteenth-century perceptions of the Chinese by Americans, the overarching linkages between domestic and foreign policies are pieces that have yet to be connected, and this connection would go some distance toward clarifying how the United States could engage in an expansion of interaction with China while at the same time Americans found themselves increasingly hostile toward the Chinese people in the Americas. Whether it is Miller’s focus on negative representation, or Haddad’s romanticized vision, both hone their works narrowly on one form of depiction as being representative of the relationship. This dissertation will clearly reveal that such a narrow focus oversimplifies the complex rhetorical and cultural relationship between China and the United States when a much more nuanced series of interconnected frameworks actually existed. Joseph Henning’s book on early Japanese-American cultural relations, *Outposts of Civilization*, provides a useful example in delineating how multiple representations can be simultaneously mobilized by different groups with their own objectives, and how these representations existed in spite of, or sometimes because of, the larger debate at hand. Henning explains how different constituent groups of Americans understood and represented the Japanese people through their own “distinctive interpretations,” yet the aims of each group reflected the tone and intent of these interpretations while still utilizing similar patterns of description.21

The sources utilized for this dissertation represent the concentrations of documents that were available for Americans at the time. While the American community in China numbered in the hundreds at any given moment, and only a few dozen American ships and their crews arrived in and departed from the treaty ports every year, certain accounts and reports dominated the historical record for logical reasons, and as such they play a larger role in establishing the rhetorical conventions that influenced the discourse. Because of their education, their duration of time spent in China, and because they were beholden to report frequently to superiors in the United States, missionaries under the American Board of Commissioners and American diplomats and naval officials were usually the most voluminous writers. As such, their narratives are often the largest, most organized, and most often referenced in other accounts. Likewise, the deep involvement of singular figures such as Caleb Cushing, Samuels Wells Williams, Peter Parker, and Elijah and Eliza Bridgman meant that they had an uncannily powerful influence on the dominant discourse. The rise in popularity of travel accounts in the nineteenth century contributed to another lasting genre of literature, but the distance between the United States and China and the perceptions of dangers in traveling to China resulted in a more limited supply of narrative publications from the handful of travelers who made the voyage. But unlike official reports, these narratives are useful for analysis because they are much more comprehensive due to their length and were targeted at the general public rather than within official ranks.

Merchant and sailor accounts for this era are more sparse, but they still represent an important and consistent source of information. Because of their periodic time in China and/or because of issues of literacy, there are not as many extant documents from this group. Likewise, as most of these accounts amounted to personal correspondence, many of these documents are either in personal collections of have unfortunately been lost to posterity. As for domestic publications, the newspapers utilized for this dissertation were done so because they represent a range of urban and rural populations, as well as a variety of different regional and political interests that help to indicate what information editors and owners published for public consumption. While notions of reception and interpretation of information are not the purview of this research, it is a reasonable leap to suggest that these papers published stories with the intent of informing as well as influencing their readership. Some potential sources – such as domestic speeches or congressional hearings – were omitted not because they conflicted with findings, but because of the issue of inconsistency. The volumes of pages written by those directly involved with the China trade overshadow the occasional debate or reference to China made by other writers, politicians, or the occasional commentator. The lack of consistency makes it difficult to reason whether the limited remarks made within these contexts were reflective of or influential within the larger frameworks that described the Chinese.

So, then, why did those involved in extensive discussions regarding China engage in these similar rhetorical explanations to reinforce their disparate purposes? As indicated above, there were several means by which Americans directly or indirectly interacted within this debate. Some Americans attempted to broach the perceived cultural and social divides through descriptions of their direct dealings. Missionaries, diplomats, merchants, scientists, and travelers all initiated their travel to and exploration of China for their own specific ends, but all did so
through interaction with Americans at home. Whether through publications, journals, dispatches, communiqués, policy suggestions, or simply letters to family and friends, these vanguards of American interests in China were at the forefront of working within frameworks of representation in order to define the Chinese in terms of personal, organizational, and national goals. In essence, regardless of their intent, these authors’ works served as travel narratives, recounting their experiences to eager audiences and painting a picture of the author’s interests and intent in China.²²

While sources such as naval reports and merchant accounts reflected a somewhat more transitory connection with the Chinese, this does not mean that their authors’ desire to know and explain China was lacking. Whether they explained the potential value of the Chinese marketplace or highlighted the threat of piracy along the China coast, these works continued the process of formalizing and disseminating how Americans understood the Chinese people. It should also be noted that these transitory figures also aided in the diffusion of information through the carrying of messages and dispatches to and from the United States and China. Often, Americans in China referenced waiting for the delivery of mail, which arrived from the United States along a number of routes, such as a path along the Mediterranean and over the isthmus of Suez known as the “Overland Route,” using ships rounding the South African coast across the Indian ocean, over a trans-Panama route, or routes that stretched around the tip of South America across the Pacific via California and Hawaii. By the mid-1850s steam technology allowed mail ships to arrive sometimes as quickly as forty-five days, greatly intensifying and accelerating communication and the spread of information contained within, while at the same

²² Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Rutledge, 1992). Pratt’s work is foremost in understanding how to unpack historical writing for the cultural cues buried within, and how the language used by travelers was often the dominant source for rhetorical frameworks of description.
time being a frequently referenced aspect of the exchange itself. The capability of shortening, and thereby potentially dominating, the route to China was framed as a way of unifying the American continent, increasing American access to the Pacific, and taking some mercantile power away from Europeans. Domestic discourse on events and actions in China published in newspapers and histories often relied on second or third-hand accounts, or sometimes merely on speculation of what may have happened in China, between the arrivals of the latest mail steamers from Canton. These more peripheral domestic publications concerned with the China exchange, while seemingly rife with inaccuracies, show the extent to which it is important to consider the larger frameworks as representation rather than as a factual presentation of events. Whether a partisan newspaper explained or criticized governmental policies with China, a merchant publication exhorted the value of railroad expansion in solidifying trade with Asia, or a history text attempted to define the peculiarities of Chinese religious practices, each mobilized a variety of sources – sometimes accurate while at other times farfetched – in order to fit its own narratives within the dominant dialogue of the day.

Looking at domestic, foreign, and transitional sources of representation as a collective exchange does not come without challenges. First, Americans were not isolated from other sources of information regarding the Chinese. Publications created in China, British journals, and even translations of foreign accounts such as French Jesuit missionaries found their way to the United States and into the popular perception. While the themes that arose in the American discourse on China could and did mirror rhetoric in foreign sources, the ways in which Americans framed these representations in terms of American interests – oftentimes in competition with other nations – warrant looking at American sources independently from these supplemental avenues of information. In addition to the difficulties of source origin, many times
properly isolating exactly which genre of source these documents represent can cause difficulty. For example, Peter Parker was a trained physician who traveled to China to work as a medical missionary. While there, Parker served as a translator for merchants and diplomats, and he himself became a consular official during the 1850s. Does one attribute his records as those of a physician, a missionary, a linguist, or a diplomat? Focusing on the general frameworks of rhetoric and representation therefore requires awareness of the many “hats” individuals such as Parker wore but further indicates the importance of utilizing a broadly focused critique of these tropes as general frameworks rather than considering individual sources as being only influenced by a single perspective. There must also be an awareness – particularly in domestic publications – of the value and challenge that the duplication of information in various sources played. For example, different newspapers published and republished reports of the latest events from China as the news traveled from American coastal cities inland – creating a measurable time lag that can show what information traveled to which areas and at what speed – in essence outlining connections and giving indication as to what information about China publishers deemed important enough to propagate. News and information traveled via networks of trade, publication, postal exchange, diplomatic cables, news reports, and personal correspondence in both the United States and China, creating a complex web of communication that only intensified American representations of China.

By paying close attention to the avenues and patterns of publication, this dissertation seeks to connect foreign and diplomatic debates more clearly with the domestic concerns of economic, industrial, and territorial expansion, balancing known anti-Chinese sentiment with a more nuanced understanding of the various ways discussions of China influenced American rhetoric. It will reveal how the debates regarding China and the Chinese merged together
seemingly disparate issues of capitalism and trade, religion and missionary work, cultural and
diplomatic foreign relations, expansion and Manifest Destiny, competition with Europe, race and
hierarchy, masculinity and power, and slavery, all under one domain. The subject of American-
Chinese relations provides a lens for viewing foreign relations and domestic concerns during the
time period and making manifest the deep interplay that these core arguments maintained with
each other, with China as the central connection between them.

Rather than focusing on specific individuals or groups within the American-Chinese
exchange, this dissertation seeks to create a larger thematic, and more holistic understanding of
the interchange. The chapters are structured to illuminate how various conceptualizations of
China and the Chinese fell into overarching characterizations of mysteriousness, opportunism,
failure, threat, and success that connected differences in time, place, intent, and authorship.
While this approach does not necessarily rely on a strict chronological analysis of these works, it
is clear that policy shifts as well as the evolution of the diplomatic relationship between China
and the United States influenced the frequency and dominance of each of these thematic trends.
As Americans questioned the ability of the Chinese government to maintain their treaty
obligations – particularly as the Taiping conflict and issues with uprisings of coolie laborers and
pirates challenged American security – it resulted in debates as to whether the opportunities and
reported successes of the relationship overrode the dangers, or whether the status quo needed to
be changed. By 1856, as tensions between Britain and China once again came to a head, it was
clear that American policy makers and policy influencers were much more amenable to creating
a new dynamic – one in which China had even less leverage in steering treaty negotiations.

Much as Benedict Anderson shows in his groundbreaking work *Imagined Communities*,
perceptions of similarity and difference, and inclusion and exclusion, of territory and personality
all contribute to the formation of internal and external identities. The value of this dissertation is therefore not found in attempting to create a logical or accurate image of the Chinese people from the perception of Americans, a task that would only serve to reinforce the perceptions and misperceptions that have since built into assumed stereotypes. Instead it will filter these constructions of China and the Chinese through these rhetorical patterns, and in doing so it will illuminate what it meant to be an American and what was important to Americans in this period of expansion and tension in the mid-nineteenth century. Oliver Turner has recently provided one of the most succinct historiographic analyses of the importance of this “imagery” in discussions of the Sino-American relationship. Turner concludes that most historical research has focused on either on singular ideas within a given period of change in the relationship between the positive and negative – like Jespersen – or has traced the evolution and change of ideas over a long period of time – like Harold Isaacs’s work in the 1950s and more recently John Rogers Haddad. Isaacs went as far as to assert that historians had attached sentiments to different eras (Respect, Contempt, Benevolence, Admiration, Disenchantment, and Hostility) and that historical study of each era reflected the dominant preconception of its day. Whereas Turner tries to trace the rise and decline of a series of individual perceptions over the entire relationship, this dissertation seeks the alternative, honing in on the simultaneous positive and negative responses to the Sino-American relationship in a narrowed period between significant points of change.

23 Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, (New York: Verso, 1983). Perhaps one of the best examples of Anderson’s notions at work is: Thongchai Winichakul, Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation, (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1997). Winichakul deftly shows how the burgeoning idea of being a Thai replaced earlier notions of what it meant to be a subject in Siam. It combined ideas of political change with the concretization of national identity that required the inclusion and exclusion of groups based on geographic location in addition to existing ethnic or cultural similarities.


Much of the way Americans discussed China and the Chinese people attempted to unravel a place and a people of which they knew relatively little. With the end of the Hong system in Canton, the barriers between American and Chinese interaction began to crumble, and as such the “mystery” of the Chinese began to be uncovered and defined to a curious American public. Chapter one highlights the flurry of contributions from nearly all literary perspectives – missionaries, diplomats, travelers, newspapers, and historians – regarding the “antipodean” behaviors and practices of the Chinese as Ball described them. Of primary concern to many was the attempt to explain the history and culture of China in very broad strokes, at times balancing explanations of grand imperial histories and Chinese accomplishments with the contemporary perception – one not helped by their defeat at the hands of the British – that Chinese culture and governance was undergoing a period of stagnation. These illustrative concerns of Chinese “backwardness” were often intensified by characterizations of the influence and role of a variety of non-Protestant and non-Christian traditions during this period. Food, clothing, literature, and art all became points of analysis for defining the “oddities” within Chinese civilization, ranging from eating birds-nest soup to the practice of foot binding. At the same time these investigations sought common ground for diplomatic, economic, and religious exchange. Perhaps no fact found its way into the issue of how to engage the Chinese more often than the constant reference to the population of China. Nearly all of the sources at one time or another referenced imperial census numbers, which indicated to these interested Americans a level of high sophistication in the governance abilities of the Qing dynasty, while at the same time highlighting the hundreds of millions of potential allies, converts, and consumers that Americans desired to cultivate. The continual accumulation of facts about the Chinese built to the point where the rhetoric shifted toward a movement that tried to apply this knowledge to the Sino-American relationship.
As the mysterious aspects of the Middle Kingdom clarified, discussions of China widened to focus on the opportunities – both real and supposed – that the Chinese presented to the United States. Chapter two will thus underscore how many of the ambitions of the American people – including the much vaunted ideal of Manifest Destiny – came to be parsed through the framework of opportunism in China. Trade in China was perceived to be the opening salvo in creating American mercantile dominance not only in Asia but around the world. Americans hoped that direct trade would create access to Chinese luxury goods without the need for European middlemen, while at the same time opening the doors for American goods to flow into a seemingly infinite Chinese market with its millions of consumers. While this rhetoric existed even prior to the founding of the United States, this justification served as a foundational piece in many of the core arguments advocating American expansionism in the 1840s and 1850s. Americans viewed expansion not only as a means for territorial growth but was also as a way to reinforce trade with China. The creation of land and sea trade hubs along the coast of the new state of California; the debate over control of the Oregon territories in relation to British power on the continent and in the Pacific; proposals for transcontinental rail lines, trans-oceanic shipping routes, and propositions for financing a canal system across Central America; and discussions about the annexation and control of islands across the hinged, as many contemporaries argued, on taking full advantage of the opportunities that access to China leveled. Failure to achieve these ambitious territorial goals would result in missing the full potential of Sino-American engagement.

26 According to averages among these accounts, estimates of China’s population was in the range of 300-350 million subjects.
28 Man-Houng Lin notes that during this period China was undergoing an economic “crisis” of its own. The continued desire of imperial officials to collect taxation in silver, coupled with the dwindling silver supply because of the opium trade and a decreased demand for Chinese luxury goods, resulted in massive currency depreciation and
Americans during this period also encountered China as a site for expanding the nation’s cultural and religious influence. Treaty provisions that permitted the establishment of American churches in the port cities created logical springboards for missionary work, although the activity of missionaries was not limited to proselytizing. Christian missionaries were the dominant force behind most foreign printing presses in the treaty ports, they founded and staffed the majority of foreign schools that catered to Chinese students, constructed and ran hospitals, and, with their linguistic skills, were often utilized by all of the other foreigners in China as translators because of their accuracy and skill. These additional endeavors not only reinforced their efforts at broadening their religious appeals to a wider Chinese audience but also drew them closer together with the other sectors of foreign involvement in China. The rise of the Taiping Rebellion in the 1850s provided an additional means of increasing American religious influence throughout China. A variety of Christian millenarian and traditional Chinese beliefs inspired the leader of the rebellion, Hong Xiuquan, to reject Qing authority and to create a “Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace” (Taiping Tianguo – 太平天国) in central China. While it was known even at the time that Hong and his followers did not adhere to a version of Christianity that resembled that of European or American sects, missionaries and others in China believed that the Taiping opened the door to future missionary influence that could help guide “proper”

---

29 It should be noted that all American missionaries represented Protestant denominations until the 1880s, though French and Portuguese Catholic missionaries – especially Jesuits – plied their skills throughout China for centuries by this point.

30 In their groundbreaking work on colonialism in South Africa, Jean and John Comaroff illuminate how missionaries were key players that impacted both colonial and native relations. They show how missionaries often bridged the gap between issues of the home country and issues of the locals, acting as intermediaries of information. Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa.* Vol. I and II (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

doctrine and conversions. This influence would then open the door to further American influence to shape post-Qing governmental, economic, and cultural development if, or when, the dynasty fell.

Whether or not the Taiping were to successfully unseat the Qing dynasty, Americans viewed the increased access to China that they already obtained as an opportunity to prove America’s worth. Americans viewed themselves as more “fair” toward the Chinese than other Europeans, and they believed American missionaries were more effective in enticing conversion than Roman Catholic missionaries from Europe. Contemporary discussion of the proven “fairness” of Americans served as a reminder of why the United States ought to increase its power in the Pacific whether it was within debates over the Washington territory, Pacific islands, or the treaty ports in China and elsewhere. American adherence to good behavior in China indicated how much ideas of prestige influenced expansionist policies. This debate even extended to discussions about the potential value of Chinese labor in the Americas – even the United States. The anti-Chinese sentiment of the late 1850s and beyond belies the fact that many Americans at this time saw the importation of Chinese labor as an economic opportunity on a number of fronts. Shipping firms in the United States could, and did, dominate the market of transporting Chinese laborers across the Pacific to U.S., South American, and Caribbean destinations. Many contemporaries – both abolitionist and capitalist – argued that Chinese workers could serve as a more reliable work force than slave labor on Caribbean plantations and in mines in places like California and Peru. These workers were viewed as short-term, temporary labor that, unlike slaves, could and should return to their home country once their

32 According to John Haddad, rather than weakness, adherence was more about the realities of the limitations American’s had in engaging with China. Their inability to establish colonial systems like the British forced Americans to alter the playing field in ways that were amenable to American aims and capabilities. The Romance of China.
labor contract concluded. Thus, as the relationship between China and the United States gained a more solid footing, the perceived benefits of this exchange continued to intensify, but as expectations gave way to the reality of the relationship so too did the rhetoric of opportunity diminish.

Among the narratives of uncovering the Chinese mystery and presenting the opportunities from interaction with China, a theme emerged that China was an inherently flawed place with an untrustworthy people. Whether from the mobilization of existing racial and cultural tropes against the Chinese, or the fizzling of the opportunistic spirit under a more realistic expectation of Sino-American relations, the intra-Opium War period saw the rise of a more critical attitude toward the Chinese. Chapter three will highlight the variety of ways American perspectives of China rejected calls for optimism. First and foremost among the complaints many Americans had was the claim that the Chinese were unable to properly govern themselves. Their ineffective resistance to the British in the Opium War, the dislocation and death of substantial numbers of subjects during the Taiping Rebellion, and their inability to stem the continued flow of illegal opium showed to some Americans that, governmentally and militarily, the Chinese could not maintain their empire. Some blamed this lack of control on ethnic differences between the Manchu Qing dynasts and the majority Han populace. Others perceived that corruption of the government, indicated by the mistreatment of foreigners by mandarins and other imperial officials, prevented the development of a proper “civilized” regime. Criticisms of Chinese traditions and culture, highlighted through factual collection and often intensified by religious hostilities against “idolatrous” practices, only further fueled the discourse of whether engagement with China was opportunity or folly.
One dominant trend within this area of discourse merged the rising tide of criticism with the theme of Chinese society being the opposite of that of Americans. Through observation and insinuation, many engaged in a discussion of how the Chinese challenged the gender roles expected by Americans at the time. When speaking of upper-class Chinese women, American writers wrote extensively on the practice of foot binding. This physical process was seen as the full extension of male power over Chinese women in a procedure that was reportedly eroticized by Chinese men. This practice also typified the American understanding of elite and middle-class Chinese women – whether wives, concubines, or daughters – as being purposefully cloistered in their homes and left as uneducated and replaceable resources by their husbands. The disposability of women in China was presented by the consistent reference to infanticide as being an almost wholly female phenomenon – an action carried out against female children by their mothers in response to a dominant cultural preference toward male offspring. Yet, American criticisms of Chinese gender expectations ranged beyond understandings of elite women to that of women in the laboring class. Whether working in fields or in boats, female laborers were almost always described in reference to their hard-working nature – often with infants slung on their backs or children working alongside them – while their husbands looked on without aiding them. At the same time, male laborers – or coolies – were referred to by foreigners simply as “boys,” regardless of age, rank, status, or profession, and were often described in relation to their capacity to perform work normally done by pack animals elsewhere. Thus, in criticizing the gender roles of China through contemporary frameworks of race and class, women were simultaneously hobbled physically and intellectually, while others were exploited for their physical prowess, and men were cunning in their ability to control the bodies of women through foot binding and labor, or were themselves no better than beasts of burden.
The rosy image of industrious Chinese workers and expansion-driven American dominance in the Pacific was increasingly tainted by the cultural criticisms emanating from discussions of the Chinese. This gave way to rising fears that the flaws uncovered in China represented a variety of threats to the United States – both real and imagined. The fourth chapter will show how this perception of “threat” did not arise all at once, nor was it on a singular front on which Americans discerned risk. Instead, a sense of danger existed from the signing of the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia) and manifested itself throughout the inter-bellum period. Only as an increasing number of Chinese immigrants made their way across the Pacific Ocean did fears of the “threat” begin to reach a fevered pitch. The threat Americans perceived often depended on their personal proximity to China and the Chinese. For Americans living and traveling to China there existed an almost perpetual concern for their personal security. Attacks and threats on foreign settlements during and after the First Opium War created a pervasive sense that “mobs” of Chinese were only moments away from attempting to decimate the “fan kwei,” or “foreign devils,” as American reported being called. The danger to American interests and to Americans themselves – particularly women and children – often downplayed the culpability of foreigners in provoking hostility, intensified criticisms of the Chinese government as being incapable of controlling their populace, and relied upon expectations of military and naval superiority to enforce the perceived rights of American citizens. The sense of mob activities in China helped turn the tide of American support for the Taiping Rebellion. While some remained hopeful that missionary activity could mold the Taiping into a willing diplomatic and economic partner, by the mid-1850s most sentiment shifted to the belief that the Taiping could never be instructed in the correct version of Christianity and were only serving to further undermine the political control of the Qing, thereby threatening American interests in the region. Piracy served
in the same rhetorical capacity of mobs when threats were concerned. “Piratical” activities disrupted normal trade and endangered American economic interests, violated treaty protocols – showing the incapacity of the Chinese government to enforce maritime laws – and proved to be a physical threat both to American merchandise and to American lives. As those on land trumpeted the martial abilities to repel attacks on foreign settlements, so too did maritime sources repeatedly highlight the prowess of American naval forces in their ability to fend off or even destroy pirate fleets.

As historians have deconstructed the rising anti-Chinese sentiment of the 1850s and beyond, what has often been lacking in their analysis is the role that the debate over the importation and immigration of Chinese labor played in larger foreign policy debates. A key position of this debate hinged on whether the potential value of the influx of Chinese laborers, or coolies, outweighed concerns over introducing a group they believed could not assimilate into the American polity. Accounts of coolie mistreatment by shipping officials, mine owners, and locals in the west contrasted reports of coolie violence and uprisings on ships across the Pacific. Particular among abolitionist publications were concerns that the rise of an international coolie trade – dominated at the time by American shipping companies – verged on creating a “new slavery.” Their concern was that Chinese workers, without their knowledge or consent, were being transported to the Americas, were paid next to nothing, and had little to no legal recourse to either negotiate better wages or to find a means to return to their home country. As this concern over the issue of the permanency of Chinese immigration continued, so did debates over whether the Chinese had the ability to assimilate into American society, as opposed to the hope of many that coolie work was only temporary and a lack of pay or the threat of physical coercion would compel the Chinese to return home.
Despite the challenges of dealing with the Chinese as suggested by the preceding themes of mystery, opportunity, flaw, and threat, it must be made clear that no one advocated a ‘hands-off’ approach when it came to Sino-American relations. Instead, Americans held the United States up as the exemplar nation, from which China could succeed by regaining its vaunted position among “civilized” nations. Most involved in this debate presented missionaries as the primary bulwark and bellwether of American interests in China. The creation of schools and hospitals by these Americans was tangible proof of the physical benefit of the American presence. In particular, the focus on the conversion of Chinese women indicated the overall success or failure of individual missions. These purported reformers asserted that Chinese women could claim a better social standing through Christian conversion than they could through traditional Chinese culture. By ending the practices of foot binding and cloistering and through Biblical education, these women were viewed as representatives to their families not only of Christian morals but of American interests as well.

This era also represented the creation of a proto-“Open Door” policy. While it would be decades before Americans asserted the actual Open Door policy, the diplomatic and merchant efforts to secure and ensure open trade networks for all interested nations laid the framework for the later codification of such a policy. Americans were wary about European strength in the treaty ports and wanted to maintain an equal legal and economic status with European nations in their spheres of influence, but many hoped that by adhering to treaty agreements more closely and by maintaining a cordial and beneficial relationship with Qing officials, the United States could gain special favor in China. By maintaining these open connections most believed that through Americans in China or among returning Chinese laborers from the United States, ideas like democracy, capitalism, Christianity, and a variety of other cultural thoughts would
organically spread for the benefit of both the Chinese and American people, ironically undermining the supposition that the Chinese in California could not be civilized. The supposed culmination of American influence would result in an idealized governmental, military, and social reconstruction of China, centering on technological and legal reforms that Americans were more than willing to inspire and direct.

China in the context of the 1840s and 1850s represented equal parts panacea and Pandora’s box, embodying American hopes of addressing domestic and foreign concerns while at the same time attempting to identify and neutralize unknown variables that had the potential to scuttle the tenuous relationship. Sanu Limaye notes in his analysis of the United States as a “Pacific Nation” that, “apart from a Pacific coastline and owning territory in that ocean, is a mental image or identity of being so. A complex and intricate mix of history, ideas, and interests have shaped the story of the U.S. being a Pacific nation.” Likewise, Hongshan Li asserts that, in general, “U.S.-China relations have been known to take numerous roller-coaster like sharp turns largely because of the lack of accurate image and perception between the two peoples.” These perceptions became more accurate at times of improved relations, and likewise during periods of poor relations perceptions were more likely to be skewed by the “monopolization” of the image by a small subset of interest groups on both sides of the Pacific. The idea of China captivated and concerned Americans as much in the 1840s as in contemporary debate, and the Sino-American relationship, then and now, can be used to gauge American understandings of themselves and their perceived role in the larger world.

Chapter 1: China as Mystery

“There can be no doubt that the doors of China, those two-leaved gates of brass that have so long been closed, and guarded by the great Dragon, are shaking and will soon be opened.” - Rev. Walter Lowrie

Whether it was the vast distance that physically separated the United States from China, or the symbolic representation of the foreboding Great Wall meant to keep outside forces at bay, Americans throughout the mid-nineteenth century looked upon the China with an air of puzzlement and acknowledged misunderstanding. Like its neighbor Japan at the time, the Chinese government attempted to limit the impact of foreign influence within its territorial borders politically, economically, and culturally. Tiny glimpses of China offered through interaction at Macao and Canton throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as well as preexisting historical connections between China and the outside world, only added to the aura of Chinese mysteriousness. As the United States continued to expand both territorially and economically, debates about China, the Chinese, and their value to American political, economic, and social interests increasingly sought an understanding of China, pushing some to travel half-way around the world to find the answers. Much of the way Americans discussed China and the Chinese people aimed at developing an understanding of a place and a people that were relatively unknown. With the end of the Cohong system in Canton and the proliferation of

---

trading ports, many of the barriers between American and Chinese interaction crumbled, and as such a curious American public began to discuss and define the “mystery” of the Chinese.

What resulted from this new access was a flexibility of representation, dualities of understanding that presented the Chinese as both odd and familiar, distant but approachable, civilized yet stagnant. The concept of China as a mystery set the stage for how Americans took advantage of the vacuousness of their knowledge in order to form and present other images of China that suited American, rather than Chinese, needs. This chapter will emphasize the variety of methods contemporaneous Americans used in order to define the Chinese. Historical conjecture drove perception of the persistent “closure” of Chinese society. Literary assumptions in publications and travel narratives fueled calls for the need for a reassessment of Chinese society. And emerging examination framed through correspondence and dispatches contributed to a notion that proximity and observation correlated with accuracy and truth in representation. These conflicting methods perpetuated the ambiguous understandings of the Chinese, and they added to the notion that more than merely being different, the Chinese were in fact opposite to American and European culture and society. The result of these multiple representations of Chinese mystery and their definition as an “antipode” was American uncertainty as to how to approach the Chinese in terms of cultural and political relations. Questions that arose from the uncertainty of the relationship, and the relative answers derived therefrom, plagued those who studied, wrote about, and lived in China. The multiple ways Americans presented knowledge of China in the face of these various interpretations helped to create a framework that was certain enough to continue to encourage American interaction in the area, yet remained persistently indistinct enough that conflicting notions about opportunity, flaws, and threat from the region did
not discourage American engagement. At the same time, none of these explanations dominated the discourse surrounding the Sino-American relationship.

Opening the Doors of a Closed Nation

The metaphor of “opening” a country, while not exceptional in the writings of European and American travelers, took a unique shape in the ways foreigners described China after the First Opium War. Unlike other areas where topography, climate, or disease kept foreigners at bay, the limitations in access were artificial in that they stemmed from policies of the Qing government as much as they did from the geographic distance between the United States and China. As the treaties of Nanjing and Wangxia permitted increased access, rhetoric about “opening doors” and the resulting contact emerged in American writings on the topic of China. As Robert Sears noted in his *Pictorial History of India and China*, “The recent opening of the ports of China to the commerce of foreign nations, and the consequent relaxing of that rigid policy by which that nation has heretofore kept itself so closely veiled from the observation of the rest of mankind, afford opportunities not before enjoyed, for acquiring acknowledge of its institutions, social, political, and religious – of learning new facts in its history, and also for the correction of many errors that have prevailed in relation to the character and habits of its people.”² The “errors” to which Sears referred remained unspecified, implying that information regarding China, even if it was incorrect, was common knowledge among the reading public.

---

Those unspecified errors, however, were presumably serious enough that providing a clearer and more precise understanding of China and the Chinese warranted his literary intervention. Henry Brownell, historian and author of *The People’s Book of Ancient and Modern History*, reinforced Sears’ assertion of ingrained misperceptions and misunderstandings about China, though he indicated that these mistakes were nothing new in the minds of Europeans and Americans. Brownell explained that “exaggerations” about the size, complexity, and uniqueness of Chinese society maintained a pervasive hold on expectations of China, owing much to the account of Marco Polo’s voyage to China during the Yuan dynasty centuries earlier. He later added, “Little is accurately known concerning this singular people prior to the expedition [of the Polos].”

While Marco Polo and his family were by no means the first Europeans to traverse the Chinese Empire, the lasting influence of his account of Chinese society was a frequently cited source of information. By the 1840s, however, Americans were more than aware of the inadequacies of Polo because of changes over time in China and assertions of inaccuracy in his writings. In his history of the contemporary state of Anglo-Chinese relations, Jacob Abbott explained somewhat musingly that to the informed reader Polo seemed to have been “strongly tempted to exaggerate, for instance, every thing which tended to show the emperor's interest in Christianity; as the honor of having made any impression upon so remote and powerful a government in favor of the Catholic religion, would be very highly valued in those days.”

Abbott went on to write that Polo’s failure to mention the prevalence of tea consumption, the practice of foot binding among Chinese women, or the Great Wall were reasons enough for the

---


4 Jacob Abbott, *China and the English, or the Character and Manners of the Chinese, as Illustrated in the History of Their Intercourses with Foreigners, To Which is Added an Account of the Late War* (Cooperstown, NY: H. & E. Phinney, 1843), 25.
reader at home to wonder about the veracity of his claims, without questioning how similar impulses toward literary self-interest may have impacted Abbott’s own work and the writings of his contemporaries.

Even with the historical information provided by travelers such as Polo, Americans at this time were quite willing to admit a certain level of ignorance when it came to concrete information about the contemporary status of China and the Chinese people. One of the foremost experts on China at the time, the missionary Samuel Wells Williams, maintained that previous authors misinterpreted Chinese culture, and he endeavored through his work and writings to “divest the Chinese people and civilization of that peculiar and almost indefinable impression of ridicule,” those writers gave to them.⁵ Those interested in China cited the desire to combat ignorance of the Chinese as a reason for discussing China, or in some instances for personally traveling there to dispel the inaccuracies themselves. They viewed direct contact to be a way to determine the accuracy of facts and to define the truth of a situation.⁶ For example, Osmond Tiffany claimed to have written The Canton Chinese, or The American’s Sojourn in the Celestial Empire, because he was, “desirous of studying, as far as lay in my power, the aspect, manners, customs, habits, and ranks of Chinese life, [which meant that he had] to come in actual contact with the people.”⁷ Unlike missionaries, merchants, doctors, and others who traveled to China for a specific professional purpose in mind, in his introduction Osmond Tiffany stated that he had no reason to travel to China other than the desire to do so. Despite not having a clear

---

⁶ Mary Louise Pratt asserts that using ideas of “contact” helps by “[foregrounding] the interactive, improvisational dimensions of imperial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by accounts of conquest and domination told from the invader’s perspective. A ‘contact’ perspective emphasizes how subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other. Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (New York: Rutledge, 1992), 11.
⁷ Osmond Tiffany Jr., The Canton Chinese, or The American’s Sojourn in the Celestial Empire (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1849), vii.
purpose for residing in and traveling around Southern China, he mobilized the same patterns of representation as authors who had intended goals for their travels. The American Sunday-School Union, publisher of *The People of China*, explained, “Until recently, its peculiarities of manners, customs, education, government, religions, and its acknowledged antiquity, have been concealed from the observation of other nations. Now, however, some have visited this country, and some have even penetrated into the interior, and made themselves acquainted with the habits of the people.”

P. T. Barnum’s pamphlet accompanying his collection of Chinese ephemera and miscellany made a similar point, adding, “China, being situated on the eastern border of Asia, appears to have been so far removed from other great nations of antiquity, that little was known by them concerning it.”

Analogous to this idea that China was distantly removed from the currents of the modern world, many writers believed that the Chinese removed themselves from interaction with the outside purposefully. Rev. William Speer, missionary and advocate for Chinese rights in California, asserted that before the gold rush encouraged Chinese emigration, “The inhabitants[of China], for several thousands of years, had stood on the shores of the oceans all round it, like men at the foot of inaccessible mountains of sapphire.”

John Quincy Adams had said much the same thing more than a dozen years earlier, in a speech to Congress stating, “China, from ocean to ocean, had surrounded herself, from ages immemorial, by a wall, within which her population, counting by hundreds of millions, were pent up with sullen separation and

---


seclusion from all the rest of mankind.”¹¹ While the access that foreigners enjoyed at Canton before the Opium War belies the point that China had severed all outside ties, it is important to consider the role that this perception played in creating a blank canvass on which Americans could and did present the Chinese people for their own purposes through the emerging nature of Chinese and American contact.

Through this notion of overcoming the obstacles of access to China, many Americans engaged with describing China and the Chinese people concerned themselves with addressing what they believed were obvious and remediable gaps in their knowledge and the knowledge of the public in general. What discrepancies they believed existed and their proposed solutions often depended on the profession and the perspective of the author. Robert Forbes, a prominent Boston merchant who made a sizable fortune in the China trade, noted early on that “a vast portion of our reading public are ignorant of our past and present relations with that Empire, and of our prospects for the future in respect to our trade.”¹² Jacob Abbott prefaced his work with a statement of his intent to inform the public, noting “This work is designed to furnish to the families to which it may be admitted, an entertaining volume for the winter evening fireside, and at the same time to communicate such information, in respect to the extraordinary country to which it relates.”¹³ Whereas Rev. Walter Lowrie explained in amazement, “This country is a world in itself; and the thought has often occurred to me, while traversing its beautiful plains and crowded streets, ‘What a world has been revolving here of which Christendom knows nothing.’”¹⁴ The ways that authors justified their inquiries and their publications often reflected

---

their professional or personal interest in China. Regardless of access or experience, many writers felt compelled to add their own perspectives on American understandings. W. Hastings Macaulay’s account of his travels on the China seas carries the disclaimer, “I may venture to speak of these people from what I have seen, fully aware that plenty of more potential pens, held by persons who have lived longer among them, and penetrated their country to a greater extent than I shall ever be able to do, have given their peculiarities to the public.”

Regardless of the perceived inconsistencies of knowledge of the readers, or the writers themselves in the case of Macaulay, each of these authors contributed his works to the larger public discourse on China and the Chinese as a means of providing what he believed to be answers to the questions Americans posed and those they did not know to ask.

In addition to the concept that the Chinese excluded themselves from interactions with the outside world, these writers also presented coordinating explanations of the limitations placed on foreigners in their ability to remediate contemporary misunderstandings of China. One notion presented geographic distance as the primary reason for the lack of information, the other that aspects of Chinese society – both cultural and political – were to blame. As the First Opium War came to an end and Americans prepared for the departure of an official diplomatic envoy, the New York Daily Tribune – and a week later the Sunbury American – published an article that expressed the concern that how the “mysterious people” of China would relate to foreigners was unknown. Many attributed this to the fact, as Osmond Tiffany noted, that before the conflict foreigners residing in Canton were “almost entirely restricted” in their actions and their access. Years later, Consul general Edward Everett explained to the State Department that before the

---

17 Tiffany, The Canton Chinese, 145.
war, “the Chinese kept themselves, in general, entirely aloof from all connexion [sic] with any other part of the world” as imperial edicts and economic restrictions through the Cohong system severely limited interaction between foreigners and Chinese.  

William Morrison, a consular colleague of Everett, asserted that a combination of Chinese “jealousy” toward strangers and government restrictions targeting “the unprincipled grappling and ambitious Jesuits,” decades earlier continued to negatively impact relations. In contrast, Brownell claimed misunderstandings were a result of limited interaction and not the other way around, asserting:

> It would be doing great injustice to the Chinese character to judge it by the exhibition of depravity, duplicity, and absurd self-importance which strikes the observer at Canton. This being the only city where foreign trade is generally admitted, and foreigners being constantly held up by the native authorities as objects of supreme contempt and distrust, it is not unnatural that those who are brought habitually into contact with them, should feel at liberty to meet supposed fraud with fraud; and, always expecting deceit from those with whom they deal, that they should, in their turn, overreach to the extent of their ability.

It may be the fact that in only having access to Canton, Shaw agreed that, “the opportunities of gaining information . . . of its inhabitants, can neither be free nor extensive. Therefore, the few observations to be made at Canton cannot furnish us with sufficient data from which to form an accurate judgment.”

The conclusion of the war between the British and the Chinese was almost universally parsed in terms of Americans finally gaining access beyond the geographic and political restrictions, and the limitations of only dealing with the Cohong merchants in one port far from the imperial center. Therefore, the British victory was not just an achievement for the United Kingdom and its interests but also created a perceived opening for all foreigners, and Americans hoped to take full advantage. In his personal journal, missionary David Abeel

---

18 Edward Everett to James Buchanan, February 31, 1847, ADPP, Vol. 3, 70.  
recorded that with the treaty between the British and Chinese, “China’s long night of exclusiveness” was at an end. As this “light” shone, the drive to understand and to define China and the Chinese people became all the more pressing.

**Defining the Mystery**

Emerging out of this new era of contact and communication came attempts to clearly define the Chinese in terms of reinforcing the goals of American interests. What resulted was a detailed exploration of the various ways in which Americans engaged with the Chinese and the numerous methods they utilized in order to ensure that this contact resulted in an increased frequency of dissemination, and accuracy within, these accounts. In writing the introduction to his weighty narrative, Samuel Wells Williams explained why he did not simply publish a journal of his many years of experience in China. He stated:

> In arranging them [his chapter topics], the same order has been preserved [as his lecture circuit]; and in discussing them, care has been taken to select whatever information was most authentic, important, and recent; trying to reach that difficult medium between an essay on each head, which would tire the general reader . . . and an unsatisfactory abridgment, too meager to gratify rational inquiry, and too short even to induce further research.23

This statement suggests that Williams consciously constructed and associated ideas that, to him, were more “authentic, important, and recent.” It also implies that he expected his work to inspire the reader to search out other accounts of China and the Chinese. Indeed, Americans were not the only people attempting to gain access beyond the treaty ports. Lowrie indicated in his *Memoirs* that a French missionary breached the restrictions with great regularity, noting, “He

---

goes first to Shanghai, there changes his garments and puts on a queue, with Chinese spectacles, to conceal his eyes. From Shanghai he goes by the grand canal, and expresses no fear of being detected on the way. The “opening” of China shifted the discourse from the injustices that prevented foreign access to the more pressing concern of mitigating the problems associated with increased contact.

With this new capability of learning about the Chinese at hand, a great uncertainty arose as to what the resultant understanding would be. S. Augustus Mitchell in his System of Modern Geography claimed, “The study of Geography will enable young persons, when they hear of distant countries, to tell where they are situated - what are their productions - how they are governed, and what is the character of the inhabitants.” And as to the “character of the inhabitants,” many writers were certain that the new openness that existed between foreigners and the Chinese would help in correcting the perceived errors of previous generations. As Sears wrote, “It is essential in forming a just estimate of the character and habits of a nation, to be conversant with their government and laws; and no country affords a more striking example of the truth of this remark than China.” How did these misperceptions, as these writers indicated, and the desire to come to correct judgments arise to begin with? In his Plea to the California legislature, William Speer described the Chinese as, “a race on whom we have unthinkingly and unkindly set the heel” based off of unfair and outdated stereotypes. Some writers blamed the moralizations of missionary writers for the inaccurate or skewed information. For example, W. S. W. Ruschenberger claimed, “The character given to the Chinese by Christian writers seems to

26 Sears, Pictorial History, 231.
27 Speer, An Humble Plea, 3.
me untruthful as a whole, though, I doubt not individual conduct may be found to sustain the statements made.”  

Others, however, believed that the isolation enforced by the Chinese themselves only served to project an unfavorable image, as foreigners did not have much interaction with the Chinese outside of Canton. Brownell continued his assessment beyond the “great injustice” of the characterizations of the Cantonese as being inaccurate representatives of the Chinese people as a whole, adding “Neither the rabble nor the sagacious merchant of Canton offer fair specimen of the national character; to understand this thoroughly, a residence in the interior is necessary, and an observation of the sobriety, industry and decorum of the agricultural and manufacturing classes.”  Brownell’s comments indicated not only that contact was a desirable means by which to assess the Chinese but also that a critical mass of contact was necessary to project the most accurate representations.

These debates about defining China carried a deep implication that as much contact as possible should be made between Americans and Chinese in order to best serve American interests. In his report to the American Baptist Society on missionary activities in south and eastern Asia, Howard Malcolm expected that the establishment of long-term missionary outposts would succeed in spreading Christianity. In addition, he hoped that the “Fruits of mature and extended observations” would result in an influx of more reliable information regarding the Chinese. Nevertheless, even a decade after the signing of the Treaty of Wangxia, ambassador Humphrey Marshall noted that it remained difficult to disseminate intelligence regarding the status of American interests because the “terra incognita of China” made the confirmation of

28 W.S.W. Ruschenberger, Notes and Commentaries During a Voyage to Brazil and China in the Year 1848 (Richmond, VA: Macfarlane & Fergusson, 1854), 211.
29 Brownell, The People’s Book, 276.
details challenging.31 While Americans concerned themselves with the limitations of their knowledge about the Chinese, both because of legal restriction and geographic distance, what emerged was an understanding that with the right amount of effort foreigners could and did manage to circumvent the restrictions that remained which prevented foreigners from traveling outside of the treaty ports. Some travelers recounted fairly benign efforts at simply walking past the guards to the city wall at Canton, but Macaulay cautioned after one such attempt “it is true, you may be allowed to pass its gates [in Canton], but run a risk of being hustled and pelted out of their vicinity.”32 In his diary, George Tufts lamented that the guards at Canton permitted him to have a “look in” at the gates, but refused to allow him to enter the city itself.33 Consequently, while Americans reveled in the new sources of information about China, the Qing government’s continued unwillingness to permit free travel frustrated foreigners and stymied their efforts at to gather facts through contact.

Despite the accounts of being challenged in their attempts to traverse into the Chinese interior, the most effective means through which foreigners bypassed restrictions was, from their perspective, to become Chinese. A number of accounts and anecdotes told of Americans and other foreigners like Lowrie’s French missionary disguising themselves as Chinese men, and in doing so successfully “passing” the restrictions and gaining valuable information. Thus, for these writers, race, or at least racial characteristics, was a malleable set of features that, under the right circumstances, could be altered – albeit temporarily – for the purpose of gathering knowledge while avoiding the enforcement of the law. Although this racialist conceptualization of identity was not a frequent occurrence, its use by those attempting to enter China highlights

32 Macaulay, Kathay, 39.
the ways in which geographic location and visual attributes played into the racial constructs of Americans at this time.

As Americans attempted to gain access to China through visual deception, the accuracy with which they observed the physical characteristics of the Chinese as a means to emulate and mimic their appearance increased in importance. In terms of the physical characteristics of the Chinese, Macaulay noted that men in northern areas “had a more healthy appearance than their southern brethren. Their complexions were of a lighter hue and here, for the first time, I saw a Chinaman with rosy cheeks.”

In meeting a Chinese man for the first time in Malaysia, he noted him as having a “tail, costume and all.” Later he described a group of Chinese boatman, in refusing to set sail during a storm, “shaking both head and tail,- please to remember the Chinese boatmen have tails to their heads.” Interestingly, in foreign sources the style of maintaining a long braid of hair, otherwise known as a queue or a plait, was often described as a “tail.” Descriptions of the Chinese, particularly the physical characteristics of Chinese men, were assumed by many of these writers to be a commonly known assessment. From his voyages around the world, Fitch Taylor questioned, “What youth of either hemisphere of the civilized world has not had his mind filled with images of Chinese association? He has read descriptions of the celestial empire and its long-cue or braid inhabitants; and contemplated in drawings the delineations of their peculiar costume, and more than half-shave heads, and turn-up and thick-soled shoes, altogether exhibiting a picture, which resembles the creature man as found in no other part of the globe.” It is from this understanding of the Chinese that emphasized hair

---

34 Macaulay, Kathay, 133.
35 Ibid., 30
36 Ibid., 159. Emphasis in original.
37 Fitch W. Taylor, A Voyage Round the World, and Visits to Various Foreign Countries, in the United States Frigate Columbia; Attended by Her Consort the Sloop of War John Adams, and Commanded by Commodore Gorge C. Read. Also Including An Account of the Bombarding and Firing of the Town of Muckie, on the Malay Coast, and
styles and outward appearance as an aspect of race that foreigners attempted their journeys beyond the treaty ports.

Accounts of foreigners “passing” came to various conclusions about the value of mimicking the characteristics of the Chinese. Traveler Benjamin Ball noted that one Mr. White, “who entirely adopts the Chinese costume, and passes very well for a real Chinese,” successfully gained access to the interior of China on a number of occasions, returning with valuable insight into the Chinese people.38 But not all accounts concluded with positive results on the experience. Abbott explained that for a time the vaunted Sinologist William Morrison became like the Chinese in that, “His nails were allowed to grow, that they might become like those of a Chinese. He had a tail, - a tress of hair, a sort of queue of some length, - and he learned to use the chop-sticks, instead of knife and fork, at dinner, with as much dexterity as a native. He walked about the Hong with a Chinese frock on, and with thick Chinese shoes.”39 While Morrison claimed to have “gained nothing” in insight by imitating the Chinese, he still managed to “pass” restrictions by dressing as a Chinese man. The Rutland Herald noted the journey of one foreigner who managed to travel beyond Shanghai to “Su Chow” [Suzhou] and despite being robbed of his clothing along the way, he managed to observe the daily lives of the Chinese and then impart that information to the outside world.40 What were these foreigners endeavoring to do by fluidly moving between racial categorizations? In short, access and contact were the determining factors in their attempts to better understand the Chinese.

---

38 Benjamin Lincoln Ball, Rambles in Eastern Asia, Including China and Manila, During Several Years’ Residence: With Notes of The Voyage to China, Excursions in Manila, Hong-Kong, Canton, Shanghai, Ningpoo, Amoy, Fouchow, and Macao (Boston, MA: James French and Co., 1855), 355.
39 Abbott, China and the English, 237.
40 “Notes on a Journey,” Rutland Herald (26 February 1846), 1.
The transformations that allowed Americans and other foreigners to breach the boundaries of Chinese society were not entirely predicated on successful racial and physical mimicry. Many of these early efforts at representing and understanding the Chinese people aimed at overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers as well: defining and detailing the Chinese language while reporting on and embracing the “oddities” of Chinese society that made them so unique in the world. In his study of the Chinese written language, Stephen Andrews explained that to the untrained eye, Chinese was “a mass of incongruities and confusion,” and that learning the innumerable number of characters was a “herculean task.” Abbott and others who were not necessarily interested in detailing the complexities of the language, still noted the difficulties in learning Chinese not only because of the use of vertical printing and the uniqueness of each

---

41 “Chinese City,” in Abbot, China and the English, 28; and “Amoy - One of the Five ports opened by the late treaties to foreign commerce,” in Sears, Pictorial, 211.
42 Stephen Pearl Andrews, Discoveries in Chinese, or the Symbolism of the Primitive Characters of the Chinese System of Writing. As a Contribution to Philology and Etymology and a Practical Aid in the Acquisition of the Chinese Language (New York: Charles B. Norton, 1854), 8 and 25.
character but the dialectical differences that existed between the written and spoken language. On this score, Barnum’s pamphlet asserted that differences in dialects made it difficult even for the government to run effectively, with translators often needed at courts because judges were appointed from other provinces. “The dialects of the different provinces vary so much, that the natives of one cannot understand those of another, without recourse to writing.” William Morrison, a pioneer in the field of Chinese to English translation, even recalled that “the language was known to be both extensive and hard of interpretation, even by the natives themselves.”

Accordingly, Americans were deeply concerned about learning and deciphering a language that was as useful in understanding the Chinese as it was perceived to be difficult in its idiosyncrasies. William Lowrie lamented that missionaries spent so much time learning Mandarin, the dialect of the bureaucracy, that they often could not communicate with the general public. “The consequence,” he explained, “is, that a person speaking pure Mandarin can scarcely understand [people speaking other dialects] at all; but they can gather his meaning in part. Now, as our business is with the poor and the ignorant, this is the dialect we must learn.” The combined power of direct contact and the linguistic capability for coherent communication were presented as the means by which Americans could maximize potential benefits for American interests. As an article in the New York Tribune succinctly put it, the successful disentanglement of the “mystery of Chinese writing” would aid in “breaking down the wall of separation between the Chinese and the European and American mind.” As Rune Svarverud notes, early translation

43 Abbott, China and the English, 253-261. Even within the Chinese language there differentiations are made through characters when speaking about 尾 (hua – speech), 文 (wen – writing), and 语 (yu – language generally).
44 Barnum, Ten Thousand Things, 34.
46 Lowrie, Memoirs, 317.
efforts were largely designed to adapt the Chinese language to European contexts, including religious translation and the creation of treaties, both meant to clarify and intensify the relationship between China and the western world. He explains that increased contact resulted in the increased accuracy of such translations. For example, the work of those such as Peter Parker in his ophthalmologic hospital through his daily communication with the Chinese public resulted in establishing mutual knowledge through the creation of new terms that made writing and enforcing agreements a much less contentious process. Through these efforts at engaging with the Chinese, and in ensuring that this new contact resulted in accurate accounts, the increasing importance of the cycle of observation and representation increasingly played a part in American efforts to dispel the mystery of China.

**Observation and the Representation of Chinese Culture**

As linguistic connections solidified the precision and frequency with which Americans communicated with the Chinese, observation became synonymous with the accurate accumulation of facts. Personal accounts, official cables, and news reports relayed detailed accounts of a vast array of Chinese social, cultural, and political descriptions meant to help fill the void of information or to correct faulty representations. This notion of definition through observation found outlets in many of the ways Americans tried to relate their own experiences to those of the Chinese. As such, broad topics like forms of government, religious practice, issues of labor, and gender divisions became arenas for analysis and comparison that asserted clearer understandings of China and its people, but ones that increasingly conflicted with the representations built out of existing expectations of mystery.

---

48 Rune Svarverud, *International Law and World Order in Late Imperial China: Translation, Reception, and Discourse*, (Boston: Brill, 2007), 70-77.
Many aspects of Chinese society and government, including the role of the emperor, were little understood at this time, in part because of the perception of purposeful isolation, which resulted in suppositions as to why the emperor acted in a mysterious manner. The *People of China* explained, “Concerning the private life of the emperor of China, scarcely anything is known among Europeans. He appears very little in public, regarding it as the safest policy to withdraw from the gaze of his subjects, in order to inspire them with the greatest awe.”

Barnum added that in regards to the power of the emperor in China, “the whole earth is ignorantly supposed [to be] subject to his sway; and from him, as the fountain of power, rank, honor, and privilege, all Kings derive their sovereignty over the nations.” What arose in these early understandings of the Chinese imperial system was a discussion of the real versus the perceived power of the emperor over what J. W. Spalding described as the “grand, celestial, central, middle, flowry [sic] kingdom.”

In terms of imperial power over the law, Americans presented the emperor and his representatives on the provincial and local level as having total control. Barnum’s *Collection* indicated, “A Chinese court-room is never graced with a jury-box; the representative of the Emperor is both judge and jury.”

Indeed, many publications regarded rank and imperial position as the means to political power in China. The *People of China* traced biological kinship to the imperial family as the most important means to a powerful position in China. “Nominally, the Chinese constitution maintains the following privileged classes: the privilege of imperial blood; of long service; of illustrious actions; of talent and wisdom; of great abilities; of zeal and assiduity; of nobility; and of birth,” with greater power and position granted

---

52 Barnum, *Ten-Thousand Things*, 34.
to those with the most direct imperial lineage and the longest record of distinguished service.\textsuperscript{53} This, of course, asserted that the Qing government adhered to a system of government dictated by a “constitution” of their own design, but with set laws analogous to those in the American constitution. In addition, there was a general consensus that the Chinese government, indeed Chinese society as a whole, was “purely patriarchal.”\textsuperscript{54} Thus, the entirety of Chinese society was assumed to be hierarchically structured and infinitely complex. As Sears described it, “The empire is divided into eighteen provinces, and, in accordance with Chinese systematic regularity... This classification and arrangement accords with the whole theory of government, the emperor having despotic sway over the country, and the various mandarins having the same delegated to them... down to the most inferior officer.”\textsuperscript{55}

At the same time, as Barnum’s claim that imperial power derived from maintaining the ignorance of the Chinese people indicated, some authors put forth the notion that imperial power was less real than imagined. Ball noted that provincial governors and other mandarins “displayed considerable show and pomp,” to foreigners and Chinese subjects alike in their efforts to assert an aura of power.\textsuperscript{56} This extension of imperial power through public exhibition was alleged to extend even after life, as during a period of mourning after the death of an emperor, men were forbidden to shave, no marriages were permitted, and no sacrifices were made.\textsuperscript{57} Whether the emperor exerted real or imagined power over the Chinese populace overshadows the general consensus that in matters of political influence, the emperor and the bureaucratic class wielded authority over all aspects of Chinese life. While the emperor represented the font

\textsuperscript{53} American Sunday-School Union, \textit{People of China}, 45.
\textsuperscript{54} Brownell, \textit{The People’s Book}, 281. S. Wells Williams also noted the wholly “patriarchal” political system. Williams, \textit{Middle Kingdom}, Vol. 1, 6.
\textsuperscript{55} Sears, \textit{Pictorial}, 177.
\textsuperscript{56} Ball, \textit{Rambles}, 104.
\textsuperscript{57} Sears, \textit{Pictorial}, 172. And the \textit{Glasgow Weekly Times} also reported on the social practices and restrictions in an article entitled: “When the Emperor Dies...,” \textit{Glasgow Weekly Times} (24 Mar. 1853), 4.
from which all power and authority emanated, he still existed as a figure shrouded in mystery that provided a moldable persona for American understandings. Yet, the observations of the imagined power of “pomp” conflicted with the understandings of the purposefully mysterious emperor wielding total control.

Figure 3 and Figure 4: “The Emperor of China” and “Mandarin receiving Seals of Office from the Emperor.” These two figures provide competing visual narratives of the role of the emperor in China. In the first image the emperor is a solitary figure dressed in his court robes, yet he is removed from the context of power. In Figure 4 the emperor is portrayed as having an active role in managing the affairs of state through his interaction with the mandarins illustrated in the fore and backgrounds.  

Much like the conflicting reports of the role of the emperor in China, the status of Chinese people in general presented a baffling conundrum for those trying to paint a picture of what it meant to be “Chinese” from the perspective of an American. Not surprisingly, writers

---

mobilized assessments of class, age, rank, and gender in ways that attempted to construct a portrait of daily Chinese life understandable to an American audience. Of all of the areas that Americans chose to analyze to understand the Chinese people, labor, or one’s social capability to avoid it, was also one of the topics most frequently studied through printed images. The general consensus among writers was that the Chinese were, for the most part, very hard workers. Lowrie explained, “There is a vast deal of labor in cultivating rice, as the Chinese do it,” and while sailing Sears emphasized, “Great labor is required in setting [sails], as the Chinese have no proper machinery for that purpose, so that all their manoeuvres [sic] in working a ship are performed by actual strength.”⁵⁹ Nonetheless, because of these reports on the difficult methods by which the Chinese were reported to work, Americans were often concerned that the level of physicality Chinese laborers exerted wasted energy and effort. Missionary Eliza Bridgman voiced her anxiety that, “Men have to do the work of horses, and for half the wages laborers receive in America. [In China] We have no carriages, no steamboats, nor railroad cars. If we ride on land, it must be in a Sedan chair borne on the shoulders of two men.”⁶⁰ Recalling his own experience being carried in a sedan chair, Ruschenberger expressed a similar moral qualm because of “a notion that it is indecorous for one man to require two of his fellow citizens, if not his Adamitic brothers, to bear him upon their shoulders through the streets, in sunshine or rain, like beasts of burden.”⁶¹ Like many others he reported that he overcame his concerns when realizing that the job of the sedan bearer was likely easier than that of workers who carried cargo heavier than his weight and for lower compensation.

⁵⁹ Lowrie Memoirs, 329; and Sears, Pictorial, 111.
⁶⁰ Eliza J. Gilleit Bridgman, Daughters of China; or, Sketches of Domestic Life in the Celestial Empire (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853), 118.
⁶¹ Ruschenberger, Notes and Commentaries, 143.
Discussion of the physicality of the Chinese laborer resulted in two somewhat divergent opinions of the Chinese that would play a part in the rising sense of economic opportunity emerging from the Sino-American relationship. The first was that China could benefit from mechanization as a means to reduce workloads, mechanization that could be provided by Americans. The second was that these hard working individuals were complacent in their difficult labors and had the potential of being harnessed for economic benefit. Lowrie brought to mind an occurrence of handing religious tracts to laborers who were “working in the rain, all of whom seemed cheerful and civil enough.”

62 These observations laid the foundation for debates over the value of the Chinese marketplace and of Chinese labor itself that would be mobilized into a larger understanding of the opportunity that China presented to the United States, as well as the threat to American labor that the Chinese would eventually represent.

62 Lowrie, Memoirs, 331.
Americans assumed that strict gender divisions in China, owing to Confucian patriarchal structures and issues of class and status, kept Chinese women from entering the workforce in any tangible numbers. They therefore devoted considerable attention to lower-class women who they believed were forced to work, particularly the “boat women” found around treaty ports. Barnum explained that the “tanka boats [were] generally navigated by young girls . . . [whose] fathers . . . [were] generally fishermen, boatmen, or coolies, whose employments call[ed] them away during the day and who [were] obliged to leave their boats and families in charge of the mothers.” In nearly every account written by an American traveler to China, the author recalled interacting with “boat women” and their families as they navigated the waterways around the treaty ports. Tiffany declared that “a more cheerful being is seldom found.” Americans’ frequent interaction with tanka women challenged the expected notion that social

---

65 Tiffany, Canton, 34.
limitations and restrictions constrained all Chinese women to cloistered obscurity, revealing instead that they affected only women from middle or upper-class families.

**Figure 8** - “Untitled” - "Since the days of the 'old woman who lived in a shoe,' nothing can be found which has been made to contain more human beings in the same space than a Chinese fast, or tanka boat.” The familial and gender dynamics of the “Boat peoples” was so unlike what Americans expected that the recollection of the first interaction with these people was a common element of travel accounts from this era. 66

Accounts attempting to describe family structures common to China mirrored the uncertainty of the role of women as laborers in China. Part of the confusion originated from a vague understanding of familial roles. While economic and labor exchanges between foreigners and Chinese became increasingly common place, contact on a personal level was rarer and often more anecdotal. In addition to the class differences that established conflicting roles and expectations for women as workers, so too did Americans realize how rank and status determined the expectations and structure of Chinese families. Writers made the assertion that for all classes and ranks the patriarchal political system extended into the family. Eliza Bridgman cited an interview with a local to describe the primary perceived difference between men and women. She explained, “I once asked a tailor, ‘Why do your people always rejoice at

the birth of a son, and not at the birth of a daughter?” ‘Because the girls are so much trouble and expense, they cannot work and get money.’” 67 And while a certain level of education was expected for sons, “the daughters of the wealthy receive something of an education; those of the middling and poorer classes generally none at all.” 68 These discussions attempted to not only define the internal relationships of nuclear families but the role of extended families as well. Preble recounted in his diary an explanation of how and where families lived in relation to each other. A Chinese man:

told me today how the Chinese villages are settled. A man buys a piece of land. His children settle around him, and their descendants in turn occupy the land which they are not allowed to sell to another without first offering to one of the family . . . he says all the inhabitants of a village have the same family name. He also said that by the Chinese laws a man is held accountable of the doings of his descendants to the 5th generation, and in like manner honors descend to the 5th generation & then cease. The 6th generation is released from accountability and commences a new family. 69

But even if the rights of extended families emerged out of an organized system of inheritance and rights, it was clear that these expectations did not apply to all Chinese families. Sears’ account of families living in tanka boats contrasts this notion of generational inheritance. He noted the lives of “The river population of Canton is estimated at two hundred thousand, of whom the men go on shore in the day to work in the fields, or at any employment they can obtain; while the women earn a little money by carrying passengers in their boats, which they manage with great dexterity.” 70 Looking at these accounts, it is clear that when Americans had the opportunity to directly interact with Chinese, their information was much more precise, yet

67 Bridgman, Daughters, 127.
68 Barnum, Ten-Thousand Things, 94.
69 George Henry Preble, “Diary of a Cruise to China and Japan, 1853-1856,” p 522, Manuscript Division, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.
70 Sears, Pictorial, 199.
accounts of subjects like upper-class education or inheritance rules, which they did not observe, were much more subjective and often accounted as second-hand.

Figure 9 - “The Chinese Family” – Unlike the images of lower-class laborers, images of middle and upper-class Chinese were generally indoors and often taken as portraiture rather than engaged in daily activities.  

Clothing and style was another way Americans attempted to indicate the familial expectations for women in China. They described women’s’ garb as “modest” compared to that of men, while it was reported unmarried girls wore their hair down and married women wore their hair up. The Sunbury American and the Jeffersonian Republican went as far as to say that Chinese women valued having the physical features of small round eyes and narrow eyebrows. These articles also mentioned the desirability of women having small feet, giving some indication as to the American understanding of the practice of foot binding among elite women in China. Bridgman’s report that the feet of boat women “are large, the usual size of ours” seems to suggest that Americans not only understood foot binding but that they also inaccurately

72 American Sunday-School Union, People of China, 215
73 “Female Beauty and Ornament,” Sunbury American (2 Dec. 1843), 1; and “Facts for the Carrions – Female Beauty” Jeffersonian Republican (23 Oct. 1851), 2.
assumed all Chinese women underwent the process. These conflicting notions about the role of women in Chinese society not only in terms of their positions within the family but also in their roles as laborers hint at why so many people flocked to New York and Boston in the late 1840s to catch a glimpse of Barnum’s “Chinese Beauty.”

Figure 10 “Sampan Girl” and Figure 11 “Head of a Chinese girl” – The watercolor and the sketch, both done by George R. West during Cushing’s mission, reflect the general differences in the portrayals of laboring versus elite groups.

Barnum’s Chinese Beauty

One event that seemingly captivated the attention of Americans, and perhaps contributed to the perpetually limited understanding they had of the Chinese, was P. T. Barnum’s Chinese Collection. In New York City and later Boston, Barnum displayed a variety of Chinese items, artwork, and assorted ephemera. The pamphlet that accompanied the exhibition boasted, “The Museum is exclusively Chinese, collected from all parts of the Empire, and with the aid of this work, will give the visitor a better knowledge of this curious people than can be acquired by reading the most faithful descriptions alone, or even by a transient visit to China.” In other

---

74 Bridgman, Daughters, 57.
words, much like armchair travel through reading travel accounts as a source of information, Americans could spend an afternoon viewing the collection and learn all they wanted about the Chinese without the bother or risk of traveling there. In addition to the various objects of interest, Barnum employed six Chinese people as objects of attraction, using the interest of the public regarding the Chinese to drive attendance up. Before his voyage to China on the St. Louis, George Preble recalled, “At Barnum Museum the other afternoon I saw the usual, or rather an unusual collection of curios, including the Chinese Collection.” Many other travelers to and from China recounted having visited Barnum’s collection in New York. While advertisements and publications listed the vast variety of items displayed in the collection, the highlight of his show was the introduction of the “Chinese Lady” to the viewing public.

Figure 12 - Barnum Broadside – The prominence of “The Chinese Lady Suite!” gives indication of the importance that Barnum placed on the uniqueness of a Chinese woman coming to the United States. The fact that her feet measured two and a half inches in length was repeated

77 George Henry Preble, “Voyage on the USF St. Louis,” 57/2/15, Manuscript Division, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.
several times on both sides of the broadside and throughout the collection’s pamphlet, showing that Chinese women were increasingly associated with having small feet.\textsuperscript{78}

The pamphlet accompanying the collection extolled the rarity of a Chinese woman traveling outside of her own country.

When it is considered that the watchful jealousy of a Chinese gentleman excludes from even a casual glance at the females of his family, not only his male friends, but his most intimate male relations – that a residence for years in China will not secure to a European, under any circumstances, the sight of any but a Chinese woman of the lowest condition – some idea may be formed of the difficulty attendant upon an attempt to induce a young lady of acknowledged respectability to visit this country, and of the interest such a rare curiosity in our midst may legitimately inspire.\textsuperscript{79}

Barnum proceeded to describe her physical characteristics, noting the symmetry of her face, and her small feet. In broadsides, pamphlets, and newspaper advertisements, the smallness of the seventeen-year-old Pwan-Ye-Koo’s feet was nearly always mentioned. A \textit{New York Tribune} article titled “Down East Girls” took note that “Speaking of Barnum’s Chinese lady, who is holding court at Armory Hall, and who boasts a foot only 2 ½ inches long,” was no different than European women “deformed by liver-squeezers [corsets]” or those “fatted after the manner of Hottentots.”\textsuperscript{80} Despite this effort to compare Chinese women to other women around the world, the rarity of the presence of the Chinese was billed as the major draw. Another \textit{Tribune} brief explained that, “The Chinese Beauty at Barnum’s Chinese Museum on Broadway, is the most curious and interesting exhibition in this city. So are the other Living Chinese, in the same genteel collection.” The article continued on to cajole its readers that “Country folks should not miss this chance of seeing them,” implying the rarity of their presence and the briefness of their stay.\textsuperscript{81} Indeed, it was reported as a relief when the “Chinese Lady” extended her stay in New

\textsuperscript{78} P.T. Barnum, “Armory Hall Broadside,” Manuscript Division, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.
\textsuperscript{80} “Down East Girls,” \textit{Jeffersonian Republican} (29 Aug. 1850), 1.
York before leaving for Boston and then Europe, as the newspaper anecdotally claimed, “This will be good news to the crowd that frequents that handsome establishment and fills it day and evening” by providing further opportunities to visit.82 So while many Americans in China wrote about their experiences with the mundane labor of lower-class Chinese women and the more hidden lives of their middle- and upper-class counterparts, Americans in the United States, or New York and Boston in particular, experienced a much more exoticised notion of Chinese femininity through the Chinese Lady and her troupe. These representations played off of the concept of the rarity of access to engage the public, and all contributed to the idea of Chinese differentness.

Unraveling Chinese Morality and Faith

Analyses of the Chinese were not limited to the superficial observations of what they did and looked like. A much deeper thread of questioning led many Americans to try to describe deeper cultural meanings in contexts that their countrymen and women could understand. For missionaries and laypeople alike, the issue of Chinese religion was often presented as a topic of utmost importance because it was believed to be a way to truly understand the Chinese as a people through connections of faith and morality. Which religion the Chinese people practiced, however, seemed to further contribute to the curiosity and misunderstanding of those writing. Macaulay explained his confusion in describing the religiosity of the Chinese people, because “when you attempt to find out his belief, a Chinaman is very apt to confound you with a part of

---

each doctrine [i.e. Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism], and it is only by much sifting that you can come at his real sentiments.” Indeed, a sense of religious pluralism, in which the Chinese were said to be adherents of multiple religions, was a common sentiment. In *A System of Modern Geography*, S. Augustus Mitchell explained that in China, “The religion of Fo or Buddha is professed by the chief part of the people; but the learned men worship the spirit of their great philosopher, Confucius.” He added, “There are some Roman Catholics, Jews, and Mahommedans, in China,” but they made up a small fraction of the population. In his *Travels* Malcolm further reinforced the primacy of the three Eastern religions, confirming, “The Chinese are divided into three sects, viz. those of Ju-kea-su [Confucius], Taou, and Boodh.”

The impact of these three religions, and the fact that Americans perceived them to be practiced in a number of combinations, led these observers to wonder how the Chinese manifested each through actual practice. The *Sunbury American* asserted that the Chinese “in reality reject all faith” by finding all religions “equally good.” What resulted was a rising sentiment in the literature on the Chinese that the primary responsibility of religious worship in China centered on the performance of rituals above all other functions. William Lowrie explained that for Buddhists in particular, “The routine of their duties . . . it consists [of] an unceasing round of prostrations and chants.” No practice of Chinese faith was more analyzed and subsequently criticized than the process of mourning, whether children for parents, wives for husbands, or subjects for the emperor. Sears asserted that the importance of mourning related to the notion that “a Chinaman would consider the neglect of the tomb of his ancestors, as one of

---

83 *Macaulay, Kathay*, 77.
84 *Mitchell, Geography*, 298.
85 *Malcolm, Travels*, 343.
the most heinous sins he could commit.” Barnum’s pamphlet on Chinese culture indicated mourning periods lasting “nominally three years, but actually thrice nine or twenty-seven months,” and that government officials were expected to go into a form of temporary retirement for the duration of the mourning period. Detailing the mourning rituals performed by one young widow, Eliza Bridgman explained, “She was in full mourning-dress, which was made of grasscloth; the edge of which was not hemmed, but left with a sort of fringe. Her hair also was tied with white cord, and she had white shoes upon her little feet. This, in China, is deep mourning.” How and why rituals like mourning periods persisted in Chinese culture continued to cloud the observations like those made by Bridgman, and the generalized assumptions of others like Sears and Barnum in the concerted effort to create a clearer picture of Chinese society.

The role of Confucianism was perhaps the most puzzling aspect of contemporary Chinese belief for Americans to comprehend. Whether it was a religion or merely a series of philosophical instructions, it was understood to be the “principal or state religion of China . . . patronized by those who make any pretensions of learning,” and its adherents carried great political sway. Although it was recognized as the religion of the state and of the educated classes, in contrast to European state religions, Malcolm added the caveat that in China “[Confucianism] is, however, much less intolerantly maintained, [against Buddhism or Daoism] than either Popery or Protestantism [against other faiths], where united with the state.”

---

87 Sears, Pictorial, 230.
88 Barnum, Ten-Thousand Things, 132. R. Kent Guy provides a fascinating look at the ways provincial bureaucrats maximized their time away from power as a way to gain promotions or avoid scandal through the manipulation of mourning periods or feigned illnesses, which he cleverly terms the “bureaucratic flu.” R. Kent Guy, Qing Governors and their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644-1796 (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2010).
89 Bridgman, Daughters, 109.
90 Barnum, Ten-Thousand Things, 43.
91 Malcolm, Travels, 344.
perhaps the lack of enforcement that led some writers to assert, “The system of Confucius may be more properly termed a system of morality than a religion,” because while it evoked rituals and sacrifices, foreigners did not observe it maintaining a system of priesthood to enforce adherence, like Buddhism or Daoism, or Christianity for that matter. Henrietta Shuck inferred that Confucianism was “more political than religious,” whereas Walter Lowrie went as far as to call practitioners “atheists,” because, as he concluded, they worshiped the man Confucius and not any set of gods. The ways in which Americans described Chinese religious practices set an early precedent that questioned both the validity of these religions and the intensity, or lack thereof, with which Chinese adherents believed in them. As such, accusations of the failures of these religions and their practitioners, and assertions of amiability toward Christian missionary influence, were logical results of the frameworks of understanding established in the process of describing Chinese religions.

Antipode

The result of much of this discussion of the seemingly unique aspects of Chinese society and culture was the belief that in many ways the Chinese were physically, culturally, and socially the opposites of those of European descent. In contrast to the conceptualization of the “other,” which allows for a somewhat more dynamic set of representations that focus on the distinctiveness of different groups, the framework of the “antipode” is much firmer in its construction. By presenting the Chinese as the antipode of the west, it used Americans’

92 Sears, Pictorial, 266.
93 Henrietta Shuck, Scenes in China, or, Sketches of the Country, Religion, and Customs of the Chinese (American Baptist Publication Society, 1851), 29; and Lowrie, Memoirs, 381.
understandings of their own culture in order to frame the Chinese as the opposite. To be sure, not every contributor to the debate over China directly stated that it was the opposite of the United States. Some writers described China as an “eccentric nation,” others noted “the strange contrarieties” of Chinese life, as Henrietta Shuck did when she listed the “contradistinctions” of Chinese society that separated it from other cultures.94 Others, however, were not so kind in their assessment of Chinese distinctiveness. Ball alleged, for example, “They do everything backhanded, after their own way, which to a foreigner is generally the opposite of his wishes, and a person must endure much from them till they are taught and, by that time, they know how to steal, deceive, and take many advantages.”95 As with the other “mysterious” aspects of China, rather than discouraging Americans from engaging with the Chinese, these peculiarities spurred further investigations as to the nature and depth of the Chinese “antipode.”

A frequent method used in the effort to define the Chinese “opposite” was by comparing Chinese and Euro-American societies broadly. Brownell’s *People’s Book of Ancient and Modern History* explained, “The manners and customs of the Chinese, so strongly contrasted with those of other nations, offer an extensive and interesting field for observation and inquiry.”96 Ruschenberger agreed that “the manner of living in the East differs so much from our customs that it is worthy of a note.”97 The depth of this assertion of the differentness of Chinese society was wide-ranging, from politics and society, to religion and culture, and even to the physical characteristics perceived to be unique to the Chinese people, or “a striking contrast to those of any other existing nation.”98 Even the manner in which the Chinese lived was compared

---

95 Ball, *Rambles*, 234.
97 Ruschenberger, *Notes*, 144.
to Europeans and Americans. Throughout his book, Ball described European buildings in the treaty ports as “handsome,” “commanding,” and “commodious,” while the homes of the Chinese were described as “dingy,” “shed-like,” “badly arranged,” and part of “miserable, dark, dirty villages.” These differences presented opportunities for clearly defined distinctions between American and Chinese society, yet, how these antipodes originated and whether or not they could be ameliorated for the benefit of Chinese and Americans remained uncertain.

Writers attributed the cultural and social differences between Chinese and foreign societies as an issue of incorrect practice. Tiffany explained that in China “you will see one hundred reverses to European customs.” As an example of the cultural, as opposed to physical, “reverses” of custom, Ruschenberger explained that to an American listener, musically the Chinese engaged in “screaming in falsetto voices more piercing and dissonant cries than caged canaries in a bird fancier's garret.” Likewise, when describing the odd designs and use of ships in China, Spalding explained that these vessels served as an example of “the celestial propensity to “reverse” everything.” Samuel Wells Williams established a laundry-list of these cultural comparisons, noting that officials kept chop sticks in scabbards rather than swords, wore hair styles of questionable fashion, ignored differences in calendars, utilized contrarian printing methods, styles of mathematics, and the location of surnames, and the fact that in China women wore “trousers,” while Chinese men wore “petticoats.” As this theme focused on customs as opposed to physiology, statements in this vein carry the implication that change was possible, or that at least the Chinese could be understood within this framework of expectation.

---

100 Tiffany, *Canton*, 55.
101 Ruschenberger, *Notes*, 149.
102 Spalding, *Japan*, 83.
In contrast, some assertions of distinctiveness did not carry negative connotations in the most explicit sense. As the *New York Tribune* reported “It has been often remarked that the Chinese are our antipodes in everything,” but they found value in that the Chinese were “busy” despite the hotness of the climate, which made others “lazy,” and the article admitted that “I have never seen farms kept in better order in any part of America.” Thus, whatever cultural aspect that made the Chinese unique also made them particularly hard-working in terms valued by these American observers. Yet, whether they were critical or positive, these efforts to clearly define the ways that the Chinese were opposite to Americans ran afoul of some engaged in the China trade. When he was consul Peter Parker asserted that it was likely a futile endeavor to truly understand Chinese ways of thinking. He lamented in a letter to Secretary of State William Marcy that much of this questioning of Chinese reasoning may be wasteful for consideration, as he asserted “western logic will not always apply to the Chinese.” In other words, it was not worth their while to define the indefinable.

Despite Parker’s warning, Americans pressed on in their efforts to define Chinese culture. One of the larger results of this understanding of “antipodes” was the search for “oddities” among Chinese actions, especially in descriptions of Chinese cuisine and eating habits. Newspapers in particular found much to question among the consumables asserted to be on the plates and in the bowls of the Chinese, ranging from article titles such as “Questionable Food,” “Bits and Dainties,” and “San Francisco Luxuries.” Sears explained that many Americans in China were surprised at the types of food for sale in Chinese markets. “Peculiarly curious to American eyes and ears,” he wrote, “are the sights and sounds . . . which issue from various

---

105 Peter Parker to William Marcy, September 3, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 6, 134.
bamboo-cages wherein live stock is kept, and exposed for sale in the narrow streets; puppy-dogs yelping, kittens mewing, rats squalling, fowls chuckling, ducks quacking, geese cackling, and pigs grunting.”

Indeed, the *Nashville Union* went as far as to comment that, “It is almost impossible . . . to think of these curious people, without associating them with the idea of roasted dogs, boiled rats, or fricasseed cats,” continuing with a poem reinforcing the point:

Two boiled dogs,  
With pickled frogs;  
Stewed cats in scores;  
Roasted Rats,  
And well boiled cats,  
And heads of jagged wild boars.

Tame kittens all in troupes,  
And camel soups,  
With salted dromedary;  
Elephant’s tongues,  
And monkey lungs,  
To which nothing is secondary.”

Titled simply, “The Chinese,” this poem illustrates the extent to which the representation of consumption extended as an aspect of how the Chinese were distinct from Americans.

Flying in the face of these sensationalized reports of Chinese delicacies came the counter-assertion that, for the most part, the diets of the Chinese were not that far out of the ordinary. In his diary, George Preble mused that, “Rice has been so associated in my mind with the Chinese as their principal food that I have been surprised to find it so little eaten in Shantung [Shandong]. Beans and Indian corn are the principle [sic] products and of course the chief food of the people.” And in his *Rambles*, Ball asserted that the fantastical and quixotic foods assumed to be the main staples of the Chinese were actually “only eaten by the poorer classes.”

---

that in the mad rush to characterize the Chinese people, the use of the food they ate, or more appropriately the foods the Chinese ate that Americans did not, served as another means by which to indicate just how different Chinese society was perceived and represented to be at the time.

![Dog Seller](image)

**Figure 13:** “Dog Seller” – Despite the realization of many that the average diet of the Chinese consisted of rice, beans, or wheat depending on the region, tales of the consumption of birds-nest soup, cats, and dogs found their way into the popular imagination of Americans early on, and only fueled opinions that the Chinese were inherently different from Europeans and Americans. P. T. Barnum went as far as to quip, “Chinese dogs are said to have a particular aversion for butchers, in consequence, no doubt, of the violation of those personal exemptions and privileges which the canine race are allowed to enjoy almost everywhere else.”

**Stagnation versus Civilization**

Discussions of the mysteriousness and antipodes of China culminated in contemporary scholarship as to the value of Chinese civilization itself, and indeed, whether China was even civilized. Scholars and commentators alike held a variety of opinions on the matter, ranging from allegations of primitiveness, to the view that China was equal to Europe. Harnessing the

---

rhetoric of China’s mysteriousness and the antipodean behaviors of its people, Americans who commented on the state of China could and did combine any and all of these observations as a process of justification for where they placed the Chinese on the sliding scale from savagery to civilization.

Writers at this time who suggested that the kingdom was less than a civilized nation-state used words and phrases such as “heathen” and “barbarian” to mark the actions of the Chinese. As such, their justification usually came as critiques of Chinese culture generally, and practices more specifically. Speer determined, “The Chinese are a heathen, and a peculiar people, as yet to us the objects of ignorant wonder and misapprehension.” The *Belmont Chronicle* used domestic racialized hierarchies as a means to impart information regarding the Chinese. Their article describing the “State of China” asserted that the “conquering races” of Europe made the Chinese like the “red men” in America and “aborigines of New Holland.” Using the notion of imperial expansion based on racial difference, the article concluded that the Chinese were “asiatics, not only by their geographical position, but also by their character, their habits and manners, their frame of mind,” and that this racialized characterization explained the “docility with which they submitted to the yoke of the conquerors [the Manchu].” This construction of the Chinese as less than civilized played off of critical observations in attempts to explain why and how China was distinct from the rest of the world, while at the same time also justifying how such an old culture could succumb to the power of Great Britain while employing terms of American westward expansion. Using this familiar conceptualization, Americans could proceed

---

in engaging with the Chinese in a more familiar set of circumstances as opposed to guessing about how the Chinese would react.

Others admitted certain positive aspects of Chinese culture while still determining that the Chinese were partially civilized for a number of reasons, but were showing signs of progress toward the European norm. Consular representative Alexander Everett wrote to secretary of state, and future president, James Buchanan, that in China, “civilization and humanity have made some progress.”114 Fellow diplomat Humphrey Marshall agreed with this middling position when he claimed that the Chinese were “a subtle and half-civilized race.”115 Referencing the notion of China’s recent isolation from political connections with Europeans and Americans, Ball explained that “to live in China, compared with America, is like being shut up in a convent. One is almost certainly separated from the civilized world.”116 Thus, in these assessments, for a variety of reasons, China did not muster among the ranks of the civilized, but neither was it wholly uncivilized. Mitchell’s Geography provided contemporary insight into the qualifications of what made a nation civilized, at least in the context of his measurements of civilizations against one another. He mused, “How are the half civilized nations distinguished?” His answer was, “They understand agriculture and many of the arts tolerably well, possess written languages, and have some knowledge of books. They have also established laws and religion, some little foreign commerce, but are very jealous of strangers, and treat their women generally as slaves.”117 When considering how other Americans framed their understanding of China’s agricultural and labor potential as limited by not using machinery, their representation of Chinese government and religions as lacking cohesiveness in their foundations, their complaints

117 Mitchell, Geography, 43
regarding the limitations on global trade because of the Cohong system, and the focus on the role
of women in China, we can see how these characterizations mirrored the qualifications behind
Mitchell’s classification. Likewise, in his Discoveries, Andrews opined that, “The Chinese are a
people who have perfected the arts to a high degree. . . apparently almost without the aid of
science.”118 Whereas Andrews used comparisons of the arts and sciences as a means of lowering
the Chinese on the hierarchy of civilization, Macaulay asserted that because of their advanced
experience in the arts, the Chinese “have conduced so much to the amelioration and welfare of
the human race.”119 So by referencing Mitchell’s contemporaneous definition of half-
civilization, we can see how many Americans at this time agreed with this assertion.

While writers such as Everett and Marshall framed Chinese as semi-civilized in terms of
progressing toward an undefined goal, others projected the notion that the Chinese were semi-
civilized because they had regressed from past levels of civilization. Benjamin Ball maligned his
experience as feeling as if he were “surrounded by semi-barbarians in a foreign land.”120 Others
such as Rev. Lowrie categorized the Chinese in terms of levels of hygiene he believed were
necessary to be “civilized.” He believed that the Chinese required proper instruction in
cleanliness and warned potential visitors to the Middle Kingdom, “these are disagreeable truths
to those fond of romance, but the missionary to the Chinese must lay aside many romantic ideas,
and accustom himself to many things unpleasant.”121 Contrary to the claims of Chinese success
in the arts, other writers contended that their real value was limited, as one history text called
claims by the Chinese of their literary greatness “mere oriental hyperbole.” 122 Using science as

118 Andrews, Discoveries, 47.
119 Macaulay, Kathay 75.
120 Ball, Rambles, 236.
121 Lowrie, Memoirs, 228
122 American Sunday-School Union, People of China, 52.
the barometer through which they measured civilization, the *People of China* added, “Notwithstanding their boasted civilization, the science of the Chinese is not many degrees superior to that of the primitive ages.”

Sears placed the Chinese somewhere between civilization and “a rude or uniformed race.” Ruschenberger also divided his praise, noting, “They are a curious, cunning, demi-civilized sort of people. They are ignorant of geography, but pretty skilful diplomatists”

![Figure 14 - “Stages of Society”](image)

Figure 14 - “Stages of Society” – According to Mitchell’s illustration, the Chinese were relegated to the category of “Half-civilized” [lower right corner] along with the Ottoman Turks. In this conceptualization it was understood that peoples could rise to the “Civilized and enlightened” realm, but Mitchell made no proscription as to how that process could be achieved.

---

123 Ibid., 150.
125 Ruschenberger, *Notes*, 140.
At the same time that these writers were defining the Chinese in terms of barbarity or semi-civilization, still others depicted the Chinese as fully civilized people. Ruschenberger reasoned:

There must be truthful men in a community in which there are no lawyers by profession - by the way, this sign of civilization the Chinese want, although we find them in possession of most of the institutions which are supposed to belong only to civilized nations of Christendom. The Chinese have literature, and learned men; religion, temples for public worship, and priests; laws and judges, but no lawyers; taverns, tea-gardens, gambling-shops, restaurants and brothels, foundling-hospitals, jails, and places for decollation; business-brokers, bandits, pirates, money-changers and slaves; theatres, bill-stickers, and mountebanks; druggists, doctors, quacks, and last, not least, "newsboys" vending the *Peking Gazette* or the last new novel. What more has Christian Paris, or Enlightened England?¹²⁷

Fitch stated that it was the fact that the Chinese were civilized that attracted outside interest, especially in the area of enticing religious conversion. He explained, “They are a courteous and civilized nation. They are a reasoning people among the higher orders, who govern, unopposed by the lower classes.”¹²⁸ This idea of civilization by comparison also extended to Samuel Well Williams’ claim that compared to other “Asiatic nations,” China had attained many achievements in “general intelligence,” in terms of good governance, morality, and “sobriety,” but that some of its proclivities and practices tilted toward heathenism.¹²⁹ So for these writers, gauging Chinese civilization was more a matter of reasoning and institutions than actions and rituals. Interestingly, one of the few figures who downplayed whether China was “civilized” or not was P. T. Barnum, who in his commentary echoed the notion of the antipode while jibing, “The Chinese have been ridiculed for assuming to be the only Civilized nation in the world. This assumption is probably owing to their peculiar institutions. . . They live on the past, we on the

future, and consequently are not to be judged by our standards.”

Caleb Cushing echoed this notion when he exclaimed that the Chinese were “highly civilized, just of a civilization different from ours.” Regardless of whether or not an individual author believed the Chinese people to be civilized, half-civilized, or barbaric, all generally agreed that they were not as civilized as Americans and Europeans. This conviction reflected the belief that while China once possessed one of the greatest and most powerful civilizations in human history, a number of social, cultural, and historical factors contributed to its “stagnation” in a state that left it increasingly behind the West.

Ambassador Caleb Cushing provided an indication about how the idea of civilization and stagnation were overlapping concerns. In a memorandum to the State Department he explained, “The Chinese are a highly civilized people; their government is careful to fortify itself by fixed rules & long-descended axioms of eternal form, and their public even are educated persons, rigidly observant of the dictates of decorum themselves, and quick to mark the slightest departure from it.” Thus, in Cushing’s estimation, it was the hard-nosed policies enforcing adherence that led to the “rigidly observant” social and cultural mores of the day. Macaulay cited a similar reason for the societal ills in China. He claimed that, “The Chinese are truly said to be an imitative people,” meaning they copied the ideas of others without altering them. Josiah Quincy published the journals of the first consul to China, Samuel Shaw, long after Shaw’s death, but he noted that the information about China enclosed was likely to still be accurate due to the “unchangeableness of Chinese habits and policy,” a sentiment that Shaw

---

130 Barnum, Collection, 198.
131 Caleb Cushing to Upshur, 44/2/5, ADPP, Vol. 1, 171.
133 Macaulay, Kathay, 31.
indicated throughout his writings.\textsuperscript{134} Howard Malcolm repeated this idea of the permanency of Chinese culture and society resulting in the perpetual accuracy in his 1853 \textit{Travels}. “As Oriental countries are very little subject to change,” he explained, “a book thus attested will remain for a century as valuable as the first.” What emerged from this estimation was a picture of Chinese culture and civilization stuck at a point from which they were falling behind those of Europe and the Americas.

Whether this decline already occurred, or that it was still happening, Americans concerned themselves with creating points of reference to measure its severity. This deterioration was marked enough that the \textit{New York Tribune} noted that in their ancient past the Chinese “were very much superior to any other heathen people, and were second only to the Saxon people in the elements of civilization.”\textsuperscript{135} Likewise, Barnum asserted, “Although nearly 1000 years have elapsed since their first accounts were written there is a remarkable identity between the Chinese as they are therein described, and the same people as we know them at the present day.”\textsuperscript{136} The perceived result of China’s resistance to change was not only that Europeans surpassed the Chinese, but that China was slowly but surely collapsing. The \textit{Rutland County Herald} reported that the Qing dynasty had a long and distinguished existence, but that as of late China had fallen into a “state of decay.”\textsuperscript{137} This idea of decay was also repeated by Samuel Wells Williams, who declared, “Chinese society is like a stagnant pool fermenting in its own feculence.”\textsuperscript{138} This aquatic metaphor was also mobilized by the \textit{New York Tribune} when it described civil unrest in China as a response to the “stagnant waters of Chinese history.”\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{134} Quincy, \textit{The Journals of Major Samuel Shaw}, vi.
\textsuperscript{136} Barnum, \textit{Ten-Thousand Things}, 188.
\textsuperscript{137} “China,” \textit{Rutland County Herald} (4 Feb. 1853), 2.
\textsuperscript{138} Williams, \textit{Middle Kingdom}, Vol. 1, 400.
Indeed, the perceived success of the Taiping against Qing control in central China led some Americans to question whether they could manage to shake China from its apparent decline. “Whether the Progressives or the Old Fogies prevail” was the primary focus of a *Nashville Union* article describing the state of American interests in China in terms of Taiping progress and the likelihood of the fall of the Qing from power.  

Continuing this notion of Chinese stagnation, in a comedic article titled “New Dictionary,” the *Boon’s Lick Times* suggested that the definition for *China* be rewritten as “A hermit among nations. A living toad embedded in stone.” Yet, perhaps no clearer commentary about the state of Chinese civilization in terms of change and stagnation came from Howard Brownell. In comparing the history of China with Europe he determined:

> During all the vast changes in the physical and moral condition of the people of Europe; the perfection of the higher arts; the lapse to barbarism, with the rule of brute force, and the almost total destruction of learning and refinement; and during the revival of forgotten sciences, and their wonderful modern extension, the inhabitants of China have remained the same. As far in advance of the rest of the world a thousand years since, as they are now behind it, in knowledge and policy, they still pursue the customs of their forefathers, and manifest the same untiring industry, the same deficiency of invention, and the same puerile fancies which distinguished them in the earliest period of their history, of which we have any authentic account.

He later added that any efforts for their civilization to progress “would be diametrically opposed to their permanent and unchangeable system,” and would be ignored as a result. Indeed, it was the age of Chinese society itself that was given as a reason for its stagnancy, as Abbot explained, “That it is an old custom, is evidence enough to any Chinese, that whatever he may be doing, is right; and foreign innovations or improvements, in any case, are repelled with scorn.”

---

143 Ibid., 279.
These assertions of Chinese intransigence toward progress beg the question of how Americans believed this civilized, or once-civilized kingdom, had stagnated to the point of dissolution. Lowrie asserted in his Memoirs that the Chinese themselves seemed “content with old thoughts, old customs, old modes of doing things: and not only content, but in love with them.”\textsuperscript{145} Fitch Taylor, for his part, went as far as to claim “that the mind of the Chinese is only imitative, and incapable of invention,” which he blamed for their stagnation and decline.\textsuperscript{146} Lowrie also cited the vague concept of the “mind” of the Chinese as being inferior to that of Europeans and Americans. He alleged that many of the problems in China were due to “the utter stagnation of the Chinese mind, with regard to everything but money.”\textsuperscript{147} Assertions of the difference of Chinese labor practices was both a result of and contributed to these allegations of failure on a civilization level. Sears asserted that the Chinese “possess but very little scientific knowledge,” and “they have very little machinery, and are strongly prejudiced against the introduction of any improvements that would tend to abridge manual labor.”\textsuperscript{148} Indeed, Forbes even argued that the Chinese were at a point where it was possible that they could not improve themselves, asserting that the Chinese remained “unchanged in their natures though they have had a severe lesson of the power of Great Britain.”\textsuperscript{149} Thus, the allegations of the burdensome nature of improving Chinese society was perceived to be a potential fool’s errand.

Rarely, others were not so critical in their assessment of the Chinese, instead perceiving and presenting a notion of stability rather than stagnation. Andrews claimed that the successful perpetuation of writing and literacy, as well as the Confucian ideals that Chinese society was

\textsuperscript{145} Lowrie, Memoirs, 382.
\textsuperscript{146} Taylor, Voyage, Vol. 2, 166. Emphasis in original.
\textsuperscript{147} Lowrie, Memoirs, 388.
\textsuperscript{148} Sears, Pictorial, 291.
\textsuperscript{149} Forbes, Remarks, 56.
built upon, were a result of the “enduring nature of Chinese habits and institutions.” And the American Sunday-School Union was quite positive in its assessment that, “The antiquity of China is indicated by the theoretically patriarchal form of its government. This is a remarkable circumstance, when coupled with the consideration that great revolutions have shaken the very foundations of the empire of China. Its institutions have been subverted by strangers, who ruled the people with a rod of iron, but the empire has again resumed its former outward state.” So while these more optimistic writers agreed with the consensus that China was in a state of decline, they cited China’s own historical precedent of overcoming tumultuous times as a reason to believe it would do so again in the near future.

What this larger debate over the questions of civilization and stagnation indicates is that Americans were deeply interested in understanding China’s place in the world in terms of hierarchies of power. Whether they alleged the Chinese were civilized or uncivilized, stagnant or simply in a temporary period of difficulty, this established a general understanding that Americans held an advantage within the Middle Kingdom. How Americans dealt with the uncertainties that came from the assumed certainty of Chinese stagnation. This played an integral role in constructing how China could simultaneously represent opportunities and failures, threats and successes.

“This Vast Number of People”

An emerging assessment from the debate over China’s degree of civilization and stagnation was the realization that despite the criticisms and prognostications of Chinese issues,
China maintained a population of nearly four hundred million subjects. The repetition of population statistics throughout the writings coming out of China was an attempt to allay concerns of Chinese decline, while defining the concept of accessing the Chinese population as an opportunity for a wide range of American interests. In his introductory greeting to the Qing emperor, Caleb Cushing delivered a message from President John Tyler that made specific note that, “The Chinese are numerous. You have millions and millions of subjects.” Because the emperor obviously would have been well aware of the size of the population of China, Tyler couched his self-evident observation in the assertion that an improved relationship would “offer profitable exchanges both to China and the United States,” as “The Chinese love to trade with our People, and to sell them Tea and Silk.”

Rev. Walter Lowrie made a special point to his readers that, “The attentive reader of this journal will have been struck with the frequent reference to the amazing populousness of the country; but it is impossible to convey any adequate idea of the real state of the case.” So from the president of the United States to a missionary in China, the rhetoric of China’s population plays an important role in conveying how Americans framed emerging descriptions with personal and national advantage in mind.

This discussion over the population of China merged together a wide cross-section of American interests. The population of China, in particular the number of inhabitants in cities, also perpetuated and continued the idea that China remained a mysterious place. As the Chinese government continued to restrict the movement of foreigners outside of the treaty ports – foreigners “passing” as Chinese aside – the rest of the country continued to be an inaccessible wonder. In its article on “The Largest City in the World,” the Jeffersonian Republican, with the

---

152 “Messages of President John Tyler,” Papers of Caleb Cushing, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.
153 Lowrie, Memoirs, 231.
Vermont Phoenix reprinting the information nearly two years later, claimed that a city in China was reported to have a population of between four and five million inhabitants within its walls.\(^{154}\) In this same vein of estimating the population of Chinese cities, Abbot suggested that the population within Beijing’s city walls was alleged to be four times that of New York.\(^{155}\) It is clear that despite the decline of many travel restrictions Americans still wanted access to the millions more that were, for the time being, out of reach.

The advantage of knowing the exact population of China, and the successive efforts to connect to it, was made no clearer than by those with the intent of engaging in missionary work in China. Eliza Bridgman declared to her readers, “Three hundred and sixty or four hundred millions of her sons and daughters are waiting to receive the gospel. Who will claim the privilege of imparting this blessing to them?”\(^{156}\) And while Bridgman’s perspective of population was as a means to excite more Americans to join her and her husband in China as missionaries, Rev. Abeel framed population in additional terms of potential conversion. “The prospect of soon having access to 400,000,000 . . . souls,” he excitedly speculated, “or even to any considerable part of this number, ought to stimulate every true believer in Jesus, to awake to righteousness, to put on strength, and to come up to the Lord's help against the mighty.”\(^{157}\) Walter Lowrie noted that the areas beyond the treaty ports were the true places where opportunity and high populations converged for missionary benefit. “This whole population [of Chusan] is at present without the Gospel, as there is no missionary of another Board there, nor did we know of any likely to go.”\(^{158}\) Or perhaps his intent was most clearly framed when he

\(^{154}\) “The Largest City in the World,” Jeffersonian Republican (29 Oct. 1846), 1; and “A Great City,” Vermont Phoenix (26 May 1848), 2.
\(^{156}\) Bridgman, Daughters, 37.
\(^{157}\) Williamson, Abeel, 217.
\(^{158}\) Lowrie, Memoirs, 316.
stated, “Should China be thrown more widely open than it now is, (and he who has opened it so wide already can as easily open it wider,) all this vast number of people will be accessible to the missionary.” So not unlike the complaints that governmental and cultural restrictions hindered American access in terms of interacting with the Chinese, these missionary advocates made the case that these limitations also impacted their tangible activities as well as the esoteric value of describing Chinese society.

Just as missionaries utilized the population information uncovered in the attempts to describe and define China in a way that justified their goals, so too did merchants become economic evangelists, citing population statistics as a way to promote speculation in making the Chinese not converts, but consumers of American goods. Francis Bonynge, a writer on American economic expansion, explained, “Before China may be a mart always for the sale of cotton, and perhaps it may not be an improper deviation from the subject to hint at the desirability of considering what might be the result of opening a train trade from the west of America with China.” Adding, that as it stood, the United States had an approximate population of 23.2 million inhabitants in 1850, whereas he alleged the Chinese population was calculated to be 519 million in 1851. This huge population differential was projected as a means for Americans to expand their economic interests beyond the comparably smaller consumer base in the United States toward the seemingly infinite one in China. These debates over the value of China’s population as a new marketplace contribute to what Amy Greenberg asserts was the

159 Ibid., 206.
160 Francis Bonynge, The Future Wealth of America: Being a Glance at the Resources of the United States and the Commercial and Agricultural Advances of Cultivating Tea, Coffee, and Indigo, the Date, Mango, Jack, Leechee, Guava, and Orange Trees, Etc. With a Review of the China Trade (New York: Published by the Author, 1852), 34 and 188.
desire to create a “safety valve” for American impulses toward Manifest Destiny through territorial and economic expansion.¹⁶¹

While considering the many benefits of the size of China, this issue of calculating the population of China was not entirely positive in its outcomes. The Vermont Phoenix alleged that civil unrest and conflict in China were not generally minded by those in power, as the result was a means to keep the population in check.¹⁶² Other writers framed natural disasters as another form of population control. The Sunbury American reported that because of China’s high population, the recent floods resulted in high casualties and desperate women putting their children in casks as a means to survive the flood waters.¹⁶³ On a social scale, population was presented as a negative influence on the Chinese people. Edward Tiffany blamed the high population of for what he called the Chinese “swarming nature,” while Williams defined the Chinese as “conceited” in their efforts to impress foreigners with inflated population statistics.¹⁶⁴

So as civilization and stagnation could be framed in ways that would justify American interaction with the Chinese, the idea of population served a similar purpose in framing the rhetoric of those engaged in a variety of exchanges in China. Population in China could act as a magnet for American interests, as much as it could serve as an indication of the problems in China, or the “swarming” threats that Americans could face if contact resulted in the Chinese being less mysterious. As with their mysterious nature, their unorthodox culture, and their purported civilization, the question of the population of China became defined by a variety of

¹⁶² “China,” Vermont Phoenix (10 June 1847), 2.
¹⁶⁴ Tiffany, Canton, 30; and Williams, Middle Kingdom, Vol. 1, 215.
answers, the result was not a singular one. Instead, conflicting interpretations that cast the Chinese in both positive and negative lights were revealed.

**Conclusion**

These ideas of mystery and allegations of antipode and stagnation matter in understanding how Americans conceptualized the Chinese people and their empire because China existed in an uncertain state in the minds of Americans and because Americans were for the time being willing to reconsider their historical preconceptions. Conflicting issues created a vacuum in which representations of the Chinese could be written and rewritten to match the national as well as individual interest in China. As such, these Americans could claim not only that their positions were good for their individual causes but that they would benefit the country as a whole. Just as repeated comments about Chinese eating habits magnified a difference that did not apply to all Chinese, the emerging patterns establishing the Chinese as a distinct civilization, stagnant or otherwise, represented a framework for how Americans engaged with the idea of China on a number of fronts in the ensuing years. This flexible framework allowed for competing understandings of the Chinese to exist, both encouraging and discouraging continued interaction with the Chinese. Economic and trade successes engendered a sense of unbridled opportunism in the Sino-American exchange that mobilized vast speculation as to the overall value of the relationship. Concurrently, the failings of Americans in China were focused into detailed and extensive critiques of China and Chinese society, and caused some to hesitate in their engagement. Others interpreted dangers as manifest threats to American interests and citizens in the region and elsewhere. Whether China presented opportunity, disappointment, or disaster, the processes by which these early Americans learned about China and the Chinese and then wrote about them set the rhetorical stage for how they constructed their political, economic,
cultural, and religious responses to these interrelated frameworks of understanding. All of the ways Americans described the Chinese were tinged with this uncertainty brought about by the individual interpretation of each author and the realization that still more needed to be learned. Within the process of uncovering Chinese mysteriousness, their explanations served the function of reflecting more about how Americans wanted to interact with the Chinese than they did in creating an “authentic” picture of the Chinese. Despite the assertions of those clamoring for more rights for Americans in China, access and observation were not panaceas to American misunderstanding. Rather than dispelling the mystery, American attempts at understanding of the Chinese only set the stage for the competing explanations and their perpetuation throughout the mid-nineteenth century. Without this uncertainty it is unlikely that ideas of opportunity, flaw, threat, and success could have effectively coexisted without one narrative becoming dominant over the others.
Chapter 2 - China as Opportunity

“The United States must open her treasury to the petitioners, and enable them to turn the whole trade of China and the East Indies, now carried round the Cape of Good Hope and through the Red Sea, into the Pacific Ocean and across the American continent.” – Robert Forbes

Although the idea of China’s value to the United States had, for the most part, always been a driving force behind American desire for increased interaction, the reality of access created by the Treaty of Wangxia set off a speculative rush in the mid-nineteenth century that not only attempted to further increase American engagement with the Chinese marketplace but eagerly sought out theories and explanations for how these new dealings with the Chinese would prove to be beneficial for a whole range of domestic and foreign concerns. “By applying constant pressure,” John Haddad writes “the Canton System had managed to contain three forces within the foreign factories: evangelical fervor, commercial ambition, and intellectual curiosity. Expansive by nature, each of the three yearned to spread out, conquer geographic space, and penetrate Chinese markets, minds, or hearts. Confinement, in other words, thwarted their intrinsic tendencies.” The end of the Cohong unleashed a seemingly unbridled sense of optimism regarding the China market, and the new and improved contact with the Chinese served as a substantive opportunity for individual and national concerns. Huang Kailai posits that during the mid-nineteenth century “Optimistic opinions of the China market greatly reinforced a generally positive popular conception of China,” but he adds that the opium trade

---

1 Robert B. Forbes, On the Establishment of a Line of Mail Steamers from the Western Coast of the United States to China (Boston: Boston Journal Office, 1855), 8.
created a conflicting image of “despotism, superstition, stagnation and ignorance.” Rather than a “pendulum swing” of opinion in which shifts in public sentiment could easily be traced from one sentiment to another, what seemed to exist were concurrent feelings of optimism, disappointment, and concern about the Chinese, particularly considering the moral and cultural impact many Americans wished to have on the Chinese. It was more than business acumen and implied profit that drove post-Opium War American representations of the Chinese, and this chapter will outline how the rhetoric of “opportunity” made full use of Americans’ understandings of the “mysterious” Chinese in terms of benefits across a spectrum of interests.

John King Fairbank, aware of the contemporaneous impact of the Vietnam War on American perceptions of Asia in the 1970s, noted that much of the problem within the early study of American relations with China was that it reinforced concepts of uninterrupted American westward expansion followed by the improvements of “civilization.” This self-constructed concept, while clouding the historical record of the actions taken by Americans in China, is useful in understanding how larger concerns like trade opportunities, territorial acquisition, religious and cultural influence, and framing positive American responses to the uncertainties of the Taiping uprising. The framework of opportunity is important because it allowed Americans to create a narrative of convenient omission. Antipodal and mysterious behaviors could be remedied and demystified. The reality of the relationship and the purported dangers inherent within it – to be discussed in chapter 3 and 4 – could be overlooked because of the economic, political, cultural, and religious profits to be made. Just as the mysteriousness of

---

China did not exist in a vacuum of understanding, so too did the idea of China as a land of opportunity work within the context of the economic, spiritual and cultural interests – as Haddad defined them – of contemporary Americans engaged in the China trade.

Demystifying the Myth of the China Trade

Americans oriented the process of accommodating to the reality of the new treaty through the resurrection of older assumptions of the value of the China trade. An early history of Sino-American relations, The People of China, noted that until the First Opium War, “The intercourse of America with China has been strictly commercial; it commenced in 1784, and it has gradually increased, till it has acquired an importance second only to that of Great Britain.” As such, they deemed the establishment of official relations through the treaty as paramount in setting the direction and tone of the Sino-American relationship beyond the earlier arrangements at Canton. Then Congressman John Quincy Adams reasoned the Wangxia negotiations important enough to call for $40,000 to be assigned to Caleb Cushing’s mission “believing the present moment auspicious for placing, by mutual consent, the future relations of intercourse between the United States and the empire of China upon a footing of national equality and reciprocity.” Thus, early on many hoped that the connections between the United States and China would be profitable as well as unique in strength and durability. Edward Cunningham, an American mercantile resident in China, went as far as to prophesize that “China is of so much importance to the people of the United States, for the present trade between them and for their probable future relations . . . with

---

the exception of one or two nations of Europe, China will become in the course of time, our most important commercial connection.”⁷ Making reference to the mysteriousness of China in terms of releasing potential economic gains, Cunningham declared “the veil over China requires but to be lifted to open new and fuller channels of trade.”⁸

The role that the Chinese Empire played in driving merchants’ desires was a long-standing trend not only for American traders but for Europeans as well.⁹ Albert Speer reminded readers that, “First, we need hardly say, let us encourage Chinese trade. The possession of the commerce of China and India has enriched the emporiums of Central Western Asia and Egypt from the days of the Pharaohs.”¹⁰ Regardless of nationality, foreigners assumed that if China were open to international commerce, desirable goods exported from China, coupled with the potential of establishing a vast customer base for foreign goods among the Chinese population, would guarantee profit. With new trade regimes in place, and five additional ports open to foreign traders, the China market became even more alluring to those willing to travel around the globe to get there. It was that very distance that Americans framed as an opportunity, using access to China to highlight American expansion as a necessary requirement to engage in the China trade.

Shortly after the United States and China signed the Treaty of Wangxia, the Burlington Free Press hailed the agreement for instituting “Peace – friendly, social, and commercial

---

⁷ E. Cunningham, Our Commercial and Political Relations with China, by an American Resident (Washington, 1855), 1.
⁸ Ibid., 3.
intercourse – and the reciprocation of good offices with all nations, was proclaimed as the universal policy of this Union.”11 Another paper proclaimed that, “Every thing seems to favor the impression that we are to have a valuable trade with China in Teas, Silks, Drugs, &c.;”12 The New York Daily Tribune reported that Ambassador Caleb Cushing “believed there was a friendly feeling in China towards the United States on this subject, and that she considered it as her interest not to allow England a monopoly of her trade.” The article also made note of the size of the Chinese population in the context that, “The trade with that vast empire of 300,000,000 people was, as was well known, highly important.”13 It is clear that the ability to create and sustain commercial ties within broader concerns of global trade and competition was of great importance to these early discussions in the United States.

Debates regarding the value of American exports to China, particularly in regard to English trade power in the region, was also a constant theme within the discourse of American mercantile potential in China. One hopeful report noted, “Instead of India cotton driving us out of the English market by its cheapness and abundance, (as had been predicted by some,) we are invading a market [in China] which Indian cotton has hitherto monopolized.”14 Americans hoped to take advantage of their unique, non-European position in China to gain special favor with the imperial bureaucracy. One report from Canton claimed that “The Emperor is aware . . . that the American merchants have been better contented and more observant of the laws [of China] than other nations,” in an effort to elevate the role of American interests in the area.15

While cotton exports were the most common example presented of how American abundance

11 “Commercial Intercourse with China and the Sandwich Islands,” Burlington Free Press (3 Feb. 1843). It was also found in the Vermont Phoenix (17 Feb. 1843). Emphasis in original.
12 “Our Relations with China,” The Radical (23 Nov. 1844).
could find its way into the Chinese marketplace, it was hoped that other marketable goods such as lead and iron, and even commodities such as ice, clocks, and fur, could also find their way into this exchange.\textsuperscript{16} As real economic opportunities between the United States and the Middle Kingdom burgeoned, the myth of the value of the China trade only intensified in the public accounts describing the relationship. American control of the Pacific Ocean, or the “highway of nations,” as one newspaper referred to it, allowed the United States to “bid fair for mastery of the universe,” while Europeans were left dithering with the problems of the Old World.\textsuperscript{17}

**Creating an “Open Door”**

As the United States was not the only foreign influence attempting to garner an increased role in China – the British signed the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, the French negotiated the treaty of Whampoa in 1844, and Russia would follow suit in 1851 with the Treaty of Kulja – much of this rhetoric of opportunism emerged in terms of equal access and establishing an ability to fairly compete with other foreign powers for profit in China. During the treaty negotiations, Robert Forbes noted that a successful resolution for Caleb Cushing would be likely to obtain the same benefits as the British, giving Americans the chance “to compete fairly with our neighbors.”\textsuperscript{18} Cushing himself reported in a memo to the State Department that the result of the treaty would establish “a new footing eminently favorable to the commerce & other natural interests of the United States.”\textsuperscript{19} Whether or not Americans would receive equal treatment – as some wondered if this new access would be hindered by Chinese reluctance or British maneuvering – the New


\textsuperscript{17} “Coming Events cast their Shadows Before,” *The Gallipoli Journal* (31 Jul. 1851).


\textsuperscript{19} Caleb Cushing, “Memo,” 44/2/15, Papers of Caleb Cushing, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.
York Tribune laid claim that Americans abided by Chinese law better than any other group of foreigners, namely in their agreement to and enforcement of anti-opium smuggling regulations. As such, American traders had little about which to worry.20 Ball recorded shortly after the ink dried on the treaty that, “The Chinese have been much more prejudiced against the English than against other nations, so that the Americans and others seem to be more in favor with them, though, in a commercial point of view, I presume there is little difference.”21 This sentiment of positive American actions being received well by Chinese officials was reinforced when one consular official explained that “the feelings of the government and the people of China continue [to be] favorably disposed toward Americans,” and another colleague noted that local mandarins were “more friendly to the Americans” than other foreigners.22 In his brief analysis of pre-1898 Sino-American relations, John King Fairbank asserted that “The international structure of China’s foreign relations being beyond [American] control, we had no vital decisions to make, no real issues of peace or war to face, except how and when to say ‘Me, too.’ Our national interest was to keep up with the Joneses, and also be friends with the Wangs and Lins whose house the Joneses were breaking into.”23 This sentiment may hold true to the political impact that the United States was, or more accurately was not, able to make in China during this time, but it clouds the role that Americans’ own rhetorical understanding of China played at the time. Americans were not content playing second-fiddle to Britain’s dominance in the China trade, and by studying the contemporary language surrounding China and the Chinese we can see the ways Americans hoped to use the relationship for their own benefit.

21 Benjamin Lincoln Ball, Rambles in Eastern Asia, Including China and Manila, During Several Years’ Residence: With Notes of The Voyage to China, Excursions in Manila, Hong-Kong, Canton, Shanghai, Ningpoo, Amoy, Fouchow, and Macao (Boston, MA: James French and Co., 1855), 127.
22 King to Dept. of State, September 20, 1843, ADPP, Vol. 18, 46; and Bradley to Clayton, July 1, 1850, ADPP, Vol. 20, 23.
23 Fairbank, China Perceived, 91-92.
Much of this perception that Americans would enter into China with built-in advantage came from the fact that in addition to the claimed preferential position of Americans, Chinese merchants were purported to be some of the most shrewd and effective businessmen in the world. In his *Rambles*, Benjamin Ball recounted, “Some of the Chinese learn English in the schools of the missionaries, and afterwards turn it to their own advantages for trading purposes, which in the Chinese character to me seems natural.”

P. T. Barnum made a similar assessment, though cautioned that some foreign traders could fall prey to unscrupulous behavior in the Chinese drive for profit. “The Chinese are good merchants,” he explained, “They are systematic, obliging to customers, and indefatigable in the pursuit of money. . . So much cannot be said of the generality of small traders with whom foreigners come in contact, who are as great rogues as can be found any where; and most of them will ask four or five times as much for an article as they expect to get.”

Similar to Barnum and Ball’s claims, the American Sunday-School Union proclaimed to their readers that, “As traders, the Chinese are eminently active, persevering, and intelligent. They are, in truth, a highly commercial people. Business is transacted with great despatch [sic], and it is affirmed that there is no part of the world where cargoes may be sold and bought, unloaded and loaded, with more business-like speed and activity.”

The skill of Chinese merchants was of such renown that in many instances these writers compared them with their American counterparts, using domestic understandings of economic activity to frame these foreign exchanges. Observing shipping from eastern China to Formosa and Manila, William Lowrie reported that “The Fuhkeen [Fujain] men are the New Englanders

---

of China.”

This comparison to New England merchants also appeared elsewhere, as William Speer alleged that the Chinese were “every whit as cunning a trader and as acute a diplomatist as the Yankee: in fine he is the “Yankee of the East.””

“The Chinese are the Yankees of Asia,” linguist Stephen Andrews noted in his analysis of the value of Chinese emigration around the world, especially to San Francisco. And while Americans did not have access to it as an avenue for trade, the *New York Tribune* highlighted the potential value of the Yangzi River as a “second Mississippi” for moving the world’s goods to and from the interior of China. So whether the Chinese merchant was a “Yankee” or the Yangzi River was a new “Mississippi” River, it is clear that these writers wanted their readers to understand the potential of Sino-American trade in terms with which they were familiar.

Adding to this concept of the adeptness with which the Chinese seemingly managed trade came suggestions that the industriousness and ingenuity of the Chinese people made them logical trading partners as well as valuable sources of labor and production. In a series of opinions published in Chicago newspapers, John Peyton made sure to clarify what he believed was a misleading conception of the Chinese. “I must advert to the common and erroneous impression that the Chinese are not an industrious and commercial people. This impression is wholly unfounded in fact. They are eminently an active, persevering and intelligent people.”

Similarly, in the prologue of his text, Andrews’ editor made note of how, “Mr. Andrews

---


introduces us to the living speech of the most numerous and industrious people upon the globe, with whom we already carry on a valuable trade, which, in the course of a hundred years, will, for America especially, be extended into relations of unknown variety and importance.”

This rhetoric of industriousness was a common theme within communications about the Chinese, particularly those coming from Americans who had recently visited East Asia. Abbot recalled how “The fast-boat men are generally a pretty faithful and industrious class,” while the *Sunbury American* reported that the Chinese were the “most industrious and economical people in the world.”

Boynage went as far as to assert, “There are none of the Eastern races so docile, so cleanly, and industrious as the Chinese – and none carry improvements so far, wherever they migrate.” He went on to caution his readers, however, that the use of opium erased many of these benefits. S. Lothrop Thorndike wrote in his personal papers that in order to make a sale, “For the sake of selling fifty cents worth a Chinaman will bring whole contents of his store to any place,” thereby indicating the extent to which he believed the Chinese were willing to go for purposes of commerce.

So whether the writer referenced the Chinese in terms of Yankee shrewdness or laboring industriousness, the message was clear that they were people with whom Americans could do business easily.

Working alongside this narrative of industriousness, Americans presented the Chinese as being ingenious in their production methods to compensate for the problems of stagnation and population, further enticing readers with the opportunities to be found engaging in the China

33 Jacob Abbott, *China and the English, or the Character and Manners of the Chinese, as Illustrated in the History of Their Intercourses with Foreigners, To Which is Added an Account of the Late War* (Cooperstown, NY: H. & E. Phinney, 1843), 69; “Population of China,” *Sunbury American* (21 Jun. 1851), 2.
34 Francis Bonynge, *The Future Wealth of America: Being a Glance at the Resources of the United States and the Commercial and Agricultural Advances of Cultivating Tea, Coffee, and Indigo, the Date, Mango, Jack, Leechee, Guava, and Orange Trees, Etc. With a Review of the China Trade* (New York: Published by the Author, 1852), 178.
35 S. Lothrop Thorndike, “S. Lothrop Thorndike Papers” Manuscripts Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, np.
trade. Barnum’s *Collection* illustrated that, “Nothing exhibits the patience, ingenuity, and exceeding skill of the Chinese better than these [carved ivory] balls.”\textsuperscript{36} Sears also positively framed their production skills, noting, “The Chinese exhibit a surprising degree of ingenuity in the mechanical construction of some of their lanterns.”\textsuperscript{37} In addition to the more luxurious products found in China, *The People of China* used the rhetoric of ingenuity to turn the perceived problem of societal stagnation into a positive benefit. “The Chinese are strangers to machinery,” it alleged, “but their ingenuity is conspicuous in the ready and simple modes in which they contrive to abridge labour.”\textsuperscript{38} Playing into the idea that China’s long history influenced its culture, Barnum posited that the use of bridges and arches on the Great Wall showed “that the Chinese must have understood the construction and properties of the arch long before the Greeks and Romans.”\textsuperscript{39} Mobilizing understandings of historical achievement as well, Brownell informed his readers “while the inhabitants of the now enlightened states of Europe were in the lowest state of ignorance and vassalage, the patient and laborious Chinese had brought into general use the art of printing from engraved block” through their intellectual prowess.\textsuperscript{40} Therefore, it was not only that the Chinese were capable of hard work, but also that as a civilization their work indicated a diligent work ethic that could hold use for Americans.

\textsuperscript{36} Barnum, *Collection*, 152.
\textsuperscript{37} Robert Sears, *Pictorial History of China and India; Comprising a Description of Those Countries and their Inhabitants, Embracing the Historical Events, Government, Religion, Education, Language, Literature, Arts, Manufactures, Productions, Commerce, and Manners and Customs of the People, From the Earliest Period of Authentic Record, to the Present Time* (New York: Robert Sears, 1851), 208.
\textsuperscript{38} American Sunday-School Union, *People of China*, 162.
\textsuperscript{39} Barnum, *Collection*, 161.
\textsuperscript{40} Henry Brownell, *The People’s Book of Ancient and Modern History; Comprising the Old World: Namely, The Jews, Assyria, Egypt, Greece, Rome, Persia, India, China, The Mahometans, Spain, Germany, France, England, Sweden and Norway, The Netherlands, Denmark, Portugal, Italy, Switzerland, Etc.* (Hartford, CT: L. Stebbins, 1851), 271.
The Challenge of Industriousness: “Coolie” Labor

Because of this understanding of the “industry and ingenuity of the most enlightened of the Orientals,” as Edmund Tiffany put it, this terminology had the purpose of engaging the American public with the purported potential of the China trade, but it also contributed to more positive understandings of Chinese labor in the face of increasing immigration to California after 1849. 42 How Americans framed the potential of Chinese physical labor, coupled with assertions that a tidy profit could be made by facilitating Coolie transportation around the Pacific region, conflicts with a period more well known for the origins of anti-Chinese sentiment in the American West. Much has been said about the influx of people into California after 1849, and the ensuing social, political, and cultural outbursts – oftentimes violently – that resulted from the emigration of Chinese subjects. As Elizabeth Sinn notes, it is both incorrect and inaccurate to

42 Osmond Tiffany Jr., The Canton Chinese, or The American’s Sojourn in the Celestial Empire (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1849), ix.
classify all Chinese people in California as “coolie” laborers, as Chinese on both sides of the Pacific acted as merchants, trade agents, investors, and a wide variety of other professions that gravitated toward the perceived value across the Hong Kong-San Francisco trade avenue. Yet, this understanding of actual Chinese labor activity conflicts with the contemporary perception that all Chinese immigrants were laborers. Despite this general negative belief, a notion persisted that Chinese laborers could be mobilized for larger economic gains through the concepts of industriousness and ingenuity.

One of the primary justifying factors that led many writers to speculate about the value of Chinese labor in the United States were accounts from China that highlighted observations of Chinese bodies. Barnum explained that, “The Chinese coolies are probably as muscular a body of men as can be found in the world,” implying that an underlying strength existed. How that physicality manifested itself, Americans were sure to list the ways Chinese laborers performed feats of strength in their daily lives. “Sometimes that labor [plowing],” Sears wrote, “is performed by men, and even by women, among the lowest class of farmers” instead of by pack animals like horses or oxen. The Jeffersonian Republican reported, “The most stupendous canal in the world is the one in China, which passes over two thousand miles of territory, and to forty-one cities. It was commenced in the tenth century. A monster work of man.” This sense of the immeasurable laboring capacity of the Chinese was amplified by understandings of other aspects of their “industrious” attitudes. Speer explained that Chinese workers exhibited a “patient handiwork” in their skills, and a hard-working attitude as fishermen and servants. He

---

45 Barnum, *Collection*, 114.
concluded that “For patience, docility, readiness to receive instruction, and economy, we are willing to say, emphatically, we have not seen the equals of the Chinese.”⁴⁸ Adding to this sense of readily available labor potential, the New York Tribune presented news from the California mining regions as early as 1850 stating that “a more peaceable class of miners is not to be found than the China men.”⁴⁹ So not only did Americans measure Chinese labor in terms of their ability to complete difficult tasks, but they also valued the perceived ability of the Chinese to follow orders and contribute to the maintenance of civil society concurrent with economic gain.

Figure 17: “The Annual Spring Festival” – References to the emperor’s annual agricultural ritual of plowing a field reinforced ideas of Chinese industriousness on all levels of society.⁵⁰

For Americans, China seemed suffused with examples of the positive benefits of physical industriousness that many believed could be mobilized for benefit not only in terms of national wealth but also in terms of adding to the value of American citizenry. The Jeffersonian Republican reported that in China there was a “stream” of emigrants like a “hive ready to

---

⁴⁸ Speer, China, 94.
⁵⁰ Sears, Pictorial, 238.
swarm.” Despite the comparison to a “swarm,” the article continued on to praise the Chinese as “intelligent, industrious, and desirable citizens.” 51 Dr. Nathan Allen expressed a similar pro-immigration sentiment when he explained, “The recent settlements and great increase of trade on our Pacific shores, will open a more direct communication with China, and render whatever concerns that people far more interesting and important to our own country.” 52 And even before the gold rush spurred vast movements of workers around the world to California, the Boon’s Lick Times asserted that because of their hard work, Chinese laborers “would be exceedingly useful here, and would undoubtedly find it to their advantage to emigrate.” 53 This idea that some Americans actually advocated for increased Chinese immigration adds a further dimension to the complexity and depth of the arguments of opportunism in the face of anti-Chinese resistance.

In addition to their perceived value as immigrants and potentially citizens in the United States, much of the discussion regarding the value of Chinese laborers compared their perceived capabilities and beneficial attitudes with that of other racial groups in the United States. Speer explained that one benefit of the Chinese immigrant was that they always paid debts. “The difference between the Chinese miner and the pale-faced miner, is this: the former manages to live always within his means; the latter, too often, beyond. So that the profit the storekeeper derives from his Chinese customer is apt to be lost by crediting the French, Irish, and Americans.” He added that self-policing among the Chinese was an effective means of ensuring debt payment, preventing public begging by other Chinese immigrants, and eliminating scenes of public drunkenness from taking place because of their fellow countrymen. 54 Likewise, George

52 Nathan Allen M.D., The Opium Trade; Including a Sketch of its History, Extent, Effects, Etc. as Carried on in India and China (Lowell, MA: James P. Walker, 1853), 5.
53 “China” Boon’s Lick Times (23 Sept. 1848), 1.
54 Speer, Plea, 31.
Sampson’s report on the opium trade highlighted the “unfitness” of Native Americans to perform difficult labor in the West, and stated that there was a growing “belief that the negro is destined to be superseded in that country by the Chinaman.”

This pre-Civil War conceptualization of Chinese labor resulting in a decrease of Southern dependence on slave labor was a recurring theme for some abolitionists. The Jeffersonian Republican explained that the presumed work abilities of the Chinese resulted in prognostications that “the Asiatic is destined to supplant the African,” providing labor to the south as Irish immigrants provided in urban areas in the north. And Speer advocated a truly abolitionist approach when he explained, “Chinese immigration, indeed, extends a hope of the emancipation of the negro. Their free labor would be cheaper than their labor as slaves. Reasonable Southern men proclaim themselves glad to be relieved from the responsibilities, anxieties, hazards, and manifold and continued burthens[sic] of such ‘property.’” So just as the mystery of Chinese civilization could be defined by its location within a hierarchy of civilization, the proposed value of Chinese labor also found itself viewed through a lens of competing racial ideology and hierarchies of economic value. Unlike successive waves of European immigrants enticed or driven to the United States who had assured or at least arguable racial status as “white,” Chinese immigrants to California were restricted from the legal, economic, and social benefits associated with whiteness. Although Chinese were not white, they were also not black, creating an uncertain space within racialized categories of labor that existed before the

57 A number of recent studies on “whiteness” as a category of analysis has helped to clarify the complex means by which race was not a simple binary of black or white, and whereby the rules of inclusion or exclusion within these categories changed over time. Thomas A. Guglielmo, White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Theodore W. Allen, Invention of the White Race (New York: Verso, 1994).
Civil War in which they could be simultaneously desired and reviled in their capacity to perform labor in the United States. As Stacey Smith writes, “Coolies represented both the opportunities and the perils of a transpacific empire.”\(^{58}\) The question of whether or not the Chinese had “bargained away” their economic autonomy dogged arguments as to the validity of their labor as “free.”

The idea of a sense of American fairness also emerged as a contributing factor of the value of coolie labor. “Here is an opportunity,” Sampson wrote in regard to Chinese workers, for them “to earn a good living, have fair wages, and with a chance of laying up something with which to purchase land when their contract is out, and of making themselves happy, and tolerably independent,” like Irish labor found elsewhere in America.\(^{59}\) And in his papers of his time engaged in the Coolie trade and transportation between Hong Kong and South America, William Comstock wrote that “Our impression is that the customary rate of wages for Cuba laborers is $4 per month and they to pay their own doctors bills, and that no provision is made for returning them to China.” He included the observation that Panamanians paid a better wage, offered medical care to their workers, and “transport[ed] them back to China” as ways of enticing coolie labor, keeping them happily employed, and ensuring their eventual departure.\(^{60}\) Sampson added that an English clergyman in Lima, Peru, confided to him that “if the coolies were fairly and honestly engaged in China, with a full knowledge of what they were to do, and the engagement with them kept in good faith, there could be no earthly objection” to making a profit off of transporting them to and fro across the Pacific Ocean.\(^{61}\) So not only did some

---

Americans find value enough in Chinese labor to call for immigration to the United States, but Americans could gain in the process of transportation itself so long as it was within a “fair” system. Speer claimed the potential need for increased immigration from Asia as “Our own Atlantic States cannot spare a large continued emigration to California. But by the supervision of foreign labour, American knowledge and energy will in time advance California to an equality with the proudest portions of our land.” He continued, “We believe none that are foreigners can be found superior to the Chinese,” especially when it came to agricultural work. In a separate publication, Speer also noted the estimated potential of over $1 million in profit from transporting Chinese to and from the West coast, not to mention income from domestic transport and mercantile supply of these groups. News accounts reported that “emigrants are pouring in from China,” and that “the emigration of Chinese to California continues on a large scale.” So while it is known that these influxes of labor triggered increasing anti-Chinese sentiment, there also existed a vocal contingent who continued to advocate on behalf of Chinese labor, or at least on behalf of using Chinese labor for American profit.

It was in California that debates over access to China conflicted with expanding nativist sentiments that wanted to exclude Asian immigration. At the same time the desire for inexpensive labor acted as a magnet for further Chinese immigration and closer ties across the Pacific. The Chinese who had already immigrated to Jamaica and other Caribbean islands in order to work on sugar plantations were described as “laborious,” “trustworthy,” and “more

---

62 Speer, China, 94.
63 Speer, Plea, 18.
65 It was noted by Arif Dirlik that the it was not until after 1856 that Chinese immigrants moved beyond the boundaries in California in any quantifiable numbers as economic opportunities across the West enticed them to move to other states and territories. Chinese on the American Frontier, eds. Arif Dirlik (New York: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 9.
skillful . . . in performance of their work than the blacks” in American newspapers.\textsuperscript{66} It was also noted that in the Caribbean, coolies who worked on plantations there were “employed at the contractually agreed upon] rate of three dollars per month in China, and bound to service for a specified term of years.”\textsuperscript{67} In addition to these more positive accounts of Chinese workers in Eastern newspapers, the \textit{Nashville Union} reprinted an article from a California publication explaining, “One thousand Celestials arrived during the early part of this week, and several ship loads are reported on the way from Hong Kong. At this rate the Chinese will, in a few years, become the predominant race in California.”\textsuperscript{68} Others commented on the fact that many Chinese only lived in the United States temporarily, returning to their homeland after earning enough money. These sources often cited the intention of brief employment as another reason the Chinese were more valuable than other immigrants as their temporary residence did not require the issue of citizenship to be broached.\textsuperscript{69} So whether it was in response to extant anti-Chinese sentiment, or in relation to creating a demand for their labor, the benefits of Chinese workers outside of China was an appealing notion to some. To others, however, opportunities lay in China itself.

\textbf{Marketplace of Opportunity}

It was not only the idea of Chinese workers coming to the United States to ply their trades that Americans at this time saw as a potential beachhead for American interests in China. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the near obsession across all elements of print and personal correspondence showed the depth with which Americans considered the populousness

\textsuperscript{67} “The Sandwich Islands,” \textit{The Nashville Union} (19 Sept. 1854).
\textsuperscript{68} “The California Mail,” \textit{The Nashville Union} (4 May 1854).
\textsuperscript{69} “From China,” \textit{Vermont Watchmen} (22 Apr. 1854), 1.
of China as an opportunity to enter into a massive new marketplace. Francis Bonynge stated, “The elements of national wealth and independence are becoming every day of increasing importance, and as an effort to indicate to the people of the American Union additional sources of national and individual wealth, and . . . new and valuable opportunities for developing the national industry,” needed to be unearthed.\textsuperscript{70} China clearly presented a “valuable opportunity” to Americans willing to attempt to engage with it, especially those who could supply the “redundant population” of China with food, raw materials, and industrial goods.\textsuperscript{71}

This persistent belief in the value of the China market purportedly crossed all sectional barriers, presenting opportunities for all levels of production across the country. Ruschenberger explained:

> The planters of the south, and miners of the West in furnishing raw materials; the manufacturers of the north and east in producing fabrics, and the agriculturists who supply beef, pork, flour, &c., to feed those who pay them by labor in the cotton fields, lead mines, manufactories, or in loading and sailing the ships, which bring something to shipwrights and other mechanics in their construction and repair - in a word, every class of laboring citizens is more or less interested in this commerce.\textsuperscript{72}

Especially owing to his role in opening trade with China beyond the Cohong system, Ambassador Cushing frequently received letters from former constituents in Massachusetts as well as a variety of others concerned with expanding their products to China. A Mr. Sealnook asked about the possibility of using superfluous Chinese labor to manufacture cotton into cloth as a means to bypass British control of that process. He explained to Cushing, “our object is to give this cotton to a manufacturer in the Celestial Empire on the condition that he converts it, or

\textsuperscript{70} Francis Bonynge, \textit{The Future Wealth of America: Being a Glance at the Resources of the United States and the Commercial and Agricultural Advances of Cultivating Tea, Coffee, and Indigo, the Date, Mango, Jack, Leechee, Guava, and Orange Trees, Etc. With a Review of the China Trade} (New York: Published by the Author, 1852), iii

\textsuperscript{71} “China,” \textit{Gallipolis Journal} (2 Jun. 1853), 2.

\textsuperscript{72} W.S.W. Ruschenberger, \textit{Notes and Commentaries During a Voyage to Brazil and China in the Year 1848} (Richmond, VA: Macfarlane & Fergusson, 1854), 153.
endeavors so to do, into muslins, laces, or other fine fabrics.”

Sealnook wondered unknowingly whether the Chinese even had machines capable of cotton cloth production. His plans were based on the supposition of opportunity rather than the reality of Chinese textile capacity. Others inquired whether the Chinese would be interested in items ranging from New England clocks and American pistols, to the feasibility of paper production in China. Sears’ *Pictorial Guide* noted the lack of certain items in Chinese society. He wrote that the Chinese did not make good "locks, knives, or cutlery of any description,” thereby indicating an unmet demand that Americans could supply. In addition to the lack of certain products, others promoted the value of American items over their Chinese counterparts. Ruschenberger explained that one pound of American tobacco was reported to have as much “nicotin” in it as one hundred pounds of the Chinese variety, thereby showing how better-quality American goods could find their way into the exchange. Returning to the issue of increasing cotton exports, Bongynge presaged that raw and processed cotton could find a new marketplace among the estimated 364 million Chinese consumers who currently did not have access to the abundance that the United States did. “Therefore China may be a mart always for the sale of cotton, and perhaps it may not be an improper deviation from the subject to hint at the desirability of considering what might be the result of opening a train trade from the west of America with China.”

---

73 Mr. Sealnook to Caleb Cushing, February 12, 1845, Papers of Caleb Cushing, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

74 Mr. Brewster to Caleb Cushing, January 4, 1845; Mr. Dickinson to Caleb Cushing, June 28, 1843; and Mr. Dickinson to Caleb Cushing, June 30, 1843, Papers of Caleb Cushing, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

75 Sears, *Pictorial*, 296.

76 Ruschenberger, *Notes*, 205.

77 Bonyng, *Future*, 34.
blocks of ice, gingerbread, cheese, and hair tonic, it was hoped the surplus of the United States could find an outlet in the marketplace of China.\textsuperscript{78}

Unlike the suppositions of Chinese labor and the Chinese market providing valuable opportunities for American investment, the significance of Chinese commodities such as tea, silk, and porcelain in the American marketplace was already known to be profitable. But the increase of trade between China and the United States after the First Opium War led many to speculate how Americans could increase profits from the sale of goods from the “great emporium of China” in the United States.\textsuperscript{79} Merchant suggestions circulated around the notion of removing middle-men from the process to extract more profit from the goods transported to the United States. Some, like Bonynge, speculated that continuing to import goods from China en masse was “folly,” because, as he alleged, “we can produce them for less than one-fifth the expense of importing them.”\textsuperscript{80} Indeed, one report from the \textit{Jeffersonian Republican} suggested that a dozen Chinese workers already had relocated to the United States to cultivate tea along the Ohio River near Cincinnati.\textsuperscript{81} While there are no other accounts to verify this attempt at producing tea in the Ohio Valley, this example shows the extent to which Americans were willing to believe positive accounts about China or the extent to which they did not know about China beyond the ports or the biology of the tea plant itself. The value of tea alone was of major importance in considering what profits Americans wanted to make and the means by which they could be achieved. Mitchell noted that at the time of his publication, “The export of tea alone to Great Britain and the United States is about 70 million pounds annually.”\textsuperscript{82} As for the value of

\textsuperscript{78} “Boston Ice Crop,” \textit{New York Tribune} (14 May 1843), 1; “Gingerbread,” \textit{Sunbury American} (4 Nov. 1843), 2; “Cheese,” \textit{Burlington Free Press} (17 Nov. 1843), 1; and “When Canton was Taken,” New York Tribune (26 May 1843), 3. It is clear that much of this speculative fever emerged shortly after the end of the war in the mid-1840s.
\textsuperscript{79} Forbes, \textit{Liners}, 14.
\textsuperscript{80} Bonynge, \textit{Future}, 24.
\textsuperscript{81} “Tea on the Ohio,” \textit{Jeffersonian Republican} (27 Jul. 1854), 2.
\textsuperscript{82} Mitchell, \textit{Geography}, 297.
the China trade, Barnum reported that some seventy American ships were engaged in journeys to the Middle Kingdom, with a capital investment of around $7 million total, not to mention the profits that could be had if the ventures were successful. It is clear that the China trade was a massive undertaking that provided much potential profit. Adding to the idea of ensuring increased American gain, others wanted to decrease the influence that European merchants, particularly the British, had over American economic interests in China. Forbes anticipated that Americans could take advantage of increasingly hostile Chinese attitudes toward the British stemming from their recent conflict and the continued misconduct of opium smugglers associated with Great Britain. He hoped “British policy and British arrogance [could] be forced to give way before the commercial stride of the giant republic [the United States].” The Radical also claimed that the continued relationship between China and the United States was one of “a very lucrative as well as tranquil intercourse” that developed after the war.

The expansion of American influence, the influx of luxury goods, and the decreased influence of middle-men were not the only desirable outcomes these merchants hoped would emerge out of this new access to the Chinese marketplace. The Vermont Watchmen conveyed the story that one American in China was surprised that the sheep in Shanghai were not “queer, odd, [or] quizzical” like other antipodal Chinese things, but instead were “respectable looking, as the most civilized of their European or American brethren.” The Vermont Phoenix also contributed an analysis of the value of Chinese livestock. It reported “The China [hog] fattens easy, but it is too small-limbed for profit.” It went on to propose that Americans cross-breed

---

83 Barnum, Collection, 192.
84 Forbes, Steamers, 7.
85 “Our Relations with China,” The Radical (23 Nov, 1844), 3.
86 “Shanghai Sheep,” Vermont Watchmen (17 Feb. 1853), 1.
Chinese pigs with other types to ensure their value on a global market. So not unlike the attempts to categorize the Chinese people based on their relative status compared to Europeans and Americans – be it in a hierarchy or as an antipode – American attitudes toward Chinese products reflected these assumptions of American superiority, or at least insinuations that Americans could improve the situation.

![Image of Dr. Lin's Celestial Balm advertisement]

**Figure 18:** “Dr. Lin’s Celestial Balm” – Throughout the time period and across the country, ads ran for Dr. Lin’s Celestial Balm. Harnessing the mysterious and exoticized nature of Chinese products, the advertisement purported that the balm treated any number of ailments.

Willing to overlook difficulties in the exchange for economic benefit, many merchants discounted the problems involved in trading in China in terms of Chinese merchant reluctance and geographic and political difficulties. In attempting to measure the potential benefits of increasing cotton exports to the Chinese, American merchants wanted to know the properties of domestic “Nankin cotton plant” production. They alleged that Chinese traders purposefully kept the information a secret from foreign interests as a way to maintain their own financial

---

security. Likewise, despite being known as a dangerous region because of piracy and the ferocity of the locals who were mostly uncontrolled by the central government at this time, merchants presented Formosa [Taiwan] “a place of considerable trade for both Europeans and Americans, as it is now indeed with the Chinese of the neighboring provinces of Fo-Kien [Fujian] and Che-Kiang [Zhejiang] on the mainland” because of its location relative to Japan and the Philippines, and because of the suggested mineral resource and coal wealth that could be found there.\(^90\)

These economic entrepreneurs hoped that over time a cyclical and mutually symbiotic trade relationship would develop between China and the United States. As his primary interest in China was economic, Cunningham wrote that “it is apparent that a close connection is most desirable for us, while it would be equally beneficial to her.”\(^91\) The establishment of diplomatic relations was viewed to be beneficial beyond the merchant class as well. A representative of the American Board of Commissions, a major missionary organization, wrote to Caleb Cushing that they were “deeply concerned in all that relates to the maintenance of friendly relations with the Chinese government or people, & to the security of American residents & American interests.”\(^92\) And Cushing later restated the value of diplomatic relations to a wide swath of American interests when he wrote to the U.S. legation, “the good understanding which already exists between the two governments, and, if ratified, prove beneficial to the commerce & interests of the citizens & subjects of both countries.”\(^93\) *The Radical* succinctly stated that sending consular

---

\(^{90}\) W. Hastings Macaulay, *Kathay: A Cruise in the China Seas* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Co., 1852), 148. Emma Teng writes convincingly about the problems that the Qing dynasty had throughout its history in approaching and maintaining control of the people and the geography of Taiwan, and it is clear that this lack of imperial oversight was noticed by Americans at this time. Emma Teng, *Taiwan’s Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

\(^{91}\) Cunningham, *Commercial*, 1.


\(^{93}\) Cushing to U.S. Legation in China, 44/7/4, Ibid.
missions to China to introduce them to American products “will most likely be acceptable to that ancient and populous empire, and best exemplify the condition of improvements of this country, with the view of obtaining valuable returns.” While there were a variety of interests represented by the diplomatic engagement between Cushing and imperial representatives, this implication also gives rise to the fact that Americans harnessed the opportunism of the China trade in the expectation of changing not only that kingdom and its subjects but the United States as well.

The China Trade Begins at Home

Even with the rise of accounts in the press highlighting the vast potential that lay in store for industrious Americans, the difficulty of actually engaging in the trade itself, regardless of ambition or treaty negotiations, did not go unnoticed. Newspaper reports on China frequently cited the dangers and difficulties of trading in the China market, be they weather disturbances, competition with Europeans, cultural differences, or even run-ins with pirates and bandits in the China Sea. Nevertheless, debates over the China trade spurred many to plan vast infrastructure projects that would enable the industrial centers of New England, agricultural producers in the South and Midwest, and eventually centers of natural resources in the west to tap into these potential markets through proposed roads, railroads, and steamship lines in order to facilitate trade and make it safer for merchants.

In his analysis of the myth of the China trade, Huang Kailai writes that the influence of business on the Sino-American relationship was generally limited until after 1844, noting a marked increase in calls for continental expansionism – promoting the development for plans for

---

rail, steam, and canal systems across the United States – that persisted in their use of China as a logical terminus for trade development that allegedly guaranteed American success. The first major hurdle many of these transit options faced was the issue of getting across or around the continent itself. The most frequent suggestion was to use an overland route to tie Eastern production with ports on the Pacific coast. One congressman from New York promoted a plan for the government to designate funding for surveyors to create a railroad that stretched from Lake Michigan (thereby tying it into the maritime trade system of the Great Lakes to New York) through a sixty mile wide land grant that stretched some twenty-one hundred miles to the Pacific, and with sea routes stretching to the Sandwich Islands to a terminus at Amoy, China. Other accounts touted a transcontinental rail system that would “make a route . . . from the Pacific to the Atlantic – From Canton to Liverpool – from China to Europe,” with the United States at its center. One proposal for a steam line to connect Australia, the United States, Japan, and China even predicted that, “The future . . . of the Pacific must form one of the most brilliant, instructive, and remarkable chapters in the history of human civilization.”

The inherent point of agreement within this conceptualization of easy access to China via rail lines and steam ships was the concern that American territorial access was paramount to the success of mercantile endeavors in East Asia. The fact that the interior of the territory between the Missouri River and California remained a nebulously controlled region of conflicting interests made the contention of creating transcontinental routes more perplexing. Speer explained to his readers that “five different lines have been surveyed, and a national railroad virtually determined upon, which shall, throughout its whole length in republican territory, and in

---

95 Kailai, “Myth or Reality”, 32.
96 “Oregon and China,” The Colombia Democrat (8 Mar. 1845).
a straight line, and the shortest, connect the great commercial interests of the two oceans.” He assumed this would be done with eastern termini at St. Louis or New Orleans, with access to the Gulf of Mexico and hence onto the Atlantic trade networks. While the idea of easy movement to the Pacific coast maintained general approval and positive sentiment, Peyton explained that regional concerns and access would likely dictate where a route would begin and end. Unlike Speer, he asserted that southern routes from St. Louis or New Orleans would be untenable because of the need to cross the more arid regions of the Southwest and those contested by Great Britain in Canada, Mexico, and various Native American groups, whereas a northern route from Chicago across the agricultural zones of the plains and the mining regions of the Rockies to the Pacific Northwest would result in a “tide of wealth” rushing from the interior to the coasts. And while some like the Rev. Walter Colton indicated that tapping into the China trade was “regarded as a necessity to be superseded as soon as practicable, by a railroad directly across the continent, within our own jurisdiction to ensure speed and for the political necessity of avoiding foreign powers,” John Frost noted that at that time the most efficient and most used method of transportation from the Atlantic coast of the United States to its Pacific holdings remained a proposed overland route through Panama.

Yet, these debates over the methodology of transport to and from China belie the fact that political and territorial boundaries between the United States and the Pacific Ocean were in a

constant state of flux during this period. The emergence and conclusion of hostilities with Mexico, California’s ascension to statehood, Anglo-American rapprochement over the issue of the boundaries of the Oregon Territory, and the gradual movement of pro-annexationist groups in the Hawaiian Kingdom contributed to discussions of not only engaging in, but dominating, international trade with China. These territorial differences also influenced the proliferation of suggestions as to how to best capitalize on the China trade as American access continued to fluctuate. By maximizing port access on the Pacific coast and establishing commercial steam transportation and rail distribution systems through these new possessions, some news accounts anticipated that the construction of a hypothetical rail route “will not only bring Western America into more intimate and kindly relations with both shores of the Atlantic, but that San Francisco and New York will thereby become stations on the quickest route from both Australia and China to England and France.”

Ruschenberger added, “but Boston and Canton will be still more closely approximated in point of time, when a railroad connects the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of the United States and a system of steam navigation is established across the Pacific, between California and China,” not only for trade but also to convey market information from Asia faster and more efficiently. Thus, the idea of the expansion of American power to China purposefully aided in incorporating more territory into the national polity and entailed expanding economic power well beyond. The potential value of California in tying the United States into the China trade had a much more nuanced relationship with China and the Chinese. It remained key in the machinations of many for controlling the China trade as, “From its position, it must command the rich commerce of China, of Asia, of the Islands of the Pacific, of Western

---

103 Ruschenberger, *Notes*, 151.
Mexico, of Central America, of the South American States, and of the Russian possessions bordering on the ocean."^{104}

Although its position on the coast and the spontaneous influx of outsiders during the Gold Rush increased its value to national interests, California was not the only territorial concern on the Pacific coast during the intra-Opium War period, as questions of the extent to which the United States controlled the Oregon Territory dominated many political concerns in the news media of the day. As Speer put it, “It is not California alone but the countries and people lying along the whole American coast from Alaska to Chili [sic] that are interested in the establishment of a regular and reliable commerce with Asia.”^{105} The issue of obtaining a favorable position in the Oregon Territory in particular in the face of British interests in the North Pacific went well beyond the chants of “Fifty-four Forty or Fight!” Frequently in news reports on the Oregon issue reporters and commentators presented arguments regarding the many benefits that control and incorporation of this region could provide, using access to China as one of their primary justifying factors for the negotiation process. As the treaties with China were being signed, one commentator noted that British influence in China would increase Britain’s influence across the Pacific and into Oregon, resulting in diplomatic and military friction “in regard to the title [sic] of our Government to the territory in question.”^{106} In addition to the natural harbors in California, the physical geography of the Oregon Territories was viewed as a magnetic pull for the China trade to North America. Many hoped that the establishment of a rail line or a national road could connect the Colombia River, which stretched far into the Rockies, with the Missouri or Mississippi Rivers, and ensure a vast increase in trade and efficiency

---

^{104} “President’s Message,” *Saturday Morning Visitor* (23 Dec. 1848).


between the Northeast and the Far East. The *Jeffersonian Republican* even jibed that in the eagerness of controlling Oregon the United States may have even ended up annexing China in a fervor of expansion.

John Peyton perhaps best summarized the competitive spirit with which many Americans viewed territorial expansion and control on the Pacific coast for the purpose of engaging in the China trade when he noted, “Every consideration of private interest, and of public prosperity, demands that we should exert our utmost efforts in this important contest.” He added that the benefit that could be had as a nation, and not just on a regional basis,

leaves the question of a route for the Pacific railway open, to be determined not so much by sectional considerations as by those of a general nature, affecting the interest of the whole country. Viewing it as a national high way, to be built for the most part by the common funds of the Union, for the common good, and as not intended to bolster up the wanting fortunes of any city or State, there can be very little doubt but that it will find its way to the great island seas of the north-west.

In addition to the value of enticing trade, Sears highlighted the fact that adopting California as a state into the Union would bring “the United States many thousands of miles nearer to the Chinese territory – and in point of facility of intercourse, placing this country in closer proximity to China, than any European nation.” Forbes added his opinion that the combined territorial and economic expansion to the Pacific “will furnish a ready and efficient means of national defense for our Pacific seaboard” and would result in closer and more intimate connections between the East and West coasts. And if the United States did not make the attempt to connect to the region, Colton asserted, “Such a dereliction of duty, so apparent, would ere long,

---

110 Ibid., 8.
as a natural if not necessary consequence, create an independent nation on the Pacific.” Or as Bongyne phrased it, “Great cities and ports must be raised on the West coasts to trade with China, with 500 [million] people, to supply them with grain, timber, &c., and to receive from them such articles as America requires and cannot produce as cheaply.” So it is clear that the impulses toward expansion and manifest destiny, and of economic and foreign policy demands, found easy outlet in the concerns over the relationship between the United States and China.

Right of entry and influence in Hawaii, or the Sandwich Islands as they were alternately called, played a unique role in the debate over accessing the China trade. While full incorporation of the island chain into the American territorial system was rarely mentioned at this time, their proposed annexation as part of a valuable network of waypoints across the Pacific Ocean was of the utmost importance. One paper cautioned that, “before we pluck the Flowery Empire [China] to add to our proposed gigantic nosegay of nations, we have no small job to gather up the innumerable islands of the Pacific, those verdant oases in the great wilderness of waters that separates the Asiatic Continent from ours.” Hawaii above all other Pacific Island chains was valuable as the major hub of Pacific trade going to and from China. One article explained that the Sandwich Islands, “Have been termed the ‘Half-Way House,’ on the ‘Great Crossings of the Pacific.’ Vessels bound from San Francisco to China or Australia, stop at these Islands or pass within sight of them on their outward and return voyages.” And for those concerned about the prospect of the United States annexing such far away territory, one report noted, “The American is not the only government now in for annexation,” in that other imperial powers, including the Russians in Northern China, were jostling for influence across the Pacific.

113 Colton, California, 456.

116
and in Asia, and it was in the best interest of the United States to obtain as much advantage as possible. These American interests saw a great deal of potential in using the Hawaiian islands as a stepping stone to the larger fortune of the China market.

From another quarter, too, our Pacific commerce will be largely augmented [by] the Sandwich Islands. Already the commerce of these Islands has attracted the attention of our government, and negotiations have been opened for a special reciprocity treaty. These islands have become distinguished for their progress in manufactures and commerce . . . When the trade and commerce of these numerous Pacific and Indian Islands, and of the vast regions of the Chinese Empire, shall be directed to our country, we will become the storehouse as well as the highway of nations, and enjoy an opulence and power unrivalled by anything the world has ever known.

So while the annexation of Hawaii did not occur at this time, its potential value to the United States in engaging the China trade did not go unnoticed. The purported value of the island chain was so high that the Nashville Union asserted that the Monroe Doctrine should be extended to China and the Sandwich Islands in an effort to curb European imperialism and to bolster American interests across the Pacific. So while the Hawaiian Islands, like transcontinental railroads, steamship routes, and control of the west coast of the continent, were presented as a potential avenue for access, what is certain is that the mere idea of economic opportunity in China was all the justification that was necessary for Americans to assume a posture of territorial expansion to fill those needs. The concept of creating a reciprocal relationship with China assumed mutual desire for the other’s goods and the means to engage in the exchange, but Americans also saw the opportunity in influencing Chinese society as a means to “improve” perceived problems in China – and in so doing create a Chinese need for American influence.

Finding Opportunity for the Chinese

118 Peyton, Suggestions, 22
For all of the debates about the value of Chinese workers in the United States or the means by which Americans could take better control over their trade with China, it was not just the domestic impact for which Americans mobilized the rhetoric of opportunity. In fact, the notion that Americans could serve as a force for good in China, helping to shake it from its “stagnation” or move it up the hierarchy of civilization, was a common motivation. Whether they emphasized the aspects of Chinese society that still worked, or that were similar to Western culture, or explained areas where Americans could exert an increasing level of influence, these writers saw the exploration and exploitation of Chinese society as a means to benefit both their interests and the interests of the Chinese. Or, at the very least, improve them in ways in which Americans believed the Chinese should have an interest.

Even though many of the “mysteries” of China were blamed on the failures of Chinese government and society, numerous Americans described aspects of these realms in terms of net-benefit not only to Chinese culture but to their relationship with the United States. In essence, whether it was noting examples of governmental efficiency, touting the positive impact of individuals in Chinese society, or arguing that certain regions of China were more amenable to foreign interaction, Americans claimed that there was evidence that Americans could work with the Chinese for their own interests. Likewise, they framed missionary efforts at conversion, descriptions of the similarities between Chinese religions and different sects of Christianity, and the trope of the malleability and fragility of Chinese women as potential avenues for those interests.

The impressive duration not only of the Qing Dynasty but of the dynastic system in general drew many compliments from writers regarding the durability of the Chinese government. It was the fact that there had been so many dynasties that these Americans cited as
important precedent for contemporary rulers in China to maintain control of their empire. Sears explained “there have been ample proofs in Chinese history, which serve as examples to warn emperors to tread in the steps of their great predecessors who retained their authority and secured tranquility and prosperity of their subjects by their indefatigable watchfulness.” The People of China reflected this sentiment of “watchfulness” when it described the limitations of the imperial family. It noted that Chinese law circumscribed the abilities of all members of the extended imperial family in their ability to wield power, as the emperors of China were “taught by the experience of former ages” to make sure that “[imperial family members were] carefully excluded from all authority, and even from all the opportunities of acquiring power” so as to not pose a challenge to the emperor himself. Likewise, it was in part because of the sense of the unchangeableness of Chinese society, stagnant or otherwise, that Americans saw as a symbol of stability. When debating whether or not the United States should back the efforts of the Taiping in overthrowing the Qing government for hopes of a more favorable relationship between the United States and China, Americans were torn. Cunningham explained that compared to the Taiping, the “Imperial Government, to whom we are already bound by solemn treaty . . . has maintained its faith with us throughout the ten years which have expired since it was first pledged.” He continued on to explain that, “Its vitality and strength are much greater than would appear from the recent course of events and from representations made from China, by residents interested in the success of the rebellion.” Therefore, the historical stability of the Qing was viewed to be of great consideration when the Taiping uprising was concerned.

120 Sears, Pictorial, 232.
121 American Sunday-School Union, People of China, 42.
122 Cunningham, Commercial, 6.
These statements that implied Chinese strength in the face of opposition left many to present arguments of how the government of China governed with stability in the face of opposition throughout the test of time. *The People of China* presented the strength of the emperor as the true core of Chinese achievement. “Under his fostering care, agriculture, trade and commerce flourish, and the people are left to possess their full share of the results of their labour. The surest proof of this is the characteristic cheerfulness with which the Chinese proceed to their daily toil.”¹²³ But Sears presented a divergent argument to this assertion. Instead of good governance by imperial representatives, he claimed that it was the legal system itself that benefited the Chinese people most, in spite of those in charge. “Nothing can be more beautiful,” he wrote, “than the moral and civil code of laws in China, or more ingenious than their system of checks in the administration of justice; but unfortunately, like all human institutions and devices, they fail most glaringly in practice, principally owing to the non-observance of those laws and maxims by the persons who are selected to administer and expound them.”¹²⁴ The *New York Tribune* published an article on “Attorneys in China,” with a similar sentiment, claiming the system helped shield China from the vices of those in charge. The paper noted that lawyers were prohibited as a profession in China by law, which freed the nation of the “Villainous and perverse vagabonds” within the legal profession.¹²⁵ Likewise, the *Boon’s Lick Times* reported that the Chinese themselves were well protected by a trustworthy law enforcement system, noting that in China “police are very efficient, and rogues seldom escape punishment” despite the “daring” of burglars to avoid apprehension and hiding knives on their bodies as weaponry.¹²⁶ Whether it was because of the strength of the imperial system, or the legal and judicial system

¹²⁶ “China,” *Boon’s Lick Times* (22 Nov. 1845), 2.
that underpinned Chinese society as a whole, this perspective made clear that China was a strong state capable of enforcing the rule of law, and thereby could enforce the laws that bound it to the United States.

Working within this notion of the durability of Chinese society, and the strength of its institutions, Americans presented various aspects of Chinese civilization as beneficial not only in general in terms of good governance and moral well-being, but also in terms of being similar to American culture, or in being adaptable to the instruction of “correct” civilization. Owing to the presentation of Confucianism as a set of moralistic instructions rather than an official religion, many observers wrote positive reactions to the influence that it had on the Chinese people. Barnum explained, “Some of the moral maxims and advice contained in the works of Koong-foo-tsze [Confucius], are most excellent.”127 Similarly, Macaulay wrote that Confucianism had “excellent moral codes,” especially, as he observed, in the notions of filial piety and adherence to political and familial obedience.128 In an extensive article outlining the life of Confucius, the Anti-Slavery Bugle enumerated connections between Confucianism and Christianity, most prominently that “He [Confucius] taught reverence to the one Supreme Being; but instituted no form of religious ceremonies or worship.”129 As such, the article asserted, Confucian learning, influencing Chinese moral decency along with its lack of religious rituals, created a valuable opening for American, and Christian, influence in China. If the ritual-less beliefs of Confucianism could produce positive moral behavior, these writers were certain that Christian rituals and traditions could fill the void, with the added benefit of influencing Chinese attitudes toward Christianity and other American interests in the region.

127 Barnum, Collection, 45.
128 Macaulay, Kathay, 78.
Religion and philosophy were not the only factors that these Americans cited as a reason for good moral behavior in China. Social expectations, namely issues surrounding familial connections and education, were highly regarded in the sources describing Chinese culture. “Gravity, love of country, family affection to a clannish extent, reverence to old age, an imperturbable coolness, frugality,” Brownell explained, “are prominent features in their disposition and deportment.” Much of these beneficial Chinese attributes were traced to the level of importance imparted upon education among the Chinese populace. While explaining that the average Chinese person owned many books, and that the nine classes of mandarin officials emphasized scholarly mastery, Mitchell noted “Learning is highly esteemed by the Chinese.” Similarly, Sears connected the importance of family and the reverence of education in the overall success of Chinese thinkers. He informed his readers that education was the great equalizer in Chinese society as it was the access to avenues of power through the mandarin and official examination systems. “The absence of hereditary rank, and even of any class possessing great riches, leaves the field entirely open to this species of distinction.” In addition, the durability of the Chinese educational system, and its attachment to the strong imperial system, led *The People of China* to praise “their extraordinary fondness for letters, and the general prevalence of literary habits among the middling and higher orders, and the very honorable preeminence which, from the most remote period, has been universally conceded to that class which is exclusively devoted to literary pursuits.” The ability of Chinese men of any social class to achieve an improvement in social and governmental rank through education was an aspect of Chinese culture that Americans highlighted, and in doing so contributed to the notion

130 Brownell, *People’s*, 277.
that specific groups, or even regions of Chinese people, could be trusted as potential allies to
American interests more so than others.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chinese_school.png}
\caption{“Chinese School” – The notion of education and the ability of Chinese men to move up social and governmental strata through merit rather than birth was an aspect of Chinese society of which Americans approved.\textsuperscript{134}}
\end{figure}

Whether or not these writers believed that Chinese society as a whole held any value for American interests, a persistent theme existed that made specific note as to the regional variation within the Chinese empire. Geographic location, proximity to the imperial center, or other less tangible reasons all contributed to American realizations that China’s size and substantial population produced regional variation that they believed was beneficial to future Sino-American relations. If one area was less than hospitable to foreign concerns or to their presence in general,

\textsuperscript{134} Sears, \textit{Pictorial}, 245.
many other regions, including the unexplored interior regions, were presented as being more amenable to those interests. As the center from which the Qing maintained all foreign trade before the First Opium War, Canton was often presented as the place with which Americans actively compared different regions of China. While traveling northward during his *Rambles*, Ball commented, “I was surprised to see how much better disposed towards foreigners the Chinese people here appear to be than those in Canton.”\(^{135}\) Envoy Humphrey Marshall, in a message to the U.S. State Department, expressed frustration that the Cantonese were the “most energetic, haughty, and worst of all the Chinese” in relation to their constant harassment of foreigners in and around the city.\(^{136}\) This sentiment of Northerners being more hospitable to the presence of foreigners was a common trend, especially in the allegations of mistreatment against foreigners and their interests, but some went further in insinuating that there were physical and cultural differences at play that drove these suspicions. “Every foreigner who has visited this place [Shanghai],” explained William Lowrie, “gives the inhabitants a much better character than those of Canton. They are rather taller, of a more ruddy complexion, and much more civil and well-disposed than their southern countrymen. In passing through the streets one is rarely insulted, and the opprobrious epithets so common in Canton and Macao are scarcely ever heard here.”\(^{137}\)

With the flaws of Canton and its inhabitants made clear by their troubled relationship with outsiders, merchants, missionaries, diplomats, and travelers extolled the virtues of other cities and regions as being beneficial not only for American interests but in some instances for the Americans themselves. Explaining that the tropical climate of Canton, and of Southern

\(^{135}\) Ball, *Rambles*, 228.
\(^{136}\) Humphrey Marshall to State Dept. ADPP Vol. 4, 53/5/26, 162.
China more generally, was “disagreeable” to the health of foreigners – indeed reports of death and illnesses of Americans living in China were a frequent occurrence – a notion emerged that the new treaty ports would allow Americans to escape the dangerous climate. Lowrie reported that he thought “the climate of the ports of Ningpo [Ningbo] and Shanghae [Shanghai] will be found most suitable for persons from the United States. Persons disposed to bilious complaints and dyspeptics will suffer a good deal in the Canton and Fuhkeen [Fujian] provinces.”\(^\text{138}\) The health of the Chinese people was also said to have benefited from the differences in climate. Macaulay observed that while southern China was cleaner in general than the north, Shanghai Children were, “the fattest little rascals I have ever seen,” compared to underfed southerners.\(^\text{139}\)

While on his voyage, Preble also noted the size of northern children in relation to descriptions of geographic difference and overall health. He posited, “These Northern Chinese are fairer than their relation of the south and I think more akin to the Japanese & saw some very portly children today.”\(^\text{140}\) Thus, in presenting the north of China as providing a healthier environment not only for Americans, but for the Chinese as well, the complaints about living in the south could be solved twofold. Americans could move away from the perceived cause of much of their illness, and they could live and work amongst peoples seen as less hostile toward American interests.

Although none of these travelers either directly stated or even implied that deep physical differences existed between the Cantonese and other Chinese, they did frequently infer that cultural distinctions were plentiful. In serving to continue to highlight the new opportunities manifested through the treaty port system, many Americans made specific efforts to emphasize the quality of the Chinese people living beyond Canton. Sears explained that the inhabitants of

\(^\text{138}\) Lowrie, Memoirs, 248.
\(^\text{139}\) Macaulay, Kathay, 134.
Hangzhou were known to be “ingenious, and their character for politeness of manners and ready wit is not surpassed by those of any other part of the empire.”\textsuperscript{141} Similarly praiseworthy were the people living in Fujian province, whom Rev. Abeel described as a “frank, lively, unsuspicious, hospitable race.”\textsuperscript{142} Compared to the Cantonese in the South, oftentimes owing to the lack of American access to the capital, Americans derided the inhabitants of Pekin [Beijing] for their inhospitality. “The moral character of the Chinese peasantry near Pekin is represented by travelers in a very unfavorable light: they are idle, and, as a natural consequence, dissipated.” Despite these reservations regarding the inhabitants in the capital, \textit{The People of China} offered an alternative to dealing with the residents of Pekin, noting “In the heart of the country . . . they appear to be a comparatively artless race.”\textsuperscript{143} Whether American interest arose because of perceived benefits that could be made in connecting with the “right” kind of Chinese, or the belief that their lives would be physically improved through moving, or simply the fact that these new groups were not Cantonese and therefore did not shoulder the burden of problematic past relations, Americans in general emphasized the opportunity that increased geographic access played in the hopes of improved Sino-American relations.

If the allegations that Americans could find consolation in regional variations among the Chinese were not sufficient enough, those who lived in and traveled to China were certain to indicate the value not only of individual Chinese people who were amenable to American desires but those who aided in the facilitation of those interests. As such, the rhetoric of the “good” Chinese was key in mobilizing the notion that opportunities abounded in China and that there were people there willing to engage in fulfilling those goals. Oftentimes the relationship

\textsuperscript{141} Sears, \textit{Pictorial}, 184.
\textsuperscript{142} Williamson, \textit{Abeel}, 194.
\textsuperscript{143} American Sunday-School Union, \textit{People of China}, 137.
between Americans and Chinese at the treaty ports hinged on the relationship between a few key officials who oversaw foreign exchanges. In a cable to the secretary of state, Peter Parker made note that a new viceroy dispatched to Canton expressed “civility” toward foreigners, which th explained was an unusual sentiment held by those in the viceroy’s position.144 Similarly, Abeel was greatly impressed by a new prefect at Amoy and his bearing toward missionaries in that city. “He is a fine-looking man, of courtly manners, and expresses the greatest kindness of feeling,” when compared to the previous official who Americans perceived as being hostile to their economic and religious ambitions.145 Even Commissioner Lin, the man put in charge of ending the opium trade in Canton, and whose destruction of foreign opium was a predication of the war with the British that followed, while called “haughty and abrupt” still managed to be perceived as, by and large, “good natured” when it came to American access to China.”146 Just as access and regional variation played key roles in the ways Americans presented chances for advancement in China, so too were the responses to those officials believed to hold American interests at heart.

Yet, even if Americans did not find any rhetorical traction with their arguments about regional opportunities and the emergence of officials prone to support foreign influence, the Chinese that worked for and with Americans in a variety of professions were sure signs that there were those willing to make the desired connections. Marshall, for example, held his comprador in high esteem, claiming “I thought him then a great philosopher,” and he praised his interpreter and translator as “very industrious, sober, and moral” in his ability to carry out the duties necessary to aid American diplomatic aims.147 Likewise, as the tea trade was the primary focus

144 Peter Parker to William Marcy, 56/7/26, ADPP 11, 258.
145 Williamson, Abeel, 239.
146 Sears, Pictorial, 145.
147 Humphrey Marshall to State Department, 53/5/26, ADPP 4, 160.
of perceived value in the China trade, Tiffany explained that in his dealings with tea merchants, as a class they maintained a high level of “intelligence, honesty, and liberality,” and even the stevedores who transferred the tea to foreign ships were estimated to be “smart, active men.”

This expectation that the Chinese merchant class would be beneficial to the impulses of American consumer needs even extended to the then defunct Cohong system. In his *Remarks* on the China trade, Forbes described the former head of the Cohong system, Houqua, as having “a most comprehensive mind,” with “the qualities of an enterprising merchant and a sagacious politician.” Playing off of the notions that the Chinese were born merchants capable of making great fortunes through shrewd business acumen, he continued on to describe the rest of the class of Cohong merchants as being distinct from their less trustworthy Cantonese brethren to become “as respectable a set of men as are commonly found in other parts of the world.”

The connections between individual Americans and individual Chinese were presented as a way of establishing mutual benefit in terms of adhering to ideas of American opportunism in China and influencing the Chinese who were already amenable to American aims and turning them into evangelists for American ideas, while at the same time improving them in the process.

**Malleability and the Notion of American Influence in China**

Despite the aforementioned praise that Americans offered about the value of Chinese culture and civilization, at least on the individual level, Americans remained set on molding the Chinese in a civilizational model more akin to their own cultural expectations, and in the process arousing the Chinese from their stagnant state. On this sentiment, Reverend Lowrie exclaimed, “change will happen in China . . . [t]he new influences that must now be brought to bear upon

---

them; the new and strange sentiments that must now disturb the long-settled train of their thoughts; the various impressions of foreign men and foreign things, that must now circulate through the land, slowly, perhaps, but certainly, cannot but excite thought.”\(^{150}\) And while he did not challenge the notion of Americans possessing “a real superiority in genuine civilization, in every species of power, in the truest refinement of human nature, and in the knowledge of a Heaven-descended charity and hope of salvation,” Speer cautioned his readers to “put off the temper of meanness, and spite, and selfishness, and bigotry” with the aim of influencing the Chinese.\(^{151}\) *The People of China* went as far as to assert that the Opium War was good for foreign influence over the Chinese people when it declared to its readers “recent successes of the English open a wide door of hope for the true philanthropist.”\(^{152}\)

This idea of the “true philanthropist” fed into the dual understanding that Chinese culture could be morally beneficial to American interests while simultaneously framing the Chinese as in need of outside intervention to ameliorate perceived problems. For example, *The People of China* praised the Chinese as being “diligent and laborious agriculturalists” but quickly added the caveat that “the science of good husbandry is unknown among them.” Emphasizing the trope that the Chinese were unwilling and unable to forsake ancient traditions, the text continued on to conclude that “there is no spirit of improvement. The very instruments they use are still those of primitive simplicity,” and foreign influence would likely result in the ability of the Chinese to “produce more abundant crops” through new techniques.\(^{153}\)

Nevertheless, it was not only the notion that Americans and other foreigners could simply enter China and wield technology and techniques that the Chinese could then convert into useful

---

\(^{150}\) Lowrie, *Memoirs*, 201.
\(^{151}\) Speer, *Plea*, 4.
\(^{153}\) Ibid., 127.
results. American writers made clear that in order for the full benefits of this influence to reach
the vast population of China, the Chinese needed to be prepared for such instruction. From
hygiene to literature, there were not many areas of Chinese culture and society that could not be
transformed for the better. Bridgman wrote that “Among the first principles to be inculcated, by
the missionary among the Chinese, is cleanliness” and from that point the Chinese could be
better instructed.\(^{154}\) Another means by which the Chinese could be improved in terms of
amenability to foreign instruction was their language, which as mentioned above proved difficult
for Americans hoping to engage with the Chinese on a number of fronts. Although missionaries
were at the vanguard of learning different dialects and disseminating the information within their
ranks and to the diplomatic corps as translators, Fitch Taylor hoped a change in the Chinese
language would serve to reduce the need for such extensive study. He posited that, “the
language of the celestial empire will one day, and not a great time distant, be expressed in an
alphabetical character corresponding to the written languages of the west.”\(^{155}\) Additionally, the
New York Tribune supposed that the Chinese would likely soon adapt their writing system to
utilize movable type printing in the methods used by European and American publishers.\(^{156}\)
With the Chinese washing and writing more like foreigners, the question as to which areas of
Chinese culture, society, and government Americans could most effectively influence was a
topic of much debate, and as such it gives insight into what areas these Americans viewed as

\(^{154}\) Bridgman, Daughters, 91.
understanding of Chinese print technology, noting that movable type printing did exist in China, but that traditional
carved plates made for a much more efficient process printing non-alphabetic script and that they also facilitated the
creation of many more reproductions of documents for a society that had a significantly higher literacy rate than
those of Europe. Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press,
2004).
flawed, but also in how Americans viewed themselves as being capable enough to resolve the flaws.

Without question, the notion that Americans could influence Chinese religiosity, namely in their conversion to Christianity, was of paramount relevance not only to missionaries but to diplomats, merchants, and general observers as well. Abbot explained that a quick and effective translation of the bible into written Chinese would serve to be the most effective means of spreading the “true religion to the Chinese empire.” 157 In writing to the American Board of Commissioners, Rev. Anderson emphasized China’s need for a substantive contingent of missionaries. He wrote, “Missionaries will learn the capabilities of the language for conveying religious truth, and their younger brethren will profit by their knowledge. The heathen will become enlightened” and would then serve as missionaries in their own right, prosthelytizing the inner reaches of China where foreigners were not permitted. 158 In a letter written to one Rev. Daly, Anderson reiterated his main challenge at influencing the Chinese as the problem of getting missionaries to travel to China and learn the language. He concluded that once there, the missionaries would gain satisfaction in the hard work and resultant conversions. “Let your missionaries be multiplied to any number and work of the most delightful kind - giving constant employment - will urge itself upon them, long before their tongues are loosed to perform it.” 159 This connection between American interest, missionary zeal, and its effectiveness at converting the Chinese did not go unnoticed. Before becoming consul general for the United States, the medical missionary Peter Parker received an excited letter from a teacher. Mr. Woody explained to Parker that the rise of knowledge about the Chinese, including a visit by a Chinese citizen,

---

158 Anderson to Abeel, 46/2/2, 8, ABC Reel 231.
159 Anderson to Daly, 46/2/3, 11, ABC Reel 231.
resulted in the emergence among his students of a desire to spread Christianity in China. “The pupils of my school have been very much interested in a Native of China who has spent some time in our city [Philadelphia]. It occurred to me that I might make his visit of some avail in awakening a missionary spirit among my young pupils.” He concluded that it was in his interest to utilize the knowledge of these emerging “curiosities” of Chinese society as a means to intensify American religious intent in China.160

Clearly the missionary endeavor was not only framed in terms of converting innumerable Chinese souls to Christianity. It was also framed in a manner that emphasized the capability of Americans to engage in influential missionary activity, thereby creating an opportunity to improve both Chinese and American alike through religious service. Or, as the American Sunday-School Union put it:

But when the eyes of Christians turn to China, their minds are filled with higher and better thoughts than those which govern the policy of the world. They see there a large proportion of the whole population of the earth sunk in the degradation and folly of heathenism; and they watch, with deep interest, all the events of providence that seem to open the way for their salvation. They seize every opportunity to introduce the blessings of civil and religious liberty among those who are led captive by Satan at his will.161

Taylor also emphasized the size of the Chinese empire in terms of opportunities for conversion and social influence. He emphasized the “vast work” in store for missionaries to extend Christian and American morals to the Chinese – those under Qing and Taiping control alike – with the “expectations of a brighter day in the deep shades that seem to hang thickly over the onward prospect of three hundred and sixty millions of people.”162 Likewise, the new treaty ports opened to American missionary endeavors through the Treaty of Wangxia proved to be

160 Mr. Woody to Peter Parker, 47/2/22, Peter Parker Papers, Harvey Cushing/John Hay Whitney Medical Library, Yale University, New Haven, Ct.
161 American Sunday-School Union, People of China, 5.
162 Fitch, Voyage Vol. 2, 117.
desirable stepping-stones for their aims. The island of Gulangyu off of the city of Amoy [Xiamen] in the south became a major point of departure for American missionaries, unhappy with the treatment of foreigners further south in Canton or unwilling to play second-fiddle to the British missionaries headquartered in Hong Kong. Anderson wrote to the American Board of Commissioners that Amoy was the perfect location, as “within a circumference of a two or three hours reach hundreds of pleasant & populous villages might be visited. What a sphere for itinerancy labors!”163 And while advocating a rapid expansion of missionary presence in all five treaty ports, Anderson did not want to abandon Canton entirely. Canton and its surrounding areas were presented as valuable not because of their amenability to missionary ideas, but because its “population is vast, a million residents & tens of thousands annually coming & going. Here a hundred missionaries might labor successfully all their lives.”164

Associated with the idea of extending missionary influence deeper through these labors was the concept that the presence of American missionaries would result in an expansion of converts as well as the improvement of Chinese civilization. In fact, Christianizing and civilizing were promoted as two sides of the same endeavor. While discussing the commercial advantage Americans enjoyed in China, Cunningham relayed the information that American missionaries “[desired] earnestly to give [the Chinese] the blessings of civilization and Christianity.”165 Also emphasizing the idea that Americans brought “blessings” to the Chinese in these two connected arenas, Gammell wrote that the aim of missionary work was to spread “the blessings of Christian civilization into the most ancient empire of the world.”166 And as much as they presented Christianity as conveying civilization, the reverse was true as well. In a report

163 Anderson to Unknown, 45/7/9, 3, ABC Reel 231.
164 Anderson to Bridgman, 46/1/5, 6, ABC Reel 231.
165 Cunningham, Commercial, 2.
166 Gammell, Missions, 205.
from the “Geographical Society,” the New York Tribune reported that the establishment of the civilizing events of “rapid communication and commercial intercourse” would serve to further Christianize both China and Japan.167 Speer, in his calls for the expansion of American cultural and religious influence over the Chinese emigrating to California, provided a domestic example to prove the capability of Americans to spread civilization and Christianity as a pair. “It is a grand idea to conceive,” he noted, “that Providence may thus Christianize them as the negro race has been Christianized amongst us, to go back to the families of China triumphing in the freedom of the sons of God”168. Therefore, American, and concurrently Christian, endeavors focused on mobilizing proximity and taking full advantage of the new relationships being forged between missionaries and converts.

Unlike the more common rhetoric of missionaries serving as shepherds to flocks, a different agricultural metaphor was employed when describing the Christianizing mission in China. Rather than flocks, these missionaries presented the Chinese as “fields” ready to be harvested. Rev. Abeel wrote in his diary that in reference to China, “Here are the fields that will give full employment to all the missionaries who are likely to be furnished by the Church of Christ for years to come.”169 Eliza Bridgman also used this terminology while describing the amenability of different regions to the sway of the missionary endeavor. She clarified, “Shanghai is as healthy as most cities in America; the means of living are abundant, and the field is already white for the spiritual harvest.”170 And in his memoir, Lowrie cited the ability of missionaries to safely work and preach because of the extent of the rule of law in China, as well as the number of large cities allowing them to communicate with a substantial audience,

---

168 Speer, China, 96.
169 Williamson, Abeel, 245.
170 Bridgman, Daughters, 103.
resulting in his conclusion that “The fields are white to the harvest.” ¹⁷¹ The range of suggestions as how to actually take advantage of the treaty port locations included launching balloons with pamphlets attached for them to float in the interior and to bypass restrictions on the physical movement of missionaries to the treaty ports, to the more practical and proven course of establishing missionary schools. What was clear was that the ease with which missionaries could enter China and find a “field” ripe for the picking indicated an assumed willingness on the part of the Chinese to cooperate with missionary activities and to convert. ¹⁷² In tandem with these calls to missionary action in terms of benefiting American and Chinese adherents, those concerned with the expansion of Christianity in China also believed that they had to prove that any gains would be worth the effort in terms of the malleability of the Chinese toward conversion. And this was not only in relation to the ability of Americans to influence the Chinese, as Abbot determined that there was a “peculiar susceptibility of [the Chinese] to Christian influence.” ¹⁷³ Likewise, Gammell believed that American interaction outside of China was a missed opportunity for conversion of a group deemed to be more susceptible to influence. He explained that Chinese outside of China were more likely to convert as “they evinced far less of their characteristic contempt for the civilization and religion of Christian nations.” ¹⁷⁴ Another reason these missionary proponents were convinced of the durability of their aims in China was past precedent for conversion in China. Barnum’s Collection explained that Roman Catholic converts were “persecuted” by Buddhists and Daoists after a time because of their increasing influence over the imperial court in the time of extensive Jesuit interaction. Despite these hurdles, and for decades beyond the expulsion of the Jesuits,

¹⁷¹ Lowrie, Memoirs, 385.
¹⁷² “Disseminating the Gospel,” Jeffersonian Republican (7 Nov. 1850), 2; and Bridgman, Daughters, 128.
¹⁷³ Abbot, English, 319.
¹⁷⁴ Gammell, Missions, 196.
Barnum alleged that Catholic converts “continue to labor secretly for the maintenance of the Romish religion in China.”175

Another reason why Americans believed that the Chinese were amenable to conversion to Christianity was because of the perception that existing Chinese morals and religious practices mirrored Christian doctrine and teachings. Or, more accurately, they believed that in the past Chinese society borrowed the doctrine and teachings of Roman Catholicism. While American Roman Catholic missionaries did not arrive in China until after the American Civil War, the successive waves of European Catholics in China, beginning with the Jesuits, created a long-standing tension between Protestant and Catholic missionary interests. Much about the religious practices of the Chinese reminded these Protestant American observers of Catholicism. Abbot noted that a variety of images and statuary in a Buddhist temple was “not very dissimilar in form to that used by Roman Catholics.”176 Likewise, Ball noted, “With their burning lights, their arrangement of vases, urns, &c., they remind one of the Roman Catholic service. In truth I should be inclined to think that their mixed religion originated with the Catholics, or that the Catholics had copied from them.”177 Observations such as the shaved heads of monks, celibacy among the clergy, vows of poverty and seclusion, the use of beads to pray, incense, blessed water, bells, iconography, and a concept of spiritual purgatory led Barnum to comment, “Many of those ceremonies of the Budhist [sic] religion are similar to those of the Roman Catholics, as was noticed by early Jesuits, who visited China to convert her to Christianity.”178 The issue of comparative rituals was also noted by The People of China:

It affords an analogy to the system of penances and indulgences in the papal church: nor does the resemblance between the two religions stop here. They practice the ordinances

175 Barnum, Collection, 56.
176 Abbott, English, 92.
177 Ball, Rambles, 275.
178 Barnum, Collection, 49
of celibacy, fasting, and prayers for the dead; they have holy water, rosaries of beads, which they count with their prayers, the worship of relics, and a monastic habit resembling that of the Franciscans; and they likewise kneel before an idol called Tien-how, or queen of heaven. 179

But whereas Barnum asserted that Catholicism had in the past influenced Buddhism, this work instead suggested shared origins between Buddhism and Christianity. This concept that the similarities between Catholicism and Buddhism was believed to be so great that Lowrie reported “some of the early Roman Catholic missionaries to China could account for it only by supposing that the devil had induced the Chinese to frame a religion very like theirs in order to cast suspicion and discredit upon them!” 180

Whether derived from satanic influence or not, these American Protestants conveyed the potential influence of Roman Catholicism as both an opening for their corrective theology and as a challenge to convert the Chinese before Catholic missionaries from Europe. Anderson wrote to the American Board of Commissioners that while “Romanism” was observed to not have much influence in the new treaty ports, it was up to the Protestant missionaries there to prevent its spread and the spread of “hideous forms of idolatrous Roman errors.” 181 Ruschenberger attributed this sentiment of competitive religiosity to the notion that “The spirit of proselytism and toleration are incompatible; toleration requires forbearance, while the proselytizing spirit, which is the missionary animus, stimulates interference with religious notions, opinions or practices not in conformity with the views of the missionary or religionist.” 182 Therefore, American missionaries saw both Chinese religion and Catholic missionaries as equivalent obstacles to expounding their version of religious “Truth” to the Chinese people, but one that

179 American Sunday-School Union, People of China, 87.
180 Lowrie, Memoirs, 218.
181 Anderson to Daly, 46/2/2, 2, ABC Reel 231.
182 Ruschenberger, Notes, 172.
would inevitably be successful because of the certainty of missionaries that “intelligent” Chinese men would flock to Protestant causes for their own spiritual benefit.\footnote{\textquoteleft\textquoteleft Religious Intelligence,	extquoteright\textquoteright Burlington Free Press (31 Mar. 1848), 1.}

The Opportunity of Chinese Women

Intelligent men or not, American missionary activity persistently presented the prospect of Chinese women as having the greatest potential for influence and conversion. As one of a few female missionaries of her generation to travel to China, as well as a noted writer and proponent on the subject of conversion, Eliza Bridgeman had a unique perspective on the notion that Chinese women were especially malleable to American interests. Americans assumed they could gain access through these women to the Chinese family at large, and improvements in the lives of Chinese women were often equated with improving China as a whole. Bridgeman initially noted that much of the problem of influencing women came from the issue of gaining access to them.

But who shall teach the woman of China? The missionary - the ordained minister of the gospel, who goes forth to preach, cannot gain access to the Daughters of the land. The usages of society debar these from public assembly. Woman, in all ordinary cases, is secluded, and cannot come out to hear the preaching of the gospel. Can nothing be done to give her the glorious gospel, and elevate her to her proper sphere?\footnote{Bridgman, Daughters, viii.}

This notion that Chinese men purposefully excluded Chinese women from the public sphere overlooks the fact that there was frequent interaction between foreigners and Chinese women of the lower, laboring class, indicating that the true aim of the missionary was the cloistered women of China’s middle and upper classes with whom they had much more restricted access. It relies on a deep cultural assumption regarding the “proper sphere” of women that was neither cloistered nor laboring; something more akin to the idealized role of women in American
The idyllic Chinese women in the mind of American missionaries was one of helpmate and mother, a woman educated but still subordinate. Bridgeman explained that the purpose of educating young Chinese women was so that male converts had someone to marry. “How much more does he need a helper, at least one who has had some Christian instruction.”\(^\text{185}\) In addition to the instruction that would help maintain the conversion of potential husbands, this education was also intended to create model wives through domestic duties. Bridgeman went on to write, “Very few Chinese women know how to sew so as to make their own clothes. We wish to gather female children into schools to give them habits of industry” that would be used in the service of their families and to the church.\(^\text{186}\)

This notion that Americans could improve the domestic skills of Chinese women extended beyond China to those immigrants settling on the west coast as well. Speer accounted that a lack of American women in the west left opportunities for Chinese women to work as domestics with the skills given to them by industrious American instructors. In addition, he claimed that Chinese women educated in this domestic missionary atmosphere allowed these women to be “the best ministry that philanthropy and the gospel can employ in elevating and ennobling the wanderers from a land of gloom.”\(^\text{187}\) Merging both the observation of female malleability and the opportunity of opening the Chinese marketplace, Forbes asserted that among the first American products to be produced en masse should be “two or three hundred million baby-jumpers in order to mitigate the sufferings, and straighten the bow-legs, of the [Chinese] children now slung on their anxious mothers’ back” and to allow her greater freedom in her role as mother.\(^\text{188}\) So not only were Chinese women viewed as being the logical means through

\(^{185}\) Ibid., 129.  
\(^{186}\) Bridgman, Daughters, 131.  
\(^{187}\) Speer, Plea, 28.  
\(^{188}\) Forbes, Steamers, 16.
which to convert large portions of the Chinese populace, this transition also served as a means to attempt to relocate and improve the status of these women.

Reiterating the agricultural rhetoric of missionary labor, Bridgeman wrote, “The women of China possess intellect, but it wants cultivation, they have hearts, but they require the gospel’s sanctifying influence; they need also, early, judicious training.” Missionaries were presented as the obvious choice to supply that training. In addition to their lack of education and “cultivation,” the adherence of Chinese women to Buddhist teachings indicated their willingness to practice religion, albeit an incorrect one Americans’ estimation. Lowrie noted that it was mostly women who went to temples and supported the Buddhist priesthood. He recalled that these women were “often faithful in reading their prayers before the idols, and in observing the numerous fasts imposed by the priests.” So in his judgment, Chinese women maintained the propensity for religious learning that could be directed toward American missionaries; it was that they had little opportunity to access Christian teachings. As a result, Wells explained that because Chinese women often never attended schools, missionaries were logical suppliers of education to this underserved group. Bridgman concluded that missionary education, “if carried out with perseverance and fervent prayer for the divine influence, will elevate the Chinese female to the hopes and privileges of woman in Christian lands, and give her the same qualifications to discharge the duties of daughter, wife and mother.” Thus, the ultimate goal of the missionary endeavor in the case of educating Chinese women was to remove them from the traditional expectations of middle-class Chinese femininity and instead place them within the realm of American middle-class domesticity. Yet, women were not the only group that

---

189 Bridgman, Daughters, 81.
190 Lowrie, Memoirs, 381.
191 Williams, The Middle Kingdom, 453.
192 Bridgman, Daughters, ix.
Americans believed exhibited the propensity for American influence. The emergence of the Taiping throughout the middle of the century proved to observers that foreign ideas, albeit those that were considered incorrect and misguided, could penetrate the cultural barriers of China and instigate massive social, economic, and religious change.

Figure 20: “Domestic Scene – Ladies at their usual Employments” and Figure 21 – “Chinese Lady”: Chinese middle and upper class femininity was often purported to be limiting. Traditional women’s activities such as needlepoint and learning of musical instruments [indicated above] paled in comparison to the domestic and religious challenge of American-style domesticity.193

The Taiping as a Revolutionary Opportunity

Just as the continuing travails of the Taiping Rebellion served to create sharp contrast as to American understandings regarding the strength and structure of Chinese civilization, the question as to what value this vast political, economic, and cultural disturbance was to have on American influence and interests in the region was of paramount importance. The rising sway of the Taiping and their charismatic leader Hong Xiuquan offered Americans a unique instance of

the convergence of many of their impulses. If the Taiping were successful in overthrowing the Qing government, indeed, the imperial tradition altogether, Americans saw it as creating the potential of allowing foreign influence on the religious and political development of a new government in the image of whichever foreign power exerted the most persuasion. Hence, this idea of opportunism allowed for the Qing government to be presented as both strong in its durability and sway, but simultaneously weak in its inability to put down the forces of the Taiping. Conversely, the Taiping, while described in the same uncertain terms as Chinese society in general, remained an amorphous enough movement that their potential overthrow of the dynastic system was seen by some as a means by which Americans could increase their influence and reach in China.

It is clear, though, that Americans were first and foremost concerned with assuring themselves and their constituents that the Taiping were sincere in both their religious faith and their efforts to overturn the “stagnant” political status quo. In his pamphlet published in the United States on the matter of the Taiping, Walter Medhurst informed his readers, “It is thought in some quarters that the insurgent chiefs have assumed the profession of Christianity as a cloak to further their designs.” “This supposition,” he declared, “is obviously contradicted by all the facts of the case.” Likewise, Commodore Matthew Perry – fresh from his first journey to Japan – wrote to the secretary of the navy that he was certain that the Taiping “revolutionists” were more willing to work with foreigners than the restrictive Qing. A New York Tribune article went a step further, praising the “strength and audacity” of the Taiping in their ability to combat governmental forces. The language employed by those who took a more positive

194 Medhurst, Pamphlets, 334.
195 Commodore Perry to Secretary of the Navy, ADPP 4, 193, 53/8/31.
stance on the actions of the Taiping framed them not as a “rebellion” but as a “revolution,” implying that they were within their rights to resist the government in an attempt to deeply change Chinese society.

Of similar importance to the idea that the Taiping could be trusted in their endeavors, and that they would work with Americans, was the hope that they could be counted as co-religionists. Americans scrutinized every action taken and statement made by the Taiping as indications as to whether or not they truly were Christians. Medhurst was certain of their Christian bonafides. As he explained, the Taiping “at the same time denounce and oppose the prevalent vices of their countrymen, and inculcate a system of rigid morality - the morality of the Bible.”

An article on “The Revolution in China” published in the Fayetteville Observer cited their “hostility to paganism,” their friendliness to foreigners, and the “purity of their morals” as proof of their religious veracity and potential value to American relations. The article concluded that a result of Taiping success, “teeming hordes of population [were] being thrown open to the influences of Christianity and Civilization,” again connecting these two notions together and expecting a wider influence of the United States as a result. While he did not agree with some of their tactics, Medhurst approved of the Taiping efforts at ridding China of religious “superstitions.”

This method of overthrowing idolatry does not accord with our notions of religious liberty; but when we remember the despotic character of the Chinese government, and the Biblical examples of a similar course, we need not be surprised that the insurgent leaders should have felt called upon to adopt this course. Thus it appears that the doctrinal views of these men are, on most points, entirely in accordance with the teachings of the Bible.

---

198 Medhurst, Pamphlets, 335.
200 Medhurst, Pamphlets, 341-42.
The *Vermont Watchmen* and the *Belmont Chronicle* both referred to the Taiping as a “Christian army” with the former indicating their goal as the replacement of the Qing “with the intention of establishing in its stead a liberal and Christian government” and the latter noting their success in “publishing the gospel” and spreading it among the populace.\(^{201}\) Despite these opinions based on the allegations of Chinese military aggression, problems among the Taiping leaders were often believed to be a surmountable challenge in the face of potential Sino-American interaction. One consular official even wrote to the Secretary of State William Marcy suggesting that if the United States had a treaty with the Taiping then Americans could influence the development of Chinese Christianity.\(^{202}\) Indeed, one Reverend Taylor was reported to be astounded by the connections the Taiping claimed to have with foreigners. He explained that rather than being called “foreign devils” like the Cantonese were wont to do, the “revolutionaries” welcomed him by calling him “brother.” He concluded that the successful overthrow of the Qing would result in “the introduction of Christianity among three hundred and sixty millions of the most enlightened of all pagan nations.”\(^{203}\)

Suggestions of American improvements of Taiping religiosity and their connections to American interests often overshadowed other, more questionable aspects of Taiping expansion that these observers praised. Compared to the “inaccessible” and “aloof” relations with the emperor, *The Burlington Free Press* reported the “social revolution” of the Taiping would result in an “emancipation” of Chinese workers and converts.\(^{204}\) In their ability to best military forces of superior numbers, the “rebels” were said to have exhibited “the greatest skill and judgment”

---


\(^{202}\) McLane to Marcy, ADPP 5, 54/6/14, 62.


in their actions, while consul Humphrey Marshall even likened a Taiping general to a “European Tactician” in his leadership capabilities.205 Whether these “Christian insurgents” would, in the long run, suit American interests in China was an issue that grew in importance after the Second Opium War, but what was clear was that reported trade output from Taiping-controlled areas and the knowledge that at least a manageable form of Christianity was spreading in China showed that opportunity as well as success was a possibility of American engagement with the Chinese.206

**Conclusion: National Success and the China Trade**

The opportunities that engagement with China presented, whether it was territorial, economic, cultural, or religious, reflected the larger idea that the expanding role of the United States in the world, but in China in particular, represented an opportunity for American national success. The ability of Americans to fully take advantage of these opportunities was one that could have meaning not only bridging sectional issues but also in incorporating more areas into the polity and expanding the power of the United States abroad. In his calls for greater interaction with the Chinese, Speer commented, “when the commerce of China, and the Northwest coast of America, becomes of greater importance, this subject is of the greatest interest for the balance of commerce and the political preponderancy of nations. Then only can any great change be effected in the political state of eastern Asia; for this neck of land, the barrier against the waves of the Atlantic ocean, has been for many ages the bulwark of the independence of China and Japan”207 Economic and cultural ties were inexorably linked in this

---

205 Humphrey Marshall to Department of State, ADPP 4, 19, 53/2/8.
207 Speer, Plea, 38.
mindset, but it also placed them as the means by which Americans could exert increasing sway on the world stage. Forbes went as far as to proclaim that engagement with China was “the means by which to become the first maritime, commercial, and political power of the world” and that the opportunities therein “are stretched out before us.”208 And from the journal of his travel to China, Peyton also saw beyond national boundaries to the extent that the China trade fit in with the ideal of rising American dominance. “When the trade and commerce of these numerous Pacific and Indian Islands, and of the vast regions of the Chinese Empire, shall be directed to our country, we will become the storehouse as well as the highway of nations, and enjoy an opulence and power unrivalled by anything the world has ever known.”209 But perhaps Fitch Taylor presented the American perspective on its influence of China most clearly.

The age is one of light, mental, moral, and philosophical inquiry, which has characterized no other period of the world, and which cannot let the Chinese empire remain unaffected by its influence. China must be opened. The time is at hand when a combination of nations more enlightened and powerful in arms, science, and literature shall WILL it; and the Chinese cannot, in the nature of moral causes and their effects, hinder it.210

Whether or not the reality of Sino-American relations justified it, or the perceived threat the Chinese posed to American interests negated it, this idea that the Chinese were in the position of being inexorably changed and influenced by the outside world was one that joined fluidly with the notion that Americans had something to gain in the opportunities that arose from this change. As economic, political, cultural, and religious justifications for American involvement all tapped into this core of opportunism, so too did Americans believe that a success in one area would result in the success of the entire endeavor. But as will be shown in the next chapter, the idea of China as a land of American opportunity was a framework that did not go unchallenged; nor was

208 Forbes, Steamer, 15.
209 Peyton, Suggestions, 22.
210 Taylor, Voyage Vol. 2, 118. Emphasis in original
it an idea that occurred in isolation, as the realities of the relationship failed to meet the lofty goals laid forth by the prognosticators, and unconvinced that it was because of American problems, those who engaged with the China trade and the Chinese were left with the task of trying to understand how China failed to rise to the occasion.
Chapter 3: China as a Flawed Empire

“The Chinese are up to all such modes of rascality.” – Benjamin Ball

Among the narratives of solving the Chinese puzzle and presenting the opportunities of interaction with China, there existed a noticeable and over time growing undercurrent that China was an inherently flawed place inhabited by a flawed people. Whether from the intensified mobilization of existing social and cultural tropes against the Chinese, or the fizzling of the opportunistic spirit under a more realistic expectation of Sino-American relations, the intra-Opium War period saw the rise of a more critical attitude toward the Chinese that coexisted with the competing notions that China was also a place of opportunity and danger. This perspective presented the notion of Chinese flaws as a tipping point rather than advocating the wholehearted acceptance of increased relations that opportunists reinforced or rejecting closer ties because of the perception that the Chinese represented a threat. These linguistic trends rallied (mis)understandings of Chinese mystery and emphasized cultural differences and explanations of Chinese failure in terms that could simultaneously justify continued interaction in terms of Americans providing a beneficial example to the Chinese, or equally these accusations could serve as proof that the Chinese were too far from civilized to be trusted. In essence, this middle ground represented the issues Americans and Chinese had, as Dong Wang put it, in becoming “acquainted” with each other, with new knowledge creating both “favorable and unfavorable”

---

1 Benjamin Lincoln Ball, Rambles in Eastern Asia, including China and Manila, During Several Years’ Residence: With Notes of the Voyage to China, Excursions in Manila, Hong-Kong, Canton, Shanghai, Ningpoo, Amoy, Fouchow, and Macao (Boston: James French and Co, 1856), 243.
sentiments. Americans mustered a variety of emotional responses to the idea of Chinese failure, ranging from contempt and disgust to confusion and paternalism, but their writings consistently emphasized the wrongness that they found in Chinese society.

Ranging from criticisms of Chinese governance and allegations of corruption; to implications that Chinese men were weak and effeminate while Chinese women were concurrently physically strong yet subordinated to Chinese men through foot binding, concubinage, cloistering, and infanticide; to larger concerns about the moral, religious, and cultural failures caused by “superstition,” “ignorance,” and “fatalism,” the accounts in this framework of explanation aimed at understanding why China failed to live up to the expectations imposed upon it by American observers. This external imposition of failure is not an unsurprising framework of understanding, especially given the predominant Orientalist expectations of the day. But the depth and complexity of the specific rhetoric of failure is important to consider in the early Sino-American relationship. These areas in which Americans witnessed and detailed the failings of the Chinese bridged the gap between engaging or disengaging with China, but even then this impression emphasized an Occidentalist preoccupation that foreigners, and Americans in particular, were the people who could identify these problems through intervention, influence, and interference.

---

4 David Anderson writes that by the 1860s the dominant belief among Americans in China was that the United States and its citizens had better foreign relations with China than their European counterparts. *Imperialism and Idealism: American Diplomats in China, 1861-1898* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 2.
The Failure of Governance

Despite the contention that the Chinese government exerted a stabilizing impact on Chinese civilization, the notion that the imperial system was somehow intrinsically corrupt when compared to American governmental structures magnified over time. Samuel Shaw wondered whether, “there is a more oppressive [government] to be found in any civilized nation upon the earth.”5 In particular, he took issue with the use of capital punishment in Chinese society. He explained that, to him, the use of the cangue, a type of mobile stocks, and the execution of a foreign sailor by the Chinese, “shocks the humane mind,” in both the manner of the punishment, as well as the fact that the latter was imposed upon a foreigner by the Chinese.6 While ceding that China was a “civilized nation,” his assertion of the government’s brutality against others was only reinforced by his conviction that Chinese culture was static. Namely, he stated that the Chinese were “a people whose manners and customs may be considered like the laws of the ancient Medes and Persians, which altered not.”7 In other words, the government was inhumane because culture and morality were anachronisms of the past – with the implication that European and American culture and moral actions were progressive and modern in comparison.

The byword of these allegations of improper governance was one of “despotism.” The imperial system itself, in its ability to hold sway for centuries, was explained as the cause of many of China’s problems. Whether it was “the power of Eastern despotism to sustain the credit” of paper currency in a global system based off of metallic specie or, as others alleged, that “the love of power alone has stimulated the emperors of China to climb to such giddy heights over their subjects,” what resulted was a “system of deceit” that ranged from the lowliest

---

6 Ibid., 185 and 235.
7 Ibid., 227.
mandarin to the emperor himself. Missionary Henrietta Shuck historicized these long-standing trends, explaining that China always “groaned under absolute despotism,” and the Qing were no different from their predecessors in that regard. E. Cunningham went as far as to assert that under the rule of the Manchu, the Qing dynasty “has been remarkable in its despotism,” in the extent to which it pervaded every level of society, from trade limitations to hairstyles. Other American commentators listed a variety of outcomes of the “iron despotism” they perceived in China. The Vermont Phoenix alleged that the low pay and the high power instilled in the mandarin system was a recipe for corruption, even among the imperial family. And this use of governmental power for personal ends extended beyond the system itself, as P. T. Barnum lamented, “There is no freedom of the press in China. The newspapers contain only such information as the government sees fit to have published to suit its own purposes.” These foreign observers let their constituents know about their increasing wariness of the extent of this despotic activity between individuals and in the Chinese government in its entirety.

Discussions of members of the government presented an interesting dichotomy. When referring to the government in general, Americans evoked the rhetoric of collective wrongdoing to describe the Chinese bureaucracy. Recalling the more optimistic relationship projected by some, an interesting subcurrent in their dispatches showed that American officials often spoke

8 Jacob Abbott, China and the English, or the Character and Manners of the Chinese, as Illustrated in the History of Their Intercourses with Foreigners, To Which is Added an Account of the Late War (Cooperstown, NY: H. & E. Phinney, 1843), 53; American Sunday-School Union, The People of China; or, A Summary of Chinese History. Revised by the Committee of Publication of the American Sunday-School Union (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1844), 29; and, “China,” New York Tribune (23 Aug. 1850), 6.
9 Shuck, Scenes, 13.
10 E. Cunningham, Our Commercial and Political Relations with China, by an American Resident in China (Washington, 1855), 5.
12 “Rowdy Royalty,” Vermont Phoenix (23 Feb. 1849), 3; and P. T. Barnum, Ten Thousand Things on China and the Chinese: Being a Picture of the Genius, Government, History, Literature, Agriculture, Arts, Trade, Manners, Customs, and Social Life of the People of the Celestial Empire, as Illustrated by the Chinese Collection (New York, J. S. Bedfield, 1850), 133.
highly of those Chinese representatives who were helpful to American interests in the region.

But in general, Americans held the bureaucratic classes in China in disdain for the perceived problems in the relationship, be they diplomatic, financial, or cultural. Descriptions of the negative effects of the mandarins were usually presented in one of two ways, either by highlighting the general incompetence of the officials, or by expressing the view that individual representatives purposefully made efforts to hinder the success of the American aims in China.

The views of Americans concerned with the mismanagement of the Chinese empire were perhaps best summarized by diplomat Humphrey Marshall, who determined:

I can but deplore the woful [sic], criminal mismanagement, by a feeble despotism, of its abundant resources. I am convinced that there never has been, in the history of mankind, a worse government than that which for some years has afflicted China. It is without strength, spirit or capacity; too vain to learn wisdom, too ignorant to behold its own gross want of intelligence. It sits an incubus on the spirit and upon the prosperity of the people.13

While his comments are more hyperbolic than most, Marshall’s general ideas were commonly presented throughout a number of official reports. American diplomats criticized the members of the imperial government who served as the bridge between the Chinese bureaucracy and their foreign constituents for maintaining a “custom of exclusiveness” that allowed “corrupt” access to power and rank within the bureaucracy while targeting foreigners for exclusion.14 Others declared that the government was “impotent, ignorant, and conceited . . . more conceited and arrogant than ignorant and excusable,” and that China’s problems were exacerbated by the “trifling and prevaricating” and the “weakness and corruption” of the mandarin class.15 This

14 Humphrey Marshall to Secretary of State, February 7, 1853, ADPP Vol. 4, 16.
exclusiveness also resulted in the perception that the mandarins isolated the emperor from knowledge of the problems that foreigners perceived existed in his state. Indeed, the “anti-social and non-intercourse characters and principles of the Chinese government” were said to run deeper than merely the ill-will of a few key individuals. But not all American representatives thought the emperor was ignorant of the benefits of foreign influence and the efforts to keep their contact at bay, as one diplomat noted that he himself had “no such respect for the ridiculous exclusiveness and arrogant pretension of superiority under which [the emperor] has concealed national weakness.”

Whether or not mandarins or the emperor were to blame, Americans expressed continued agreement that China was “almost in a condition of hopeless disorganization,” and that, “the internal state of the country is most deplorable.” Nevertheless, there was debate as to whether these problems originated from “incorrigible antipathy” or “a refined and cunning policy” promoting instability from within the mandarin class. Specific complaints ranged from ”inferior local officials,” to the “inefficiency and mismanagement” of provincial governance, to the “mal-administration” of their judicial system, and to a lack of “discipline and control” over their military forces. In essence, “the peculiar institutions and manners of the Chinese” precluded them from attaining the political and military control that they needed to maintain law and order, which, according to American representatives, resulted in disruptions

17 Humphrey Marshall to Secretary of State, May 20, 1853, ADPP, Vol. 4, 271.
18 Humphrey Marshall to William Marcy, December 8, 1853, ADPP, Vol. 4, 322; and Peter Parker to William Marcy, January 14, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 6, 47.
19 Robert McLane to William Marcy, April 20, 1854, ADPP Vol. 5, 27.
20 Robert McLane to William Marcy, May 21, 1854, ADPP, Vol. 7, 210; Peter Parker to Daniel Webster, June 20, 1851, ADPP, Vol. 12, 15; Peter Parker to Daniel Webster, August 19, 1852, ADPP, Vol. 17, 334; and Peter Parker to William Marcy, April 20, 1854, ADPP, Vol. 7, 194.
both foreign and domestic.21 Other observers reinforced the notion that the weaknesses of the system itself contributed to the corruptibility of the mandarin and imperial classes by less savory levels of society, and that graft perpetuated these concerns. Barnum alleged that the “personal vanity” of mandarins using wealth rather than merit to obtain their rank and status led to weaknesses in the system.22 Likewise, Nathan Allen proclaimed that “the love of gain had proved stronger than fidelity to the Emperor’s commands.”23 Yet, descriptions of how the bureaucratic classes were susceptible to corruption when disobeying the commands of their superiors overlooks their examples of the systemic failures as to how mandarins took advantage of their power for economic or professional gain.

As Americans highlighted the notion that in the past the Chinese system was one in which merit and study could result in success in the imperial bureaucratic system regardless of social position, the problems of corruption called into question just how resilient this system remained.24 Robert Sears, in his Pictorial history of China and India, alleged that the primary reason that officials in the treaty port of Amoy [Xiamen] were so willing to turn a blind eye to continued opium smuggling was because they were given ten cents for every ball of opium that passed into the city. He later admitted that although the opium trade remained illegal, and that the Chinese legal system itself was sound, “like all human institutions and devices, they fail most glaringly in practice, principally owing to the non-observance of those laws and maxims by the persons who are selected to administer and expound them.”25 The People of China presented a

22 Barnum, Collection, 15.
23 Allen, Opium Trade, 46.
24 R. Kent Guy writes about the long shifts over time, including more difficult testing regimes and fewer positions available, that resulted in an increasingly limited access to the bureaucracy by the early Nineteenth century. Qing Governors and their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644-1796 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010).
25 Robert Sears, Pictorial History of China and India: Comprising a Description of Those Countries and their Inhabitants, Embracing the Historical Events, Government, Religion, Education, Language, Literature, Arts,
similar conclusion, “Merit, for the most part, takes the precedence of birth; and if this were carried out, the arrangement would be excellent. Unfortunately, however, this arrangement of nobility by the Chinese constitution is but theoretical; for it happens that the vicious are frequently exalted while merit goes unrewarded,” and the preponderance of hereditary nobility among the highest officials proved to the author the limited extent of merit in contemporary Chinese society. So for American observers it became increasingly clear that by the conclusion of the Opium War the durability of Chinese meritocracy was wearing thin, which resulted in a weakness of governmental stability.

American diplomats framed their own individual interactions with imperial officials in terms of purposeful unfairness and corruption. Initially, representatives hoped that the new Sino-American treaty would create “a position alike honorable and independent in China” for Americans, and would establish “the style of perfect equality between the United States and China.” These representatives soon expressed the realization that instead of equality, “indifference, if not contempt” was the prevailing sentiment among mandarins toward Americans, and foreigners in general. Other officials noted that “the Chinese have a perfect contempt for us” when using local interpreters – whom the mandarins derogatively referred to as “coolies” – rather than official scholars. More tellingly than the vague criticisms of unfairness levied against the incommunicative imperial courts were the consistent and specific complaints regarding local representatives. Parker described the governor of Canton as being “a model-

Manufactures, Productions, Commerce, and Manners and Customs of the People, From the Earliest Period of Authentic Record, to the Present Time (New York: Robert Sears, 1851), 214 and 243.
26 American Sunday-School Union, People of China, 46.
27 Caleb Cushing to Abel Upshur, July 5, 1844, and Caleb Cushing to Nelson, July 6, 1844, ADPP, Vol. 2, 221 and 225.
29 Robert Murphy to William Marcy, September 1, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 7, 326.
hater of foreigners” in one such instance.  

Officials called the superintendent of the port at Shanghai “the principal criminal in all the troubles at Shanghai,” and at Amoy [Xiamen] the “weakness of the local government” allowed for “abandoned and reckless populations” to endanger the lives of the American missionaries working there.  

A series of incidents between local officials in Amoy and the American diplomats in that port represent a convergence of many of the issues regarding criticisms of government corruption, aggression against foreigners, and excessive punishment. Article XVII of the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia) granted that, “Citizens of the United States residing or sojourning at any of the ports open to foreign commerce, shall enjoy all proper accommodation in obtaining houses and places of business, or in hiring sites from the inhabitants on which to construct houses and places of business.”  

While housing issues consistently manifested themselves across the treaty ports, with so few foreigners living in the port of Amoy the local officials prohibited the American consul, Thomas Hyatt, from finding permanent housing for the consulate. When Hyatt did make a rental agreement with a homeowner, local officials “tortured” the man and removed Hyatt’s possessions without giving legal recourse. Hyatt bitterly complained to the State Department that the Chinese were “throwing obstacles in the way” of establishing a consulate per the specifications of the treaty. While the mandarins at Amoy finally allowed Hyatt to purchase land for a consulate, he noted that they did nothing to stop local troops from taking building materials from the site of the future consulate. The troubles surrounding the establishment of the Amoy consulate epitomize the issues that American diplomatic officials

---

30 Peter Parker to William Marcy, November 22, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 13, 304.
31 Peter Parker to William Marcy, December 12, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 13, 304; and Robert McLane to William Marcy, May 21, 1854, ADPP, Vol. 5, 42-44.
33 Alexander Everett to James Buchanan, January 18, 1847, ADPP, Vol. 10, 65.
34 Thomas Hyatt to William Marcy, 55/12/10, Despatches from the United States Consuls in Amoy, 1844-1906. Text Fiche, Roll 1.
consistently reported back to Washington. Chinese leaders were not only prohibiting Americans from exercising their rights as stated in the treaty they also did nothing to stop the general populace from harassing foreigners.

Hospitable to American and foreign interests or not, what many of these writers and observers emphasized was a broader understanding of what they believed to be the larger, societal impacts of which corruption and mismanagement were symptoms. It was not just that individual gain damaged the relationship between the United State and China, it was that as a result they believed these problems were systematically leading to the failure of Chinese society in its entirety – which the notion of stagnation only served to fuel. The inability of China’s government to control its people and territory was paramount to these suggestions. Ball’s *Rambles* highlighted the fact that China at this time did not have control over the entirety of Formosa [Taiwan] and its indigenous inhabitants, and even on the mainland he claimed the “interior has never been subdued.” Ball insinuated that the inability of the bureaucratic classes to govern Chinese territory went to the extent that governors were reported to have attempted to purchase the good behavior of pirates and other disturbers of the peace. “There are two towns in the vicinity of Amoy [Xiamen],” he continued, “over which the pirates have the whole control, and the mandarins are too weak, and too much in fear of them, even to send a dispatch, or to make any efforts to put them down.” Likewise, “The province of foo-keen [Fujian],” Sears reported, “has been very frequently in a state of rebellion against the lawful authorities.” What was clear was, be they problems with indigenous inhabitants, law breakers, or outright rebellion,  

---

35 Ball, *Rambles*, 222. Laura Hostetler noted the persistent inability of the Qing to fully control Taiwan continued to be a rhetorical point in the 1895 negotiations after the Sino-Japanese war and the relinquishment of Taiwan to Japan until 1945 and the end of WWII. *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).
37 Sears, *Pictorial*, 228.
the capabilities of the Qing to maintain hold over its dominion was called into question. Even in instances where Americans saw effort by the imperial government to fully enforce the law, the mandarin bureaucracy failed to convince foreigners that any justice had prevailed. Eliza Bridgman wrote that a number of murders “were reported to the officers of government, the case was examined, search was made and several men supposed to be implicated in the affair were beheaded, but whether they were the true murderers was a matter of doubt among the foreign residents at Canton.”38 The systemic inability of the Qing dynasty to maintain law and order in China led William Lowrie to conclude, “The weakness of the government can no longer be concealed, and the lowest of the people have not failed to observe it.”39

One of the primary issues that reinforced Americans’ beliefs of the failings of domestic Chinese control over their own territorial sovereignty was the persistence of the opium trade and opium consumption. While the United States officially forbade its own citizens from engaging in smuggling opium into China as a stipulation of the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia), Americans never obtained a sizable percentage of the overall trade when compared to the dominance of British firms. Moreover, it was common knowledge among consular officials that American shipping companies regularly flouted the prohibition through a variety of backchannels, allowing British and Chinese firms to sail under the protection of the American flag, and even through outright smuggling. Still, as American participation in increased opium sales was a known factor, that did not stop others from emphasizing the “deleterious” effects that opium use had on the Chinese population and the persistent inability of the Chinese government to effectively enforce its own laws and protect its own subjects. In his Travels, Howard Malcolm declared,

38 Eliza J. Gilleit Bridgman, Daughters of China; or, Sketches of Domestic Life in The Celestial Empire (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853), 125.
“No person can describe the horrors of the opium trade. . . . The influence of the drug on China is more awful and extensive than that of rum in any country, and worse to its victims than any outward slavery.”  

Lowrie added his own opinion of opium, explaining “Opium is the curse of China. It is draining out their money from the land, sucking the heart’s blood of their industry, and destroying the constitutions and the lives of their people.” So overlooking the key role that foreigners played in creating and supplying Chinese demand for opium, these authors instead focused on the ways in which opium contributed to the decline and flaws of Chinese society.

The descriptions of the failings of the Chinese to stop the usage of opium often focused on the physical effect the drug had on the bodies of the Chinese people. Bridgman observed that frequent opium users “exhibit[ed] a cadaverous countenance, and an emaciated frame.” And Abbot also indicated the impact that frequency had on the negative impact of the substance. “Habitual use,” he alleged, “renders the individual, like the drunkard, a miserable slave to its exciting powers, and works a fearful destruction to body and mind.” And Allen quoted the British official, Lord Jocelyn, when explaining the rapidity with which opium usage was reported to disable even a healthy individual. “A few days of this fearful luxury, when taken to excess, will give a pale and haggard look to the face, and a few months, or even weeks, will change the strong and healthy man into a little better than an idiot skeleton.” It was not simply the strength and rapidity of the drug that led some to be concerned for the health and well being of the Chinese people. The Chinese, Sears noted, were said to be “prone to every vice to which human nature is addicted,” thereby establishing a racialized construction of addiction that

---

42 Bridgman, *Daughters*, 152.
43 Abbot, *English*, 266.
44 Allen, *Opium Trade*, 36.
suggested widespread vulnerability to opium use.45 This notion that the Chinese body was flawed and prone to addiction conflicts with the dynamic strength of their laboring bodies according to opportunists, and the strength of Chinese en masse according to those who viewed China as a threat. Nevertheless, these admonitions against opium use maintained the focus on the balance between benefit and danger that the Chinese body presented to the Sino-American relationship.

In addition to the speed with which opium was said to affect its users, the sheer numerical impact of the drug shocked some observers. Allen estimated that at the time some four to five million Chinese subjects – or over 1 percent of the entire population – were users, and that the average addicted worker spent over two-thirds of his daily income on opium, leaving little else for food, shelter, and supporting their family.46 In southern China, where smuggling proliferated to a much greater extent because of the openness and permeability of the treaty ports, Samuel Wells suggested that half of the population of the city of Amoy [Xiamen] were addicted.47 Regardless of the prohibition of opium by the “wise and patriotic” rulers of China for its obviously detrimental effects, the New York Tribune concluded that the rising addiction rate of Chinese and the estimated $20 million annual value of the trade made efforts at eliminating opium’s sale and use an uphill battle both for the Chinese government and for American officials attempting to maintain treaty prohibitions.48

It was that inability to control opium usage that sparked many Americans to deem the Qing government a failure. And yet again another dual understanding emerged in the rhetoric

45 Sears, Pictorial, 347;
46 Allen, Opium Trade, 29.
mobilized by Americans to understand how a ruler that maintained control over hundreds of millions of subjects lacked the control to stop, or at least curb, opium use. One notion was simply that the imperial system had grown too weak in its stagnation to create any form of solid resistance against the economic and addictive forces impelling the drug onto the shores of China – and this idea would also ring true when later attempting to understand the rapid rise in power of the Taiping. The second explanation advocated that the imperial system actually did not lose any real power, it was that abuse and corruption in the system – fueled by graft and bribery from the opium trade – made any real enforcement of the law an impossibility. Macaulay was an advocate of the former explanation, noting that even within the imperial palace in Pekin [Beijing] the emperor was unable to punish or even discourage opium use among his closest officials.49 Comparatively, in his analysis of the causes and effects of the opium trade, Allen wrote:

What can a government do with such subjects, in a country too of more than one thousand miles of sea-coast, indented with numerous harbors, inlets and rivers, inviting the wholesale opium smuggler with his richly laden vessel, armed with all the forces which wealth and skill can command – a country moreover, whose seaports, villages and coasts, are continually thronged by millions of inhabitants goaded on by an insatiable craving for this fascinating drug – a country defended by an army and navy always small, but rendered inefficient and treacherous by this very poison itself.50

In addition to the increased demand for opium, the geographic features that made smuggling on the coast an easier effort and the increasing weakness of the military because of addiction, Allen also brought to light the strength of the smuggler in the balance of power in the region. “Not a ball of opium is delivered by the receiving vessel until it has been previously paid for in cash, and the fear of their cannon-balls effectually prevents the Chinese war-junks from interfering

50 Allen, Opium Trade, 64.
with [smugglers].” As for the latter argument, allegations of the complicity of the bureaucratic classes plagued accounts of the expansion of the opium trade. Lowrie wrote that “The Chinese officers make no effort whatever to prevent [opium’s] introduction” and in turn benefited from their connections to smugglers. Barnum went as far as to claim that despite true efforts on the part of the emperor to end opium use among the Chinese, the endemic corruption of his officials made the challenge all but impossible, because “the profits of the trade were known to be so great, that the fast sailing boats, kept filled with men and arms by the government, for the suppression of the traffic, were used in many instances by the mandarins having charge of them as a means of monopolizing it.” Whether or not the Chinese government was complicit in the expansion of opium use or was merely a feeble bystander as the insatiability of addiction continued to expand, these explanations as to why opium use continued both reinforce the notion that the emperor, and by extension the imperial system, retained little of its former glory and power, and as such could not be trusted for its stability.

In addition to the perpetual plague of opium use, by the mid-1850s American delegates needed no more evidence of the instability and failings of the Chinese government than the Taiping Rebellion. American and other foreign officials in China were uncertain what to make of the movement, debating whether the self-styled Christian regime would bring upon a “revolution” to replace the “despotism” of the Qing government or the movement was a “rebellion” that only served to hinder the progress achieved by China through interaction with foreigners. Others could not decide if either of those views was accurate, noting that the “revolutionary movement [was] . . . extravagant in their pretentions” toward foreigners and that

51 Ibid., 13.
52 Lowrie, Memoirs, 208.
53 Barnum, Collection, 68.
the actions perpetrated by both the Qing and Taiping indicated that the Chinese were “a faithless and cruel people” in the manner through which they carried out warfare. What Americans were certain of was that regardless of whether it was a revolution or rebellion the Taiping had managed not only to severely undermine the strength of the Qing but also to threaten the very stability of China.

While some Americans continued to allege that the pseudo-Christianity proclaimed by Hong Xiuquan created a significant opening for missionaries, others were not so easily swayed and concluded that the Taiping were definitely not Christians. One diplomat vacillated between naming the Taiping leader “a religious fanatic or a charlatan” in the enactment of Christian ideals in the Taiping kingdom. Consul Robert McLane explained that the Taiping maintained a “monstrous misapprehension of scriptural truth,” but he qualified the statement with the notion that if the Taiping were to displace the Qing, the United States could still positively influence their version of Christianity. William Medhurst alleged that while the Taiping may have been earnest in their Christian beliefs, their “peculiar religious and political dogmas” attached to Christian doctrine left him skeptical about the chances to successfully establish a Christian kingdom to replace the Qing. Diplomats were equally uncertain about the viability of the Taiping because of religiosity and because of who foreigners observed converting to the Taiping cause. They noted that while the Taiping anti-opium stance “approximate[d] to the protestant form of Christianity” in their disapproval of its use, many concluded that the ranks of the Taiping

54 Humphrey Marshall to Secretary of State, May 25, 1853, ADPP, Vol. 4, 162; Peter Parker to Daniel Webster, January 24, 1852, ADPP, Vol. 3, 291; Robert McLane to William Marcy, May 21, 1854, ADPP, Vol. 5, 41; and Charles Bradley to William Marcy, February 17, 1854, ADPP, Vol. 20, 414.
55 Humphrey Marshall to William Marcy, May 6, 1853, ADPP, Vol. 4, 139.
56 Robert McLane to William Marcy, June 14, 1854, ADPP, Vol. 5, 57.
were filled with “vagabonds,” “rioters,” “pirates,” and “coolies” – all peoples with “a bad character” who could not be trusted in trade, let alone controlling an entire empire.\(^5\)

But these allegations of “bad character” did not stop at the individual Taiping adherent, as Americans presupposed that larger outside forces may have been a significant factor in the abnormalities of Taiping doctrine and practice. In a book review on the topic of the veracity of Taiping faith, the *New York Tribune* wrote that “Mr. Malan [the author] believes that this Chief is nothing better than a Chinese Mahomet [Mohammed], and his Christianity an imposture.”\(^5\)

Cunningham also made claim that this was an aberrant form of Christianity likened to Islam, noting that the manner that the Taiping utilized the Christian Bible “was precisely the same the use already made of the Jewish Bible thirteen centuries before, by Mahomet, in Arabia.” He did allay the concerns of his readers that Taiping ideals were much more akin to Christianity than to “Mahometanism,” but even then he still reinforced the distinction between “true” Christian doctrine and that being practiced by the Taiping.\(^6\)

The author of another article on the Taiping placed the origins of the movement beyond the realm of Christian influence. It cited “secret societies” and China’s historical proclivity for falling prey to such actors as the true impetus driving the Taiping. It chided the rebels’ leader, “Mr. Heaven and Earth,” as probably lying about his and his movement’s affiliation with Christianity so as to garner undue support from Europeans and Americans.\(^6\)

In addition to questions of foreign acceptance or rejection of the Taiping because of these religious and doctrinal uncertainties, whether or not the Chinese were willing and accepting of Taiping ideals was of equal concern when considering the rate at which

---

\(^5\) Humphrey Marshall to William Marcy, October 30, 1853, ADPP, Vol. 4, 241; and Peter Parker to Clayton, September 27, 1855, ADPP, Vol. 18, 256.


\(^6\) Cunningham, *Commercial*, 4.

the Taiping spread their influence. Marshall explained that “I have yet to meet the first respectable Chinese who expresses sympathy for this [rebel] cause!” reinforcing the notion that only unrespectable Chinese – i.e., those who Americans should not want to engage with – were joining the ranks of the Taiping.62

Issues of “respectability” aside, those who portrayed the Taiping as rebels as opposed to revolutionaries emphasized the challenge that the Taiping represented to the overall stability of China, and American interests there tangentially. Thus, accounts that underscored the Taiping as a rebellion reinforced ideas of the persistent failings of the Qing dynasty to secure its borders from challenges within and without. Of the danger that the Manchu rulers truly faced, Medhurst observed that the Taiping uprising “has convulsed a great nation, and threatens to overthrow a once powerful dynasty,” playing off of the familiar notion of Chinese decline as an indication of imperial weakness.63 Shortly after this assertion of Qing weakness, he added that the Taiping destabilized China doubly in that, “The operations of this war not only made manifest to the whole empire the inefficiency of the government, but increased very greatly its actual weakness by draining the public treasury.”64 The expansion of the Taiping highlighted the weakness of the imperial government, and Americans writing about the emerging situation made clear that the Taiping were not succeeding in creating a better or more stable political environment in the areas they controlled. Militarily “although they are numerous they have met with no signal success,” they gave “no promise of advancement to China, religiously or politically,” and in the end, according to Peter Parker, were actually damaging the “progress” that had been made in China

63 Medhurst, Pamphlets, 321.
64 Ibid, 324.
since the conclusion of the Opium War.\textsuperscript{65} The result, the consul concluded, was that, “This wretched country is in a sadly disturbed state and I can see no prospect for improvement for years to come.”\textsuperscript{66} And in a moment of prescience, Spalding stated outright his fear that “This rebellion has been continued so long now, that it threatens to become \textit{chronic}.”\textsuperscript{67} As his book was published in 1855, and the conflict between the Qing and the Taiping continued on for another nine years until 1864, the conflict further damaged the actual and supposed power of the Qing and did little to allay the allegations of governmental failure emanating from foreign pens and printing presses.

As the Taiping were unworthy and unable to rule China according to Americans, explanations as to the convergence of the rebellion/revolution and the claims of governmental mismanagement were the solution as to how to explain the rapid rise of the Taiping and the “chronic” inability of the Qing to eliminate this threat. Spalding alleged that much of the problem was that “the mandarins were doing nothing to arrest [Taiping] progress.”\textsuperscript{68} An article in the \textit{New York Tribune} went as far as to claim that the rebels were not politically motivated in an effort to dislodge the Qing, but that it was the “weakness and imbecility of the Chinese [government]” that perpetuated the decline of the central government.\textsuperscript{69} While this assessment is inaccurate in historical hindsight, and the Taiping leaders and followers certainly had a variety of personal, political, religious, cultural, and even racial motivations behind their actions, how Americans framed their understanding in terms of the narrow and persistent construction of governmental “hopeless disorganization” illustrates the gulf that continued to exist between what

\textsuperscript{65}M. Woodard, “M. Woodard Letters,” Manuscript Division, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA., 56/11/2, 2; Cunningham, \textit{Commercial}, 6; Parker to Webster, ADPP Vol. 3, 291. 52/1/24
\textsuperscript{66}M. Woodard Letters, 54/12/8, 379
\textsuperscript{67}Spalding, \textit{Japan}, 176. Emphasis in original.
\textsuperscript{68}Ibid., 346.
\textsuperscript{69}“China,” \textit{New York Tribune} (7 May 1851), 4.
Americans thought they knew, and what was actually happening in China. As such, these limited means of representation reflect the limited means of explanation, as Ruschenberger framed calls for American support of the Taiping in terms of domestic policy. He wrote, “it appears to me, those gentlemen [who wish to convert China by force or through political upheaval created by the Taiping] have forgotten that although our political Constitution provides for the toleration of all religious opinions, it carefully guards against giving its sanction to sustain any religious doctrine by force or otherwise.”

Although the United States eventually gave tacit support to the “Ever Victorious Army” that helped to finally quash the Taiping in the 1860s, the persistent and pervasive discussions over the strength and durability of the Chinese government during the intra-Opium War period are of great importance. They reinforced ideas of the stagnation and decline of the government, gave reasonably satisfactory explanations as to why American interests were not as successful as many had speculated, and the combined issues of bureaucratic mismanagement and the upheaval of the Taiping provided Americans with an indication of the scale of the damage done to the strength and capability of the central state. What resulted was a consistent image of China failing to live up to the standards of its past glory and contemporary expectation. While Americans overlooked the culpability of foreigners in destabilizing China as a result of the opium trade, the rhetoric surrounding the idea of governmental failure continued to play into the notion that the observable flaws of the imperial system could be addressed and solved given the right amount of access. These failings were viewed to be more easily confronted than the issue

---

71 W. S. W. Ruschenberger, *Notes and Commentaries During a Voyage to Brazil and China in the Year 1848* (Richmond, VA: Macfarlane & Fergusson, 1854), 182.
of deeper social and cultural “failures” of the Chinese, namely debates over the proper role of men and women in Chinese and American societies.

**Gender Inversion and the Issue of Chinese Femininity**

Whereas outside observers convinced themselves that gender roles were clearly defined and nearly always followed in the United States, Chinese actions that ran counter to American expectations in terms of the “appropriate” relationships between men and women added further range to arguments over the extent of issues in Chinese society that may have played a part in undermining the nation’s strength on the world stage. In particular, they singled out Chinese men for their lack of proper masculinity, or instances of masculine “inversion” on a number of fronts. Militarily these men were presented as ineffective and weak – particularly owing to their loss to the British in 1842. Travelers often referred to Chinese laborers in their accounts as “boys” regardless of their age or status. At the same time Americans criticized Chinese men as lazy and for exploiting the physical labor of lower-class women based on their regular observations of female workers, at times with children in tow. This conflicted with the ideal of American “republican motherhood,” emphasizing the role of women as wives, helpmates, and mothers, not as field workers. And finally, elite men were also accused of prohibiting women from carrying out their “natural” functions through cloistering, arranged marriages, concubinage, and the practice of foot binding. These criticisms provide the lens for understanding the gender roles that Americans assumed should be normative for all societies. In addition, they indicate

---

72 It is clear that the ideal of Republican Motherhood was considered a middle and upper-class phenomenon in the United States, as whether in factories or on farms, lower-class women in the United States performed great quantities of manual labor. Even with the rise of the influence of female missionaries, as Joseph Henning notes, men were expected to have political interaction while women were to intervene in the domestic realm as “diplomats of domesticity.” Joseph Henning, *Outposts of Civilization: Race, Religion, and the Formative Years of American-Japanese Relations* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 37.
social arenas where Americans expected to change Chinese society – by the Chinese voluntarily emulating the American example or through direct intervention on the part of foreigners.

Whether it was China’s loss to the British in the First Opium War, or the persistent dangers the imperial government faced from the Taiping, these large-scale conflicts served to further highlight one of the key differences that critics determined existed between American and Chinese governmental authority: military strength. They greatly maligned Chinese military prowess in all forms of correspondence and reporting. When it came to the swiftness with which the British overwhelmed Chinese forces, “The Chinese,” Allen concluded, “being inexperienced in the tactics of modern warfare, soon found themselves overpowered by British arms, and were not disposed to continue long so unequal a contest.” William Abbott presented an even less forgiving assessment of the failings of the Chinese military during the war:

The superiority of European military arrangements seems to have been signally displayed. How wonderful, that so small a force should have been able to carry terror into the very heart of the celestial empire. But these brilliant successes had not so far called forth any specific overtures from the defeated and terrified Chinese, nor awakened a conviction of their own inability to compete with their formidable enemy.

While singular Chinese troops were capable of “individual bravery,” inferior tactics and weapons made Chinese military force, as a whole, inconsequential in their estimation. Indeed, American officials supposed that the Chinese themselves had “little confidence in the efficiency of Chinese soldiers.” Despite a Taiping general being compared to a “European tactician,” one official noted that it was not the “superior bravery or valor” of the Taiping, but it was rather the

---

73 Allen, *Opium Trade*, 54.
75 James Biddle to James Buchanan, January 8, 1846, ADPP, Vol. 2, 357.
76 Caleb Cushing to Abel Upshur, May 25, 1844, ADPP, Vol. 1, 288.
ineffectiveness of the Qing military caused by the “Tartar’s [Manchu] venality” that allowed the Taiping to achieve victories.77

How was the perceived weakness of the Chinese military relevant to the way Americans represented the Chinese in terms of their own national interest? In her discussion of American expansionism in *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire*, Amy Greenberg claims that a tension existed between martial and restrained versions of manhood, and that this tension was expressed in the ways that Americans advocated expanding national control (e.g., filibusters vs. the educational civilizing mission).78 This tension existed within the criticisms leveled against Chinese military forces – whether to exert U.S. military power over the Chinese or maintain strict neutrality. Those in favor of a more overt military policy toward the Chinese, akin to the British, asserted that only military force could ensure American rights in the region. Henry Brownell reiterated this common notion that the Chinese military could not put up much resistance to foreign military endeavors. “The military organization of the Chinese is exceedingly weak and inefficient, the standing army being ill-disciplined and worse armed, and the militia a mere rabble, utterly incompetent to resist the attack of regular troops.”79 Yet, others asserted that this control did not necessarily have to be exerted through an outright attack, whereas a “force and display” was all that was needed to convince the Chinese of American military superiority, according to Robert Murphy’s letter to the secretary of state near the beginning of the Second Opium War.80 Interestingly, over a decade earlier at the conclusion of

---

77 Humphrey Marshall to Secretary of State, February 8, 1853, ADPP, Vol. 4, 19; and Robert Murphy to William Marcy, September 1, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 7, 322.
80 Robert Murphy to Secretary of State, December 27, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 13, 93.
the First Opium War, Ambassador Caleb Cushing wrote to his superiors in a similar vein of opinion, “two things only have imposing effect on the Chinese, great show . . . and real force.”

These comments regarding the usefulness of military force were further supported by the observation that Chinese troops were often “held in awe by the superiority of European discipline.” American warships could be used to serve as “floating credentials” to bolster diplomatic goals in the area. Shaw maintained a similar notion of the naval capabilities of American and European governments. He asserted that the current naval force of foreign ships in the region had the capability to beat a Chinese force five times as large because of their superiority and the inferiority of the Qing navy. Other officials advocated for the maintenance of a “strict policy of self-defense” and neutrality, especially when dealing with the Taiping. Being a “careful observer of the progress of the revolution,” Marshall suggested that “I see nothing at present to induce the United States to depart . . . from the policy towards China heretofore observed.” While both the interventionist and neutralist perspectives found their place within the discourse, those advocating for neutrality remained dominant. Despite unauthorized military and material aid being given to European belligerents during the Second Opium War, official American policy was that of seeking “concurrent” benefits, meaning that the United States would stay neutral during the war, but would negotiate to gain increased diplomatic benefits after the war – which is what happened with the United States as a signatory to the Treaty of Tianjin ending the conflict. Essentially, the diplomatic corps worked from a

---

81 Caleb Cushing to John Calhoun, May 25, 1844, ADPP, Vol. 2, 270
83 Peter Parker to William Marcy, June 30, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 6, 107.
84 Shaw, Journals, 191.
85 Robert McLane to William Marcy, May 4, 1854, ADPP, Vol. 5, 32.
87 Peter Parker to William Marcy, December 12, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 13, 73.
perspective of economic gain without military expenditure under the pretense that the complete collapse of Chinese military strength was all but inevitable.

Despite the predominance of a neutral stance when contemplating military intervention in China, this perception was not at all driven by a belief that Chinese military forces were formidable in any way. On the contrary, the universal belief among Americans was that these forces were laughably outdated and unprepared, in addition to lacking the martial capabilities of their foreign counterparts. The Chinese military not only represented no threat but it also served as an indication of the overall weakness of the current regime. Macaulay recounted seeing a fort along the river near Canton and remarked, “they are badly constructed as places of defence [sic],” but that, “they present, however, a quite picturesque appearance, and add greatly to the effect of this otherwise uninteresting part of the river.”

Thus, the building was more useful as decorative architecture than it was as a sign of military and state power. He was not only critical of the defensive abilities of the Chinese, but he also suggested that if the troops had more “courage” militarily, they could easily oust the Portuguese from Macau. It was clear to him that since Macau was still in the hands of a small number of Portuguese, that the requisite courage was lacking among the Chinese military. Samuel Wells Williams consistently denigrated the ability of the Chinese army. He stated, “their [the Chinese] reputation as an unwarlike people is ancient and general among their neighbors,” and that the prior Mongol and current Manchu dynasties, “all despised the effeminate braggadocio of the Chinese troops, and easily overcame them in war, but were themselves conquered in their turn in peace.” Indeed, many writers attempted to create a distinction between the military prowess of the Manchu and

---

88 Macaulay, Kathay, 55.
89 Ibid., 81.
90 Williams, Middle Vol. II, 158.
the weakness of the Chinese as a means to understand how the Qing could simultaneously maintain such extensive power in its historical conquest of the region while at the same time lose so thoroughly to the British. The *New York Tribune* reported during the Taiping uprising, “We hear of no Tartar [Manchu] leaders, yet it remains to be seen whether one of the bravest and most conquering races of Asia will tamely submit to the wholesale massacre of its fellow countrymen, by a race so feeble and inhabiting so rich a country as the Chinese.”91 And even after the First Opium War, Sears’ *Pictorial* account made note that “The Tartar soldiers are far more effective than the Chinese, as they are warlike by nature, trained to arms, and regularly organized; whereas, the Chinese merely constitute a militia, as they dwell at their own homes, clothe and arm themselves according to their own fancy, and are very seldom required for actual service.”92 Brownell applied the most direct criticism, noting that despite efforts to maintain Manchu traditional “military spirit,” instead the “descendants of those who introduced it having contracted the effeminate habits of the country of their adoption” had lost their martial prowess.93 This idea of a feminine or feeble force overcoming and incorporating a martial force by non-military means shows the extent to which Americans attempted to explain how a people known for their military prowess, the Manchu, could be weakened by their control over the majority Han Chinese population. Williams continued on to challenge the bravery of Chinese troops in general, stating that, “The exhibition of courage among Chinese troops is not, however, always deferred to the time when they run away, though it is doubtless much easier to wear their bravery on their backs, as some in other countries do the cross about the neck.”94 And he claimed that the Chinese were equally ineffective at defensive military actions, stating that, “The

---

92 Sears, *Pictorial*, 147.
93 Brownell, *People’s*, 273
Chinese are no better skilled in building proper fortifications than they are in bravely defending them. In utilizing these characterizations of the Chinese military as “effeminate” and cowardly, Williams juxtaposes them with the bravery of European soldiers in an entire chapter outlining the events of the First Opium War, using these representations as a justification for why China lost the war with the British.

But if the Chinese were “outmanned” in the sense of their lack of martial courage, so too were they outgunned when compared to their British counterparts during the war in both training and caliber. Ball assessed the combination of outdated weaponry “lying scattered about rusting on the ground, and some half buried in the earth as if there was no further use for them” and “fantastic dresses” – meaning ineffective uniforms – as an explanation as to why it was “No wonder that fifty English soldiers can put to flight a thousand of the Chinese.” Adding to the sense of military unpreparedness, Barnum’s pamphlet recorded that during some conflicts, Chinese and Manchu forces “advanced to meet the foe with their faces painted like clowns at a circus,” not a description that was likely to inspire terror or awe for the reader. William Lowrie recalled, while observing the training of troops outside of Canton, the problems in using basic weaponry he witnessed.

Nearly every man shut his eyes, and turned away his head when he pulled the trigger. The guns were all matchlocks of the rudest construction, and the touch-hole was large enough to admit a ten-penny-nail, consequently nearly a third of the charge escaped at the wrong end. Each man, after firing, lifted up his right foot, made a bow to the officer commanding, and fell back; but the whole exhibition was poorly calculated to inspire one with respect for their prowess or efficiency.

95 Ibid., 162.
96 Ball, Rambles, 308 and 115.
97 Barnum, Collection, 106
98 Lowrie, Memoirs, 301.
Adding to the lack of “courage,” Ball gave little credit to the military ability of the Chinese. He criticized a group of soldiers he viewed while training for still using bows and arrows, and in doing so he stated that their ability in archery was so poor that, “The arrows generally went over the head of the target beyond, or fell on the ground a few feet short of it.” The failures of Chinese men to defend their homeland were but one of the many instances where weakness and effeminacy were blamed for the crumbling power of the Chinese government and Chinese society.

Figure 22: “Infantry Soldier,” Figure 23: “Military Officer,” and Figure 24: “Chinese Soldier”
– Even in illustrations in books on the subject, Chinese military forces were presented as underprepared in terms of Western uniforms and modern weaponry, or in terms of martial training.

---

99 Ibid., 357.
While Americans denigrated Chinese men in their masculine abilities as soldiers, so too did Americans have problems with larger differences between men and women in Chinese society. On a number of occasions these observers made it clear that Chinese men, or at least segments of them, were weak or even feminine based on the standards of gender that foreigners applied to the Chinese. In an article on the imperial ritual of plowing land on the vernal equinox, the reporter noted that, as a general rule, farmers in China maintained “an enlarged idea of freedom and manliness” and served as an example to imperial functionaries who lacked the appropriate levels of masculinity and liberty.\(^{101}\) Taylor Fitch described the smile on one young Chinese man that he met on his voyage as “the perfection of effeminate loveliness, without detracting from the manly features of the young Chinese.”\(^{102}\) But it was perhaps actors that were the most frequently named group of men to not only look but also act inappropriately feminine. Whether through itinerant performers or in permanent theaters in the larger towns and cities, in traditional Chinese theater all parts – regardless of the gender of the role – were played by men and boys.\(^{103}\) While the prospect of these performances amused most foreign theatergoers, Samuel Wells Williams praised the performances, in particular the female roles that were played “admirably by young boys.”\(^{104}\) So from bureaucrats to actors, there existed at least an undercurrent of views highlighting the ease with which Chinese men could exhibit feminine


\(^{102}\) Fitch W. Taylor, A Voyage Round the World, and Visits to Various Foreign Countries, in the United States Frigate Columbia; Attended by Her Consort the Sloop of War John Adams, and Commanded by Commodore George C. Read. Also Including An Account of the Bombarding and Firing of the Town of Muckie, on the Malay Coast, and the Visit of the Ships to China During the Opium Difficulties at Canton, and Confinement of the Foreigners in that City, Vol. 2 (New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1847), 16.

\(^{103}\) It should be noted that traditional Shakespearian plays were also male-only for the similar reasoning of maintaining the propriety of women by keeping them out of the lascivious profession of acting. This similarity seems to have been missed by contemporary observers. Wu Cuncun writes an engaging work on gender, sexuality, and Chinese theater and imperial connections in: Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China (New York: Routledge, 2004).

\(^{104}\) Wells, Middle, Vol. II, 86; Tiffany, Canton, 209; and, Barnum, Collection, 170.
behaviors, reinforcing the American belief that Chinese men were not as rugged or masculine as they could or ought to have been.

An additional concern that emerged in the debate over the uncertainty of Chinese gender roles was the idea that some Chinese women were too easily broaching the social and cultural divide by being observed performing activities that Americans believed should have remained firmly in the realm of men. Barnum recalled of his visiting “beauty” that “she and the rest of her sex indulge in this luxury [of smoking], as well as the males, the pipe being used by both sexes upon all occasions,” a practice that seemingly conflicted with taboos against women smoking in the United States.105 But it was not only the actions of Chinese men and women that blurred these traditional boundaries. Among the laboring class, Tiffany admitted that he could not tell men and women apart because of the similarities in their manner of dress, also reinforcing the idea that Chinese men acted effeminate, resulting in a bizarre concept of gender neutrality.106 This discourse of the ways in which women impinged upon the masculine domain extended even beyond the living. Both Macaulay and Barnum claimed that Chinese Buddhists believed that there were no women in Buddhist heaven, “for the women who will live in that country are first changed into men.”107 This concept reinforced the idea that women were subordinate to Chinese men, and it added to the notion of the malleability of gender and sex in Chinese society that extended into the afterlife. These writers made it clear that the ways in which Chinese women engaged in the endeavors and activities of men were not only confusing but concerning, especially in the area of physical labor. “Women . . . were ploughing [sic], digging, and cultivating the ground in various ways,” Ball recalled. “It looked singular to see females at work

105 Barnum, Collection, 21.
106 Tiffany, Canton, 46. It is interesting though, that he did not mention the queue hairstyle worn by men as mandated by the Qing government as a clear indication of gendered style for all classes.
107 Macaulay, Kathay, 80; and Barnum, Collection, 47.
on the land, with bare feet and bare legs, broad-brimmed hats, like shields, of basket-work short frocks, and short pants.”

In essence, they looked and acted like men in their work. This sentiment was also shared by Sears in his *Pictorial* guide, who emphasized the unfair nature of the female-male relationship in labor when he stated that in China, “frequently a woman will be seen yoked to a plough, while the machine is guided by a man!”

As much as women laboring fields gained notoriety from these travelers, no group of women garnered the attention of American observers for their manual labor and inversion of gender norms more than the “boat women” who maneuvered their small pilot boats up and down the river from Canton to Macau and Hong Kong. As mentioned previously, more often than not, the these women were the first Chinese that Americans engaged with when arriving in China, and they almost always ended up as a highlight of journal and diary entries, ships logs, and other travel accounts. But like their landlocked counterparts, the boat women were often noted for their masculine behavior. “A greater part of these boats are propelled by females,” Abbott explained, “who, in appearance, are hardly distinguished from the men, being extremely rough and masculine in their manners and habits.” So the fact that these women not only looked but also acted masculine shaped the way in which Americans framed their labor. In Ball’s descriptions, the roles of Chinese men and women were also seen as being contrary to European or American standards. In his first encounter with a Chinese woman, he noted that she had “command of the helm” of the small pilot boat she was sailing toward his ship. Later, while riding in one of these boats, he mused, “we took a boat, *manned* by three Chinese girls.”

---

111 Ball, *Rambles*, 79.
112 Ibid., 102. Emphasis in original.
American musings about the odd situation of the piloting of boats by women focused on the way in which families lived and worked on these boats together. Malcolm recounted that on one of these boats, “The wife steers, while the husband rows, aided by children of both sexes, if they have any. Such as are not quite old enough to row, play about the boat with a great gourd fastened to their waist behind, to secure them from drowning, in case they fall overboard. . . . If there be an infant, it is fastened on the mother's back, like a knapsack, without appearing to impede her motions, or be annoyed by them.” Indeed, much of the confusion noted by these observers was the very conflation of the roles of these boat women as simultaneously mothers and laborers. Macaulay recalled in his own account that a boat woman, “generally with a child fastened to her back,” usually rowed and steered the craft, “which she manages with great dexterity, appearing to work harder, and with better effect, than her lazy lord, (who has generally the bow oar).” Thus, like the plow drivers, Chinese boatmen were shirking their responsibilities of labor, while their wives maintained concurrent domestic and public duties. In his own diary, Preble framed the lives of boat women – or in this case a boat girl – in the context of his own family and of his own expectations of gender roles.

What do you think of a boy two years older than our little Henry, that is eight years old, pulling an oar in a boat all day long to earn his living! Such is the state here by no means uncommon. ‘Twas in a sam pan the other day, where a girl of that age handled an oar for full six miles with the strength & skill of a man. I was ashamed of my manhood allowing myself to be carried with such luxurious ease at the expense of so much labor from so young a specimen of the weaker sex.

It is quite clear from these statements, especially those of Preble, not only that Americans viewed the existence of female Chinese laborers as an affront to “normal” or implied gender roles in

---

terms of what types of labor they could and could not engage in but also that this labor
endangered the masculinity of the observers themselves in their tacit acceptance of such familial
labor organizations through the employment of boat women. These issues of alleged gender
inversion highlight the expectations that these Americans carried with them and imposed upon
their understanding of the Chinese people. Whether it was because of dress or action, or because
of the role that lower class women played as visible laborers in comparison with their cloistered
counterparts in the higher echelons of society, this framework creates a distinct understanding of
how Americans expected men and women to act in relation to each other, regardless of whether
or not that expectation existed as a reality in the United States, and the failings of the Chinese
people to live up to those expectations.

**Chinese Men and the Control of Female Bodies: Cloistering, Foot Binding, and Infanticide**

While lower-class Chinese women performed acts of physical labor believed to be
exclusively male occupations in Europe and America, Ball also contrasted how these acts of
strength by lower-class women were countered by Chinese men through their treatment of upper-
class women. He stated that, upper-class Chinese women in particular, were rarely let out of
their homes – partly as an extension of the practice of foot binding – and that within the home
they did not mix openly with men until they were married. In addition, these women, “when
they see a foreigner approaching their houses, they run in with all possible speed, shut and fasten
the outer gates, and then, retreating, close up and lock fast every door, until they are securely
barricaded inside of the house,” because of warnings from their husbands or fathers of sexual
violence perpetrated by foreigners. Ball noted an interesting development in the relationship between Chinese men and women, and foreigners as well, because in the treaty ports it was becoming fashionable for Chinese women to join their husbands at meals with foreigners as a “venture to observe our [Western] customs,” thereby showing the positive impact that the presence of foreigners was having on the status of women in China. Visions of positive American impacts aside, the debates over cloistering, foot binding, and infanticide carried the same rhetorical structure in American assertions of the problems between the sexes in Chinese society. Americans mobilized each of these issues in similar fashions, first by explaining the cultural reasoning behind each practice, then describing how each was legally or socially enforced, and finally emphasizing the negative impact that each practice had on Chinese women and on Chinese society as a whole.

These discursive themes are important to consider because of their rather specific perception in foreign representations of the orientalized “other.” Rather than eroticizing the bodies of Chinese women, or attempting to physically control them like other colonial powers in different areas, Americans actually criticized the domestic eroticization and control of these women for their own rhetorical benefit, somewhat like contemporary discussions of “harems” in Ottoman culture. But unlike later American excursions in the Philippines or Haiti where critics portrayed the eroticized bodies of local women as a temptation to the moral fortitude of Americans, making them “go native” as a response, the position of the Chinese woman as

---

116 Ball, Rambles, 134.
117 Ibid., 387.
118 Reina Lewis provides an engaging and useful narrative that broadens academic understandings of Orientalism to see the moments where even Turkish women mobilized Western European and American preconceptions of Turks for their own advantage in either reinforcing or deconstructing the harem system at the turn of the twentieth century. Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel, and the Ottoman Harem (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004).
“victim” in her own land made them the perfect target for American aims. Americans did not have to fear the power or influence of a Chinese woman because she had none, and her “degraded” status among her own people, especially in the eyes of missionaries, made her the perfect candidate to be converted to western ideals and religion as a means to improve her own status. Thus, for Americans, Chinese women could only exert social mobility and individual agency within the narrow context of accepting foreign control and influence.

The idea that somehow the Chinese failed in perpetuating “normal” relationships between men and women extended well beyond allegations of the weakness of men and the strength of women. Counterintuitive to these explanations of the diligent work of laboring women, many of the criticisms Americans leveled toward Chinese society concerned the way Chinese men pushed Chinese women into a level of passivity that American observers deemed detrimental. With issues ranging from arranged marriages and cloistering, to the always lurid explanations of the process of foot binding and infanticide, these explanations gave voice and reasoning to how Chinese men could be both effeminate and dominant at the same time. In his chapter describing the “General Appearance” of the Chinese, Tiffany went into great detail specifying his perceptions of the relationship between men and women in Chinese society. He found it interesting that a Chinese man “may treat his wife unkindly, and no one takes her part, yet he is bound by every sacred obligation to pay devotion to his aged mother, to minister to her comforts, and follow her counsels.” He attached this dichotomous and conflicting relationship between men and women to the traditional Confucian structure that required children to obey their parents at all times. But in the case of daughters, he noted how, “A man with a half dozen sons is

---

120 Tiffany, *Canton*, 52.
wealthy, but with the same number of daughters, his poverty is a general subject of pity. In speaking of his offspring one will sometimes say, that he has three children, and if you ask if any are daughters, he will answer yes, four, meaning seven in all, though he does not consider the girls worth mentioning. “121 He categorized these descriptions of male/female inequality with the idea that, “In China you will see one hundred reverses to European customs,” implying that these issues and many others listed were not problems in Western society, but that they prohibited the Chinese from being more like the Europeans.

Shuck extended this distinction between foreign sympathies and domestic failures with her chapter on “Female Degradation.” She began the chapter with the basic assertion that Chinese women were undereducated compared to their male counterparts. “While much money and time are spent in educating the beloved son, the daughter is suffered to grow up in ignorance.”122 She illustrated the subservience of Chinese women and the perceived laziness of Chinese men in comparison to their wives when recounting a story of the now familiar boat women where:

By some means [we] came in contact with a small Chinese boat, in which were seated a man and his wife engaged in fishing. The rudder of the passage boat came in contact with their fishing net. The husband remained quiet in his seat, and despatched [sic] his wife to perform the task. She readily went, and after being some time in the water accomplished her object, and returned to her boat. Her husband was sitting the whole while looking on, and did not pretend to render her the least assistance, although she had to struggle hard to get into the boat again.123

She then described the frequency of female infanticide and the selling of daughters as brides and servants to other families, as further proof of the unfair status of Chinese women.

Unsurprisingly, as a missionary to China, Shuck placed the blame for the poor treatment of

---

121 Ibid, 54.
122 Shuck, Daughters, 163-4.
123 Ibid.
women on Chinese religious practices. “The Great Confucius himself divorced his wife without assigning any reason for doing. Similar cruel and arbitrary treatment towards the weaker sex, has been, up to the present day, characteristic of his numerous followers.”

This statement holds the key to Shuck’s overall view, while still asserting women as the “weaker sex,” she implied that it is the responsibility of society, and men in particular, to prevent the abuse of women. But the immoral structures in place – especially those emanating from Chinese religions – did not stop women from being mistreated. Her solution to the situation was the widespread introduction of Christianity, whereby, “The sad condition of our sex in China can never be alleviated until Christianity triumphs in this cruel land. In connexion [sic] with any thing else than Christianity, there is no hope; for it is that alone that assigns to woman her proper rank in society, and secures her against the encroachments of the stronger sex.”

Christianity, therefore, contained women within their proper social role in both the Western and Chinese contexts, but guaranteed their protection from male controlled “degradation” that Chinese religions allegedly allowed.

How Americans understood the maintenance of this dynamic between “stronger” and “weaker” sexes is perhaps detailed by their lurid fascination with the practice of foot binding among middle and upper-class Chinese women. Tiffany took pity on women who had their feet bound, explaining that, “Soon as the female child is born, its feet are enclosed within shoes and bound firmly round and round, so that no growth can ensue. Nature endeavoring to have its way, can only produce exquisite torture as each attempt [to grow] proves useless.”

Whereas other travel writers infrequently mentioned the unequal role of women in Chinese society, Shuck

---

124 Ibid., 166.
125 Shuck, Scenes, 168.
126 Tiffany, Canton, 51.
dedicated entire chapters to subjects such as the “Little Feet of the Chinese.” She remarked that foot binding “is supposed by some that it was designed for the sole purpose of rendering women more easily confined to their home, and kept under the constant subjugation of men.”\textsuperscript{127} She determined that the practice itself was sporadically practiced by women from various classes, but that “Tartar” or Manchu women did not bind their feet. As a foreigner in China she described how seeing foot bound women, “excites sympathy,” for their, “gait is indescribably awkward and it seems to us painful and uneasy, but these appearances in the eyes of the Chinese constitute the great beauty of the custom.”\textsuperscript{128} Here she clearly established a distinction between foreigners being sympathetic to Chinese women, and the Chinese men who were willing to induce pain in order to create a perception of feminine beauty. Yet, Shuck’s account highlights neatly the customary means through which Americans approached the topic, firstly trying to understand the cultural, social, and historical motives behind the practice, then describing – in often gruesome detail – the process, and finally Americans did not shy away from moralizing their outrage at the existence of the practice and the harm they believe it caused both individual women and Chinese society.

Besides the clear observation of the cultural differences between majority Han women being subjected to foot binding and ruling Manchu and other minorities refraining from the practice, most American observers agreed that the continuation of foot binding was a result of the perpetual dominance of Chinese men over women in the name of “beauty.” Ball wrote of the procedure that, “One would suppose that the pain [Chinese women] undergo while subjected to the bandages, and the discomfort they endure ever afterwards, would deter them from this unnatural practice. But the Chinese gentlemen are very partial to this mincing, hitching,

\textsuperscript{127} Shuck, Daughters, 160.  
\textsuperscript{128} Shuck, Scenes, 161.
uncertain gait in their females, which, I suppose is the principal incentive towards perpetuating this custom.”\textsuperscript{129} Fitch asserted that the results of foot binding, “little feet and swelled ankles, and nature tortured and dislocated, are regarded as the standard of beauty.”\textsuperscript{130} And Barnum added, while describing the foot size of his “Chinese beauty,” that “the golden lilies,’ as the Chinese poetically call the small compressed feet of their ladies, from the supposed resemblance of their impressions to the leaves of their favorite lotus, or water-lily,” was the ideal of beauty maintained by the Chinese, but prohibited among the “Tartars” by the emperor.\textsuperscript{131} While some authors did make conciliatory gestures comparing the use of corsets among American women and its propensity to reconfigure the female form, the extent of the obvious deformation of the foot for the purposes of feminine beauty that fit the eroticized desires of Chinese men only further fueled the belief that Chinese culture required outside intervention as a remedy.

\textbf{Figure 25}: “Foot of an Ancient Chinese Lady/Foot of a Modern Chinese Lady” Sears’ comparison of the “Ancient” and Modern” feet of Chinese women shows that Americans held a historicized understanding of the evolution of the practice of foot binding.\textsuperscript{132}

Although Americans may have disapproved of the motives behind foot binding, that did not stop them from exerting their fascination regarding the process in the extreme details

\textsuperscript{129} Ball, \textit{Rambles}, 289.
\textsuperscript{130} Fitch, \textit{Voyage}, Vol. 2, 92.
\textsuperscript{131} Barnum, \textit{Collection}, 21.
\textsuperscript{132} Sears, \textit{Pictorial}, 282.
provided in their writings. Sears recalled the observations of one American doctor who had the rare opportunity to examine a bound foot free from its wrappings. “The appearance of these distorted extremities, which are merely tapering stumps, is most disgusting to an American eye; at a very early age the foot, below the instep, is forced into a line with the leg, the toes are then doubled down under the sole of the foot, the big toe being made to overlap the others; bandages are then applied, with an incredible amount of pressure, which in the Chinese language is termed killing the foot, and for six weeks the child suffers intolerable agony.” The description continues on to describe the bound feet of adult women as “a mass of filth and abhorrent humors” and to the American naval surgeon inspecting the foot, he explained it as “more disgusting, than anything he had ever witnessed in the dissecting room.”

Lowrie also provided an extensive recounting of having “had an opportunity of seeing a “small foot” uncovered.” A Chinese woman went to a foreign physician’s office because of a malady caused by the binding. Lowrie explained:

The sight was by no means pleasant. All the toes except the largest were turned under the sole of the foot; the instep was greatly elevated, and the hollow between the heel and the ball of the foot much deeper than in the natural state. All the women here, excepting the nuns, have their feet thus unnaturally compressed, and in consequence, you never see a woman able to walk with even tolerable ease and grace. They all go hobbling about like cripples, and frequently have to depend upon an umbrella, or the shoulder of a female attendant whose feet are not quite so cruelly hampered as their own, to support their steps.

His account alleged that all Chinese women were subjected and subjected themselves to the process of foot binding to various degrees, though it is clear that this was not the case. But Lowrie’s over exaggeration of the popularity or use of bound feet sheds some light on the larger patterns of representation regarding Chinese women, and the generalizations that emphasized

---

133 Sears, *Pictorial*, 282
issues of class and ethnicity, that American pundits employed in their discussions of the overall impact of bound feet on the capabilities of these “hobbled” women.

Figure 26: “Appearance of the bones of a foot when compressed” and Figure 27: “Cramped Foot and Shoe” - Williams takes a turn to the scientific, giving a physical representation of the effects of foot binding to visually reinforce the effects of the process, which he determined were not as “injurious” as previous authors had described, though Bridgman’s illustration indicates a much more physiologically deforming process compared to that asserted by Williams.  

One of the primary impacts that bound feet had in the observations of these Americans was the elementary disadvantage that it placed on the mobility of these women. The inability of these women to easily walk without the aid of canes, servants, or sedan chairs threw into question their value to Chinese society as dutiful mothers and wives. While an older woman with bound feet sewed along a wall, Ruschenberger viewed “another of her sex, mincing along as if she had suffered amputation at the ankles and painfully stepped on the extremities of her leg bones.” Ball recounted that when he unexpectedly came upon a group of Chinese women, they “Tottled along on their small feet, like so many infants learning to walk” when he surprised them with his presence. Eliza Bridgman also made the comparison between the capabilities of

---

135 Williams, Middle, Vol. II, 39; and, Bridgman, Daughters, 80.
136 Ruschenberger, Notes, 150
137 Ball, Rambles, 359.
children as being the result of foot binding. She wrote, “One of the females had the smallest feet I have yet seen, about as large as those of a child three or four years old. It was with great difficulty that she could get down stairs.” Likewise, the difficulties placed upon these women was such that they required additional assistance to perform the basic task of walking down the street. “We passed two Chinese women attended by servants,” Taylor made note, “who were walking, rather were waddling through the less crowded part of Macao on their little feet, with each a staff in her hand to enable her to preserve her balance.” The People of China suggested to readers that the “cramped” style of binding combined the dual purpose of reinforcing class differences by ensuring that elite women could not perform labor, and through the perpetuation of masculine proclivities for the style of walking and size of foot that resulted from binding. “Their tottering gait, as they hobble along on the heel of the foot, is compared to the waving of a willow, agitated by the wind!” The book went one step further, implying that the lack of education for these women constricted their minds as the bindings constricted their feet. And even among the poor the idea of bound feet as an identifier of class was observed to be important. Sears alleged that if a poor family had more than one daughter, that it was likely one would be “deprived of pedestrian power” by her parents in the hopes of marrying her, and by extension the family, into a higher class. So in addition to the perpetuation and pain of foot binding, Americans were deeply concerned at the larger issues of the limitations of physical mobility that the practice imparted on Chinese women as well as the limitations on female class mobility implied by having/not having bound feet.

---

138 Bridgman, Daughters, 44.
140 Sunday-School Union, People of China, 194.
141 Sears, Pictorial, 283 The Anti-Slavery Bugle, in an article on “Women in China” also cited Sears’ notion of being “deprived of pedestrian power” in their allegations that women had no worse place than in China. “Women in China,” Anti-Slavery Bugle (6 Oct. 1848), 4.
Samuel Wells Williams took a distinct interest in female foot binding. He asserted that, “The practice of compressing the feet, so far as investigation has gone, is more an inconvenient than a dangerous custom,” practiced among female members of all classes as a way to be “fashionable.” Adding that:

The pain is said to be severe for about six weeks at first, and a recurrence now and then is felt in the sole; but the evident freedom from distress exhibited in the little girls who are seen walking or playing in the streets, proves that the amount of suffering, and injurious effects upon life and health resulting from this strange fashion, are perhaps not so great as has been imagined.

Thus, Williams attributed a high level of vanity among Chinese women through these “deforming” acts, and he asserted that foot binding was not as “injurious” as other writers claimed, but he did concede that it was commonly accepted that Chinese men created the custom of binding to “keep their wives from gadding [about],” reasserting notions of male subjugation of women through foot binding expressed by other writers. The theme of subjugation reemerged later in Williams’ text in his depictions of Chinese men preventing women from attaining an education, and through the systems of bride purchasing and concubinage. He did cite that women who lived in the countryside, and who were less prone to follow urban “fashions,” “are of a robust race, and contrast strikingly with the sickly looking, little footed ladies of the city.”

Mobilizing the fashion of rural women as a possible solution for foot binding, he also explained the role of missionaries in China in establishing schools to teach Chinese women not to change their role in Chinese society, but to instruct them in “their rightful place as the companions of men, and can teach their children the duties they own to their God, themselves, and their

---

143 Ibid., 41.
144 Ibid., 38 and 54-60.
country.”\textsuperscript{146} In reinforcing Chinese women’s role within society as good civic mothers, they would become the primary motivators for conversion.

While foot binding may have limited the physical mobility of Chinese women, Americans also viewed the practice of cloistering among middle- and upper-class Chinese with great suspicion. The near total lack of interaction with Chinese women above the working class sheds light on many opinions of the failings of the male/female relationships in China. Of upper class women, namely the wives and daughters of Chinese merchants he dealt with, Shaw recounted an interesting series of encounters, where he knew women were present in the home, but were never seen. “Every thing of a domestic concern is strictly concealed, and, though [the merchant’s] wives, mistresses, and daughters are commonly there, none of them are visible.”\textsuperscript{147} Shaw claimed that the only value Chinese men place on their wives and concubines, a system that he described as polygamy, was their ability to produce male offspring. “A man is pleased with his favorite wife and with his Maker in proportion to the number of sons she bears him; no account is made of daughters.”\textsuperscript{148} The idea of the cloistering of upper class women by their husbands was only further reinforced by Shaw’s claim that in religious worship, “the same ceremonies are observed by the female worshippers, none of whom but the lower sort are allowed to frequent public places.”\textsuperscript{149}

Shaw was not the only American who noticed the limited interaction held between foreigners, who were almost entirely men until foreign communities were firmly established in the treaty ports, and Chinese women. Sears pulled no punches in his allegations of the poor status in which Chinese women could be found, or more accurately where they could not be

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., Vol. II, 374.
\textsuperscript{147} Shaw, \textit{The Journals}, 179.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 198.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 196.
found. “Woman is placed in a more degraded position in Asia than in any other quarter of the

globe, and we believe that in China her humiliation is complete, by the extent to which

civilization and education has been carried in all connected, with the male population of this vast

and mighty empire. In no rank is she regarded as the companion of man, but is treated, and

looked upon solely, as the slave of his caprice and passion.” To these foreigners, the lack of

women in the public space was not only strange but oftentimes reported to be unsettling. During

a festival, Ruschenberger noted that the streets may be “crowded with men,” but that “it seemed

strange to me that such amusement should be enjoyed by men alone; without women to

participate in the festivities.” It was not only to social pressures, but legal ones as well, that

Americans traced these public limitations on women’s access. “The laws of China,” Spalding

wrote, “are very severe in the punishment of female offenders - 'Women's Rights' are below par –

and it is a land which would not be adapted for the residence of the strong-minded women of our

own country, Chinese prophecy having foretold of the downfall of their empire by the

machinations of women.” Spalding clearly used the construct of an educated female

constituency in the United States as a counter to the status of Chinese women, again citing

historical precedence for cultural stagnation. Perhaps that is why the American Sunday-School

Union alleged that to prevent “usurping the power of the emperor,” the Chinese empress, “is

confined to the palace, and to acts of benevolence,” thus relegating her role to the private sphere

like her female counterparts in other classes.

150 Sears, *Pictorial*, 281.
151 Ruschenberger, *Notes*, 147.
152 J. W. Spalding, *The Japan Expedition: Japan and Around the World – An Account of Three Visits to the

Japanese Empire, with Sketches of Madeira, St. Helena, Cape of Good Hope, Mauritius, Ceylon, Singapore, China,

and Loo-Choo* (New York: Bedfield, 1855), 196.
Even with the more legalistic or cultural explanations as to why Chinese women of the upper classes remained cloistered, the persistent idea of the capriciousness of Chinese men, in their desire to maintain control over the lives and bodies of their wives and daughters, remained a key concern. Barnum explained that the limitations placed on these women were the result of the “watchful jealousy of a Chinese gentleman [which] excludes from even a casual glance at the females of his family, not only his male friends, but his most intimate male relations.” Chinese male desire not only placed unreasonable physical expectations on the bodies of Chinese women, but it contained those bodies firmly within the innermost levels of the domestic sphere.

For foreigners the most obvious limitations that cloistering placed upon Chinese women were the result of brief interactions when they came into contact with cloistered women. They often noted on these occasions that the desire to remain separate from men, and foreign men in particular, was so great that women rapidly fled the area to maintain their distance – bound feet or not. While visiting a foreign school established for education, Ball recalled, “The Chinese [men] began to gather around and gaze at us as if we were wild beasts, and some female heads very cautiously peeped out from behind the doors and corners on the opposite side of the street.” But from cautious peeping to outright fear – and amusement on his part – he later explained having accidentally come upon an upper-class Chinese woman near her home. When seeing the foreigners she returned to her home and, “As she entered the door, she ventured to look over her shoulder, and, forgetting the high threshold, she tumbled headlong into the house, but quickly regained her feet, which, with her arms, were flying in all directions.” Taylor wrote a similar story of accidentally surprising a number of the “curious sex” in China. While

154 Barnum, Collection, 6.
155 Ball, Rambles, 107.
156 Ibid., 280-282.
observing him near their homes, these women did not notice another foreign man in the area, and “as he came up so unexpectedly and near to them; and in again to their inner apartment they would dash, as rapidly as their small feet and waddling gait would allow them.”157 The social morays of cloistering and the physical limitations of foot binding contributed to larger limitations on Chinese women in the eyes of these observers. As Taylor noted that these women were “curious” in their drive to observe foreigners despite taboos, so too did Preble recall the “genuine feminine curiosity” he witnessed at groups of women who still managed to peer at foreigners while covering their faces after being caught unawares by his traveling companions.158

Despite these instances indicating unfulfilled “curiosity” among Chinese women, along with foot binding discussions on the cloistering of Chinese women Americans applied the same rhetorical arguments about the ill-treatment of women and the negative results that the practice had on women as victims and society as a secondary casualty. The results ranged from the physical to the moral, as in one instance the Rutland County Herald reported on a “Frightful Accident” when a firecracker used in a theatre resulted in a fire that took the lives of sixty Chinese women in adjacent buildings because they could or would not leave their homes.159 Conversely, Wells alleged that the strict separation of the sexes resulted in increased immorality among men. Because men could go about in the public space without the watchful and moral gaze of women, he explained, this made Chinese men more susceptible to the vices of gambling and opium use.160 Americans even derided Chinese men who maintained positive relations with foreigners, such as the noted merchant Howqua, for their relationships with women. As Eliza Bridgman described, his wives “although handsomely dressed, [they] carry in their manner and

158 Preble, Diary, 105, 54/1/2.
160 Wells, Middle, Vol. 2, 53.
bearing a sense of inferiority, which it is rather painful to witness. They regard themselves and
act in a subordinate capacity. They are sometimes purchased for a sum of money, which varies I
apprehend according to their youth and beauty; and their condition is so humiliating, that in some
cases it is a state of servitude, and they may be discharged at the pleasure or caprice of their
lords.”161 Bridgman also applied the familiar notion that physical isolation resulted in mental
deprivation. “Not treated as a companion by her husband, untaught in books, what are her
resources? Alas! her mind becomes a prey to unmeaning superstitious rites, her temper often
sour and irritable, and her household a scene of jargon and discord. No wonder that in
subsequent life, after such a long season of subjection, she becomes herself in turn the tyrant.”162
While wide ranging, the negative impacts of cloistering were believed to be a real and
continuous problem among the Chinese.

How and why Chinese women found themselves within this system of isolation remained
at the core of many of the debates over foot binding and cloistering. The result was general
critiques of Chinese marriages and the practice of concubinage among the upper class as no
better than female slavery or prostitution in the ways in which Americans believed women were
sold and exchanged. Indeed, many of these arguments describing economic commodification of
women resulted in being “degraded” as a result of the process. Sears explained the basic premise
of these exchanges as, “The women, or rather girls, from the lower classes, who are good-
looking (according to the Chinese ideas of beauty), are purchased frequently by rich men for
handmaids, or concubines, when about twelve or fourteen years of age.163 As to how the
Chinese put a price on “beauty,” he added that the families facilitated the sale of infants,

161 Bridgman, Daughters, 51.
162 Ibid., 80.
163 Sears, Pictorial, 281.
children, and young women as servants, concubines, and even wives through the use of go-
beetwens. “Her shoe is sent to the gentleman, that he may be enabled to judge of the dimensions
of her crippled feet - the smallness of the foot being a Chinaman's beau ideal of perfection.”164
Macaulay alleged that unwanted girls were “sold” by their parents “for the worst purposes,” so as
to relieve the family of the financial burden to care for them.165 And Sears concluded:

These degraded females are, at an early age, purchased from their parents, for prices
varying from five to one hundred dollars, and are retained in bondage until worn out by
disease and profligacy; they are then turned adrift by their vile owners, with scarcely
sufficient covering for their bodies to protect them from the weather, or answer the
purpose of common decency. Their career of vice is usually commenced at ten years of
age, and they seldom live to number twenty-five years: in short, the profligacy practised
[sic] in China, unabashed, by all classes, is most appalling and heart-rending to an
undepraved character.166

Thus, establishing foreigners as “undepraved” in contention with the “depraved” character of the
Chinese, Sears’ illustration furthers the dichotomy between the two groups in their treatment and
expectations of women. Yet, the Democratic Banner even reported an instance of the breaking
of the boundaries between foreign and Chinese over the issue of the sale of women. The article
began, “The degraded position of females in China is well known,” implying that the reader was
expected to at least have a tenuous understanding of their status. From this assessment, the
article recounted the story of a mandarin official attempting to purchase an English lady in Hong
Kong from her husband, thereby reinforcing the narrative that to Chinese men women were
commodities, though in this instance the issue was played for comedic rather than shock value.
Upon learning that the mandarin had offered up to $7,000, the English lady was amused at
learning her value.167 The implication of the account confirms that Chinese men truly did

---

164 Ibid., 289.
165 Macaulay, Kathay, 144.
166 Sears, Pictorial, 202.
purchase women, but the readers were left feeling secure that this fine “English lady” did not have to fear falling into a “degraded” position regardless of her purported value.

Americans targeted marriage, at least in the manner in which the Chinese carried it out, as the institution that reinforced all of the failings in the relationship between men and women in China. Whether it was the perpetuation of foot binding as an indication of status and eroticism, the economic exchanges behind arranged marriages and concubinage, or the enforcement of cloistering as a means to reinforce the dominance of the husband, marriage in China was replete with examples that Americans responded to negatively. “In marriage,” the People of China noted, “the females of China are merely the passive subjects of parental authority,” and as such arranged marriages were simply an extension of filial piety.¹⁶⁸ But even within this seemingly cut and dry system of exchange uncertainty existed. As intermediaries were the primary arrangers of these marriages, bride and groom usually did not know each other until the moment of the wedding itself. Bridgman described a joyous response to the first meeting of a bride and groom during their ceremony. “The pair being seated together, the veil is lifted, and the groom for the first time beholds the features of his bride. In this case, the young man for some reason unknown to observers, found it difficult to conceal his feelings, which seemed ready every moment to break forth in merriment.”¹⁶⁹ Allegedly, negative reactions on the part of the groom to the appearance or demeanor of the bride were not uncommon. Regardless of the reaction of the groom, Americans were uncomfortable with the notion of arranged marriages, particularly without the consent of the people getting married.

These exchanges of women left many American observers wondering whether or not marriage and concubinage in China was little more than slavery. The New York Tribune’s article

¹⁶⁸ American Sunday-School Union, People of China, 195.
¹⁶⁹ Bridgman, Daughters, 210.
on “Slavery in China” alleged that there were over one-hundred thousand slaves in Canton alone, mostly women in “harems” of concubines. The article went on to claim that debtors selling their daughters, orphans being sold into the system, or outright kidnapping, made infanticide rare in the city, because even unwanted daughters could be sold.170 The Anti-Slavery Bugle, in an article comparing the treatment of women around the world, maintained that parents in China could “bargain” for their daughters marriage, that women could be sold and were subject to the whims of all others, that they could be further sold as concubines or prostitutes, and that many unhappy women were driven to suicide as a result of continued mistreatment. It included the explanation that the combined unhappiness that these women experienced in traditional Chinese society would make them more amenable to conversion to Christianity in the belief that they would be treated better.171 The People of China also contained descriptions of the unhappiness of marriage contributing to women taking their own lives, and sometimes taking the lives of others. “Suicides frequently take place among the women of China; and they frequently attempt to poison those by whom their earthly happiness is destroyed.”172 The allegations and fear of the extent to which Chinese women found themselves subjugated – or enslaved as some writers implied – found new impetus when a Chinese man working in the United States was accused of buying a Chinese woman for $90 “where she occupies the double posts of servant and mistress.” While she was eventually “released from servitude,” the concern that the Chinese could bring with them a new, or at least different, form of slavery separate from that of chattel slavery is an interesting fear in the context of pre-emancipation American society.173

172 American Sunday-School Union, People of China, 196.
These issues concerning the cultural failings of the Chinese in relation to the treatment of women, young and old, rich and poor, emphasized the notion that the subordinate role of these women damaged both the physical and moral capabilities of China. Looking at the idealized Chinese woman, compared to the culturally relative American exemplar of helpmate and educator to children, the notion that Chinese women were less important than men found no greater reinforcement than over the issue of infanticide in China. The elimination of infants through exposure or direct action, a process almost entirely relegated to female children in China according to observers, shocked and outraged Americans both in the ways that it was performed and the reasoning behind it. The prevalence of female infanticide was seen as the furthest extent of the failings of China in its undervaluation of women.

The influences behind why Americans determined that the Chinese were susceptible to the “barbaric” practice of infanticide were twofold. Firstly, they noted the importance of the Confucian model of filial piety, which emphasized the relevance of male offspring to maintain the family lineage. “Boys . . . are the pride of a Chinaman's heart,” Barnum wrote, “for they will perpetuate the family name, may become great men in their native land, to reflect honor on their parents, either alive or dead, and after they have passed away, will sacrifice to their names and those of their ancestors.”174 The American Sunday-School Union concluded, “Infanticide is exclusively limited to the female sex, and it may be looked upon as a proof of the degradation of females in China . . . They are not allowed the confidence of their husbands, nor to sit at table with them, nor to have a voice in domestic concerns, nor to visit the temples of prayer.”175 Macaulay even noted regional differences in the propensity of parents to perform the act of infanticide. “‘Puellacide’ [infanticide specifically targeted toward female offspring] is said to

174 Barnum, *Collection*, 89.
prevail to a greater extent in [Shanghai] than even in Canton itself. Whist sons are considered an honor, and their growth looked upon as a matter of profit, the giving birth to a daughter is proportionally a disgrace.”

Secondarily to the cultural motivators to apply infanticide as a form of post-natal sex selection, whether as a result of foot binding or a lack of social mobility, daughters in middle- and upper-class families were usually viewed as an economic hindrance to the family, costing labor capacity and dowry value and having little economic value in return. Likewise, for lower-class families there was the additional burden of simply being able to afford to take care of the child through to marriage age. On this note, Ball wrote, “infanticide here prevails to a great extent. They destroy only the female infants. They say the males are able to work and support themselves, but the females, with their small feet, are comparatively helpless; and, if their parents are not affluent, they remain an encumbrance through life.” In their analysis of the life of peasants in China, the American Sunday-School Union wrote that “Taught by the State that parents have power over the lives of their children, they frequently destroy their female offspring, in order to escape the trouble of bringing them up. This inhumanity, this dreadful crime, may likewise be superinduced by poverty.”

As with the process of foot binding, moral outrage at the prospect of infanticide did not overcome the morbid fascination of these observers to detail the means by which the process was carried out. “Children are often exposed to die in the streets, especially in seasons of famine,” Bridgman bluntly stated. Barnum also concluded that a high number of unwanted children were left on the streets to die of exposure, “but if of good personal appearance, [the infants] are

---

176 Macaulay, Kathay, 153.
177 Ball, Rambles, 298.
178 American Sunday-School Union, People of China, 136.
179 Bridgman, Daughters, 197.
taken up by those making it a business, taught numerous accomplishments, such as embroidery, music and painting, and when old enough, sold as handmaids or personal servants to the wealthy,” and thus still remained subject to the whims of the economic exchange of women in China.\textsuperscript{180} Spartan levels of exposure were not the only means detailed by these foreign travelers, as suffocation was another method emphasized for its expedient use. Macaulay lamented, “the female infant is generally allowed but a few moments existence in “‘this breathing world,” and is usually strangled by the hands of its unnatural mother immediately upon its birth.”\textsuperscript{181} While Ball explained the process as, “the manner of strangling usually is by a piece of paper, wet in vinegar, and laid over the mouth and nose of the infant” so as to quickly perform the act.\textsuperscript{182} Eliza Bridgman took her analysis of infanticide further, citing suffocation of proof of the wholly negative influence of the treatment of women in general on Chinese girls.

> When we look at woman's condition in China, in all its aspects, we need not wonder that before her female offspring have drawn but few inhalations of a heathen atmosphere, with the prospect placed before the child which the mother knows, and feels in all its force, she quenches the fire of maternal love, and closes its existence by suffocation. This act I imagine is usually committed immediately after birth. They do not wait for the eye to sparkle, and the smile of the expanding infant to work upon the maternal bosom – this would be too much for a mother's heart, even for a heathen Chinese mother.\textsuperscript{183}

Adding to this notion of societally sanctioned parental indifference, Lowrie explained a process of infanticide by drowning. “It is called ‘heih-sz,’ or death by drowning, for when the child is born, if it be a girl, the parents or assistants often heap water on it, in pretence of washing it, but in such a way that it dies!”\textsuperscript{184} These descriptions, while different in their methods, all emphasize the notion that female infants were disposable in Chinese society, and that those who practiced

\begin{footnotes}
\item[180] Barnum, \textit{Collection}, 90
\item[181] Macaulay, \textit{Kathay}. 143.
\item[182] Ball, \textit{Rambles}, 298.
\item[183] Bridgman, \textit{Daughters}, 52.
\item[184] Lowrie, \textit{Memoirs}, 341.
\end{footnotes}
infanticide saw nothing wrong with it, or did so in a manner that could minimize their parental attachment to the child.

Generic descriptions of the manner in which infanticide was practiced overlooks the many individual cases noted by Americans living in China in their contempt for the process and the detail they provided. Rev. Abeel produced a descriptive account of his discussion with a Chinese man while “Assuming a countenance of as much indifference as I could command,”

regarding the latter’s frequent use of infanticide.

I asked him how many of his own children he had destroyed. He instantly replied, ‘Two.’ I asked him whether he had spared any. He said, ‘He had saved one.’ I then inquired how many brothers he had. He answered, ‘Eight.’ I asked him how many children his eldest brother had destroyed. He said, ‘Five or six.’ I inquired of the second, third, and all the rest. Some had killed four or five - others two or three - others had none to destroy. I then asked how many girls were left among them all. The answer was, ‘Three.’ ‘And how many do you think have been strangled at birth?’ ‘Probably from twelve to seventeen.’

Similarly, Bridgman wrote of an exchange she had with another missionary regarding the prevalence of infanticide.

The Rev. Mr. Pohlman is here from Amoy [Xiamen]. He says that infanticide prevails to a great extent there; he remarked, ‘one day I entered one of their idolatrous Temples, when I met a man who had with him a very interesting child - I was attracted by it, and, observed what a pretty child it was; “yes,” said the father very sorrowfully, “but is is a daughter! I have one wife who has had eight children, all girls! I have destroyed five!” to be without a son is considered a great calamity; indeed this man considered it a great disgrace that his children should all have been daughters.

These accounts, and others like them, brought to the attention of the American public the means and extent of infanticide in China. They anecdotally emphasized the idea, as one Chinese

186 Bridgman, Daughters 55.
convert to Christianity who had killed seven of her own daughters before conversion, the “ignorance” of the Chinese people and the traditions that allowed the practice to continue.  

The quantified impact of infanticide on the Chinese was assumed to be a staggering amount, implying that its use had a negative influence on Chinese society. Sears alleged that infanticide was a “daily, nay hourly occurrence” when attempting to calculate the female population of China among supposed infanticide rates. A report from the “Foreign Missionary Board” in China alleged that infanticide was performed for upwards of 3 percent of the entire number of female births, and it recounted a foreign missionary paying a woman to take the daughter she was going to kill, instilling the notion that foreign intervention could have an impact in ending, or at least mitigating the evils of the practice. Contrary to this report’s estimation of a comparatively low rate of infanticide, as Lowrie claimed “Infanticide is very common in this province . . . It is not saying too much to affirm, that in the district around Amoy [Xiamen], one-fifth, or one-sixth of the children perish by the hands, or with the consent of their parents.” Another report in the Columbia Democrat put the statistic even higher, citing a separate missionary report that claimed one in four female infants were killed in China shortly after birth. The “Want of natural affection, and an unwillingness to encounter the expense,” as Rev. Lowrie put it, continued to reinforce the process, to which he determined the Chinese had no aversion. While Brownell established a counter argument, that it was not infanticide but accidental drowning among the children of the boat people that contributed to high numbers of

187 Macaulay, Kathay, 144.
188 Sears, Pictorial, 288.
190 Lowrie, Memoirs, 209. Emphasis in original.
192 Lowrie, Memoirs, 213.
infant deaths, the vast consensus among American commentators was that female infanticide was a deeply ingrained problem within China and that its physical and moral toll was substantial.¹⁹³

Whether it was because of foot binding, cloistering, arranged marriage, or infanticide, Americans painted a wholly unflattering portrait of the treatment of women in China. While these issues sometimes broached differences in class, others helped to put into stark contrast how higher social rank often resulted in increased female restriction. By emphasizing the origins, methods, and results of these practices, writers established a pattern that worked to highlight differences between Chinese and American society, but it also established a template for other areas of Chinese society foreign intervention could address. Expanding beyond the realm of criticism of gender relations in China, Americans were certain to emphasize the larger failings of Chinese civilization, treading the rhetorical divide between assumptions of social decline and stagnation and assertions that China could be improved by outside influence.

The Failures of Chinese Civilization

Playing off of the solidified concerns over Chinese stagnation, Americans delved deeply into criticisms of Chinese civilization in an attempt to trace the origins of what they determined to be the wider failings of contemporary Chinese society. As with the overlapping issues of foot binding, cloistering, and infanticide as indications of larger problems within the gender dynamics of China, Americans believed that these failings emanated from compounding problems inherent in Chinese culture. Beginning with condemnation of core religious values held in China, observers and critics claimed that these issues perpetuated superstition, ignorance, and fatalism among the population, which in turn contributed to moral failings that eroded the overall well-

¹⁹³ Brownell, People’s, 277.
being of Chinese civilization. As opposed to amusement over “oddities” and mysteries emphasized in chapter two, these allegations stood in stark contrast, using American cultural and moral frameworks to determine not merely the difference between the two societies but also how Chinese society was wrong in comparison.

Accounts of religious problems emphasized differences from American religious expectations – namely connections to protestant Christian religious practices – and presented an opening for further analysis and eventual criticism from American perceptions of Chinese difficulties. In his chapter describing the religions of China, S. Wells Williams argued that a major issue regarding the good standing of Chinese morality emanated from the idea that the primary religions practiced in China did not prohibit immorality in the ways that he determined were necessary or useful. “No one has very satisfactorily elucidated the true nature of their belief, and the intent of their ritual,” because of the competing and socially interchangeable practices and ideologies of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism in China. In particular, he claimed that because of Buddhist monks’ desire to separate themselves from worldly things, they were “ignorant” and could therefore not learn new [i.e., foreign] ideas and then teach them to their followers to improve Chinese society. Tiffany also focused on Buddhism a great deal, declaring it a major source of problems regarding Chinese morality. He stated, “Its dogmas are abstruse and at the same time absurd; its votaries ignorant and superstitious, and the priests of the order without a ray of piety, intellect or decency.” In turn, the priests “endeavor to pick up miserable subsistence by preying on the credulous multitude. They resort to tricks, pretend to look into futurity, and write sentences and charms on the houses of those who will pay them a

194 Williams, Middle, Vol. II, 430.
195 Ibid., 259.
196 Tiffany, Canton Chinese, 183.
Following the Buddhist priests resulted in the worshipers having “faces [that] are so stolid and brutish, that the good observer can easily know them.” These two accounts are representative of the general American criticisms of Chinese religiosity. Writers challenged the veracity and validity of non-Christian ideals and denigrated any representatives of those religions – especially Buddhist monks. They also traced the practices and dogmas of Chinese religion as superstition, to the point of leading the Chinese people into a state of ignorance. “Denigration,” “superstition,” and “ignorance” were the buzzwords employed by Americans to achieve the ends of further justifying American, and by implication Christian, influence in the Middle Kingdom.

Americans targeted the relationship between religion and state as a cause of many of the problems emanating from China. In his diary Preble wrote that Confucianism was “the most artless of any” religion, owing to its status as the de facto practice among literati and mandarin alike. And as the ruler of China, the emperor’s role in reinforcing Chinese religion was equally maligned. “Oriental hyperbole,” as the American Sunday-School Union put it, led the emperor and his family to claim divine origin and guidance, and as a result, “superstition deceives millions, and plunges them in imperishable wretchedness.” Because of these systemic reinforcements of religion, Americans had difficulty understanding why the Chinese bothered to profess any individual religiosity, including the shocked realization that the Chinese did not observe any Sabbath. “Sunday is like any other day,” Ball wrote, amazed that the Chinese spent no regular time worshiping even their own religious figures.

---

197 Ibid., 184.
198 Ibid.
199 Preble, *Diary*, 45/12/12, 86.
201 Ball, *Rambles*, 83.
aspects of Confucianism such as the reverence and worship of ancestors as, “Next to Popery . . .
one of Satan's greatest master-pieces.” Others like Taylor looked with consternation at the
“burlesque” of the “deluded and unthinking people” who continued to worship at ancient and
degraded temples. Macaulay also criticized the housing of pigs at a local Buddhist temple, as
they were “The very last animal I should think of holding sacred.” Along with this mixture of
tradition and a variety of selective religious devotion, Spalding returned to the mysterious nature
of Chinese religion to form his criticism. “What religious creed has a Chinaman? If any, it is a
bundle of negatives. He thinks nothing in such a connection: he believes nothing. How can you
change him from a position, when you do not know where he stands? How can you change his
belief when he has none? You had as well beat the air.” But “beat the air” they did, as even
the inability of Americans to understand these religious practices without the scaffolding of
Christianity to guide them did not stop them from delving further into criticizing practitioners of
religion in China.

Without question, Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist priests bore the most severe brunt of
American criticism, both for their beliefs and for their role in perpetuating their practices amid
the population. Among the writings regarding priests in China, they were described as
“miserable,” “squalid looking,” “foolish,” and “statuary idiots,” and that was just by Ball. Wells concluded that Buddhist priests in particular were “ignorant,” and because of their religion
they could not learn new ideas, thus imposing the notion of “stagnation” onto this class while
simultaneously deeming them impervious to American influence. Shuck criticized the priests

---

202 Lowrie, Memoirs, 383.
203 Fitch, Voyage, 158.
204 Macaulay, Kathay, 38.
205 Spalding, Japan, 200.
206 Ball, Rambles, 120, 260, and 275.
207 Wells, Middle, Vol. II, 259.
for living in temples in “idleness” while being supported by the people. Like Ball, the People of China printed a long list of complaints, citing priests in China as “the blind leaders of the blind,” “engulfed in the vortex of error,” and “a stupid and indolent class of men,” leading the Chinese people astray. Like her missionary colleagues, Henrietta Shuck placed a heavy emphasis on outlining the fallings of Chinese religion, yet she was quite detailed in emphasizing the different difficulties each represented to the Christianization of China. Louis Gimelli notes that Shuck’s “narrow outlook … reinforced those stereotypical images of the Chinese held by antebellum Americans.” Nevertheless, Gimelli does not detail specifically what these “stereotypical images” were, how Shuck’s writings fit into the broader context of negative representations of the Chinese to the American readers, or what these representations even were. Shuck began her chapter, entitled “Chinese Religion,” by asserting, “Pride, self-righteousness, blind inconsistency and obstinacy, shameful dissoluteness, lurking atheism and a hungering and thirsting after unrighteous gain” were the characteristics of those who practiced Confucianism. Practitioners of Buddhism were bound to “fatal superstition,” and Daoists’ “blind fatalism” in the face of natural events all combined to undermine Chinese society. In addition to the dogmatic issues she attributed, Shuck assaulted the priesthoods of the various religions as maintaining “lives of idleness, supported by the charities of the people,” as draining to Chinese society.

To Shuck, these unChristian and immoral systems needed to be replaced by Christianity through missionaries like Shuck and her husband. In essence, priests were the tangible evidence of the failings of Chinese religiosity. They were the few Chinese who could be directly associated with

209 American Sunday-School Union, People of China, 58 and 94.
211 Shuck, Scenes, 30-34.
212 Shuck, Scenes, 40.
a single religion, and their position in society and their upholding of non-Christian rituals often struck foreign observers as superstition.

Figure 28 – “Chinese Tomb” – Shuck incorporated few images in her texts, but she included this as an additional critique of Chinese religions. She described the practice of venerating ancestors at their tombs as, “How ignorant! How foolishly superstitious!”

The allocation of Chinese religious belief as unchristian at best or “pagan” at worst led many Americans to define Chinese beliefs and practices as being “superstitious.” Using personal frameworks of religion, interposed with the notion of American religious uniformity, China provided a number of examples that these observers found to be amusing, concerning, and even repulsive. The “religious and superstitious proclivities” of Chinese religion, Ruschenberger determined, were “pitifully misdirected” toward actions and beliefs that he felt had no value or power. Whether it was a poor woman supplicating in front of “idols” to help her ill husband, or criticisms that Chinese rituals were too similar to those performed by Roman Catholics to be of any assistance, it was clear that any non-Protestant actions were deemed to be useless and

---

213 “Chinese Tomb,” Shuck, Scenes, 80
214 Ruschenberger, Notes, 160.
“superstitious.” As Macaulay described the residents of Wampo, south of Canton, their “unpracticed minds” in terms of religious accuracy resulted in them being “dense and ignorant,” and therefore easy to fool by the superstitions of domestic religion.

The concepts of “superstition” and “ignorance” were thus intertwined in the rhetoric mobilized by Americans to undermine the veracity of Chinese religion because of “idolatry,” without ever firmly defining what or who an “idolator” was, other than being non-Christian. Lowrie bluntly made this connection when he stated:

Superstition, the offspring of ignorance, has a firmer hold on the minds of the [Chinese] people than idolatry has upon their hearts. Their minds are filled with vain imaginations, of things not visible; and the learned and the ignorant, the idolater and the atheist, alike yield implicit credence to the system of auguries and portents, lucky and unlucky days, and the whole round of future revealing signs.

Americans even made reference to European history to firmly outline the connections between religion, superstition, and ignorance. Barnum concluded that “The followers of Taou, like the Athenians of old, are ‘in all things too superstitious;’ while the Confucians have scarcely determined whether spirits exist or not,” thereby proving their ignorance of the realities of the afterlife. Ball asserted the analogy that “to live in China, compared with America, is like being shut up in a convent.” He continued on to define living in China as being separate from the “civilized world,” a place where foreigners and Chinese hurled the epithet “barbarian” at one another with increasing malice. He concluded, “They are true heathen, for they worship the ‘blocks of wood and stone.’ It is almost provoking to witness such foolishness, such superstitious nonsense as their idolatry.”

---

215 Ball, Rambles, 119, 260 and 275.
216 Macaulay, Kathay, 39.
217 Lowrie, Memoirs, 381.
218 Barnum, Collection, 52.
219 Ball, Rambles, 210.
chronological or geographic, lay additional foundation as to the influence of Chinese stagnation on their society and culture, whereby separation bred complacency with the status quo and ignorance of the outside world.

Observations of religious and spiritual activities triggered these overlapping critiques of superstition, ignorance, and idolatry, and reinforced a critical response on the part of Americans. Nor did these activities even have to be observed to be condemned, as Lowrie cited “the thousand unnamed and nameless proofs of the prevalence of mind-debasing and soul-ruining idolatry” in China.⁵²² Americans believed that the Chinese were prone to such failings in belief because of wider social and civilizational practices, from banging gongs to drive away evil spirits to the preponderant reliance of all classes on fortune tellers.⁵²¹ Even doctors, who were supposed to be part of the educated classes, were susceptible to the flaws of ignorance believed to be inherent in Chinese society. Ball asserted that Chinese medicine was based on superstition, and that “The pulse, in fact, is with them the index of every disease,” and as a result, “The system of medicine in China seems to be about on a par with the pagan religion.”⁵²² The “folly and credulity” of those in power supporting Daoist life-extending rituals did not endear Sears to the medical capabilities of China either.⁵²³ Even the deaths of those executed by the state held “superstitious” value to the Chinese, as according to the New York Tribune “Those who get the first dip [of the blood of the deceased] are reckoned fortunate, as their amulets are much more frightful to ghosts. This is but another proof that ‘the Chinese are our antipodes in many ways besides location.‘”⁵²⁴

---

⁵²⁰ Lowrie, Memoirs, 182.
⁵²¹ Lowrie, Memoirs, 395; and Barnum, Collection, 98.
⁵²² Ball, Rambles, 390.
⁵²³ Sears, Pictorial, 272.
Figure 29: “Chinese Fortune-Teller” – Those engaged in practices that reinforced Chinese “superstitions”, especially groups like fortune tellers, drew specific ire from Americans.²²⁵

Indeed, death and dying were the arenas of Chinese life that contemporary Americans identified as the most visibly “superstitious.” Bridgman wrote that “The Chinese will not go near the sick and dying if they can avoid it.” When one of her young pupils was on her deathbed from an illness, she recounted how superstition overtook all of the non-converted Chinese servants in her home. “It seems as if all the other Chinese in the house to-day had been trying to see how much noise they could make, and how much they could laugh and talk, as if they would drive away the solemnity of the scene of death,” as a response to their dislike of dying.²²⁶ Yet, this fear over the spirit of death extended even beyond issues of familiarity. “On the way I saw a beggar lying dead at the side of the street,” Ball recollected, “All the Chinese, as they came in sight, held their hands to their faces, and hurried by, half-running; and, when far enough passed, dropped them, giving a long expiration.”²²⁷ Americans even maligned the traditions of Chinese

²²⁵ Sears, Pictorial, 204.
²²⁶ Bridgman, Daughters, 67 and 68.
²²⁷ Ball, Rambles, 308.
funerals. “Hypocritically superstitious,” is what Ball declared one funeral he watched, as he observed women paid as mourners. “When the procession moved they cried and wailed in loud and most doleful voices. When the procession halted a little, their lamentations ceased, their countenances relaxed, they laughed, talked and ogled, all with so much pleasantness that one could have supposed they had never known a moment of grief.” Preble also made a similar observation of a funeral by the boat people. As with the mourners on land, “After wailing an hour or more I saw them whip off their mourning and with it their sorrowful cries [sic] and sad faces, and sit quietly down to their chow, chatting and laughing as usual.” Then from mourning to burial, Americans criticized the Chinese practice of using a “dead-house” to temporarily contain bodies until the “superstitions” of astrologers and Buddhist monks could determine a “lucky” time and place to perform the final burial. The actions of the Chinese in their processes of dying, mourning, and burial struck the American observer as disingenuous, leaving the uncertainties of the afterlife up to fate and chance rather than to faith.

Adding to the certainty with which Americans presented the fear of death among the Chinese people, they also put forth the idea that a sense of fatalism weighed down Chinese culture. They asserted the idea that these negative religious and moral structures reinforced the status quo, and that as such nothing would be done to address the perceived problems of China or even avert immediate danger, creating a continuity of the rhetoric of stagnation all the way to the grave. “The Chinese,” the People of China put it, “are generally fatalists, or believers in inevitable destiny; and those who are not believe that conduct is fate; or, in other words, that a man lay the foundation of his own destiny by his actions.” Likewise, Benjamin Ball cited an

---

228 Ball Rambles, 253.
229 Preble, Diary, 54/9/24, 340.
230 Lowrie, Memoirs, 217; and, Spalding, Japan, 198.
231 American Sunday-School Union, People of China, 98.
account that stated, “The Chinese will not save a drowning person; they think that it is the work of Josh [the primary deity to whom he claims the Chinese pray], with which they will not interfere, and that if the man is to be saved he will be saved without their interposition.” In addition to this claimed fatalistic attitude, he stated that the Chinese believed it was the “Will of Heaven” to make money, “and, to accomplish this, they will resort to cheating, stealing, lying, robbing, murdering, and the most debasing practices.” Therefore, to Ball, the reluctance of the Chinese to interfere with natural events and to justify what he considered immoral activities in order to acquire wealth both derived from their belief systems, which he predicated on the notion of stagnation and inaction.

The impact of this fatalistic attitude was said to be widespread. Eliza Bridgman observed that newborns were not cleaned for approximately their first week of life, and “when [their parents] take it up, instead of enfolding both arms around the tender babe, and gently supporting its head, as Christian mothers do, they handle it as other would a bundle of clothing.” Her impression was that the Chinese believed that the child would live or die depending on fate, not on the attention given to the child by its parents. This idea of Chinese recalcitrance to interfere with “fate” extended even beyond the individual to entire cities. Foreigners in particular were said to be concerned about Chinese inaction when it came to fire, as “the ideas of fatalism which the Chinese entertain” were alleged to lead the Chinese to not attempt to stop the spread of the flames, which foreigners worried endangered their own property and lives. Lowrie wrote that the extent of Chinese inaction in the face of fire was so great that rather than attempt to put the flames out, he witnessed “the owners . . . removing their furniture, and leaving the house to its

232 Ball, Rambles, 129.
233 Ibid., 217.
234 Bridgman, Daughters, 92.
235 Macaulay, Kathay, 176.
fate.” Newspapers added to this representation of fatalism among the Chinese. In reports of a fire triggering crowds to trample and suffocate almost eight hundred Chinese, or another twelve hundred killed at a theater fire in Canton, or four thousand killed in an earthquake and subsequent fires in Hunan, these articles made it clear to the reader that mass deaths were not only commonplace in China, but that the Chinese did nothing to prevent them nor did they consider the occurrences much out of the ordinary.

Whether it was because of supposed religious inaccuracies, the perpetuation of problems because of an uneducated priesthood, or long-ingrained cultural taboos regarding death and fate, the Chinese provided an entire array of actions and inactions that incensed Americans. Especially for missionaries so certain of their own fate and afterlife, the fact that they could not easily define the religiosity of individual Chinese subjects proved frustrating. The inability of Americans to locate true religious sentiment in China indicated to them that Chinese religions failed in their capacity to establish a singular faith among the millions of Chinese. Yet, as the Taiping proved, even the introduction of Christianity did not come without its dangers. The introduction of Western religion into the pell-mell of Eastern beliefs could result in disastrous consequences, especially for the Chinese, but foreigners believed the inability to define a moral center of Chinese civilization proved to be the major roadblock in the way of extending influence into China.

**Chinese Immorality as the Pinnacle of Cultural Failures**

---

These combined sentiments of problems with gender dynamics and religious culture compiled into an overall narrative that the morals of Chinese society suffered as a result of these systemic failings. Williams was perfectly clear in his opinion that Chinese society was morally weakened from the top of the society, namely, the prevailing political and religious systems. He was equally clear that, from his background as a missionary, the only way to correct the issues would be the acceptance and spread of Christianity in China. He bluntly stated:

Chinese society is like a stagnant pool fermenting in its own feculence, whose torpor is disturbed by the monstrous things its own heat brings forth, and becoming more and more polluted, casting up mire and dirt, by its own internal commotions: and until the river, whose streams maketh glad the city of God, shall flow through this rotting marsh, there is no hope of any permanent improvement,- the clear waters of peace, good order, purity, and liberty, flow from no other fountain than the Gospel.238

Accounts from China overflowed with examples of how Americans believed the Chinese exhibited immoral attitudes. “The Chinese,” Ball concluded, “are naturally so jealous and excitable,” that allegedly mobs of thousands could form almost out of thin air and endanger the lives of the foreigners living in Canton.239 But these bad, or even hostile, attitudes also applied to individual Chinese as well. Bridgman recalled a problematic Chinese student, who refused to listen to her foreign instructors. “She would throw herself upon the floor, kick and scream in such a way as to draw the attention of Chinese neighbors; her will had never been subdued, and mild measures had no effect.”240

Unsurprisingly, Americans framed the lack of access to missionaries and Christianity beyond the treaty ports as the cause of continued poor behavior by the Chinese. “The Chinese seem totally devoid of all feelings of humanity, and manifest no love or kindness, as if they were incapable of amiable qualities. But this condition of character is not so much to be wondered at,

238 Williams, Middle, Vol. 1, 401.
239 Ball, Rambles, 216.
240 Bridgman, Daughters, 77.
when we consider their ignorance of the Christian religion, – that which smoothes down all the rougher parts of man's nature, and inclines him ‘to practise [sic] those things which are good, and to shun those which are evil’”241 “It may be concluded that the standard of morals in China is very low,” alleged Ball. He asserted that the lack of moral “instruction” outside of the law – implying no access to Christianity – left the people of China at the mercy of unscrupulous and immoral rulers.242 What resulted was an uncertain picture of the morality of the Chinese people. “Idleness, docility, industry, peaceableness, subordination and respect for the aged” benefited the Chinese on one the hand, but on the other the “vices of insincerity, falsehood, mutual distrust and jealousy” restrained their progress according to the People of China.243 The usually more diplomatic Anti-Slavery Bugle came to the brusque editorial summation that “It is [our] deliberate opinion that the Chinese are morally the most debased people on the face of the earth.” Their many vices resulted in “deeps upon deeps of depravity” and suggested that the Chinese should not be allowed to enter the United States.244 Those who had sunk to the “deeps of depravity” represented what Speer called “an abundance of the vilest classes – the gambler, the infamous female, and others, who prey upon the fortunate, the unwary, or the wanton of their own countrymen.”245

Gambling was an activity Americans usually cited as one of the most obvious examples of how the Chinese failed morally. Ball called Chinese gamblers called “evil” and “villainous,” and Barnum described them as “wretches” confined to the back streets of cities among the “lower orders of the Chinese.”246 Both considered gambling not only an immoral act but also

241 Ball, Rambles, 233.
242 American Sunday-School Union, People of China, 75.
243 Ibid., 190.
244 “Chinese Morality,” Anti-Slavery Bugle (24 Nov, 1855), 4.
245 Speer, Plea, 6.
246 Ball, Rambles, 394; and, Barnum, Collection, 76.
one of adolescent behavior. Sears, too, noted gambling among the “childish pastimes” of the Chinese, while the American Sunday-School Union listed excessive gambling and drinking as part of the “frivolous and puerile” games to which Chinese men were susceptible. Spalding lamented to his readers that, “nothing can restrain the lower classes from their insatiate vice of gambling.” Tiffany emphasized the extent of this sentiment that the Chinese were inveterate and incurable gamblers. He chided a “vile, bigoted looking Buddhist priest” for standing by and watching other Chinese men gamble without reprimanding them for what the author determined was an immoral activity. Shuck also made the connection between Chinese fatalism and the vice of gambling, noting that rather than feeding their families, Chinese men were apt to let women and children starve so that they could spend money betting on dragon boat racing during lunar New Year celebrations. Fate, not hard work, they seemed to believe, would determine their economic futures.

Regardless of the result of the immoral action, the fact that the Chinese so openly partook in immoral activities deeply concerned Americans. It called into question whether the Chinese could be trusted in matters of business or in the veracity of their conversion, undermining the economic and religious opportunistic frameworks. Indeed, it further contributed to the idea that the Chinese emigrating from China to California could not be trusted either. Americans could hope to become exemplars to solve issues such as the treatment of women, the strength of Chinese men, or the quirks of Chinese religion. Yet the persistence of “immoral” behaviors such as gambling and lying among the Chinese led many Americans to suggest direct solutions for the deeper flaws inherent within Chinese society and culture as it existed.

---

247 Spalding, Japan, 95.
248 Tiffany, Canton, 200.
249 Shuck, Scenes, 126.
Conclusion

The notion of the failures of the Chinese empire are important to consider both separate from and in context with the other frameworks of mystery, opportunity, threat, and success. Chinese “failure” did not represent a wholesale rejection of Chinese society or an unfettered acceptance of it. Reflecting their own understandings of issues such as gender norms, labor, and morality, Americans parsed Chinese “failures” in terms of not living up to or representing what they expected in the domestic sphere. This more orientalist “othering” contrasts the two societies, with Americans firmly presenting their own society as superior and enviable. It also creates a distinction from the rhetoric of “oddities” and “mysteries” highlighted earlier, which indicated how the Chinese were distinct from Europeans and Americans, but were not seen as inherent aspects that required adaptation or change. The concept of “failure” walks the rhetorical border between the gung-ho opportunists and those who looked upon China with an air of suspicion, yet it continued the pattern of presenting the Chinese in a manner that emphasized the persistence of American interaction with the Chinese. Just as “mystery” drove some to suggest further investigation and opportunism highlighted the means by which Americans could most profitably engage the Chinese – profitability measured in terms of money, diplomatic status, or converts – the notion of gauging Chinese failures showed contemporaries the areas of Chinese society that Americans could attempt to influence and change through continued political, cultural, and religious engagement. But just as flaws addressed the idea of why the opportunities of the relationship were not nearly as self-fulfilling as hoped, it also reinforced how the rhetoric of the Chinese as a “threat” could coexist with the other frameworks without disrupting the overarching discursive frameworks that Americans employed to describe the Chinese.
Chapter 4: China as a Threat

“All citizens of the United States in China peaceably attending to their affairs, being placed on a common footing of amity and goodwill with subjects of China, shall receive and enjoy, for themselves and everything appertaining to them, the special protection of the local authorities of Government, who shall defend them from all insult or injury of any sort on the part of the Chinese. If their dwellings or their property be threatened or attacked by mobs, incendiaries, or other violent or lawless persons, the local officers, on requisition of the Consul, will immediately despatch a military force to disperse the rioters, and will apprehend the guilty individuals and punish them with the utmost rigour of the law.” — Article XIX, Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia)¹

The idea of the Chinese posing a “danger” or “threat” is a familiar concept for historians who have focused on the emergence of anti-Chinese sentiment within the United States. As Jean Phaelzer writes, Chinese immigrants faced the danger of being “driven out” of their claims and professions in California because of these fears mere months after the first Chinese émigré arrived in San Francisco.² This chapter seeks to broaden the idea of the constructed Chinese “threat” to a transnational level. Along with domestic concerns about issues of labor, race, and slavery there also existed a corollary argument about the potential danger that the Chinese in China posed to American interests abroad. As Americans considered the expanding relationship between China and the United States throughout the mid-nineteenth century, it was not simply domestic concerns that drove the agenda that determined Americans were in danger. This chapter will seek to better contextualize the full extent to which Americans concerned themselves with the dangers posed by the power, or potential power, of China and its inhabitants.

The rosy image of industrious Chinese workers and expansion-driven American dominance in the Pacific faced simultaneous concerns that the flaws uncovered in China represented a variety of dangers to Americans – both real and imagined. These threats did not suddenly emerge, as Article XIX of the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia) clearly shows the lengths to which American representatives wished to go in ensuring the security of American expatriates from “mobs,” “violent or lawless persons,” and the like. Yet, historians who have covered the concept of “threat” emanating from China have overlooked the nineteenth century in favor of more recent developments in the post-WWII relationship. Nonetheless, the same millions of Chinese that inspired Americans in the mid-nineteenth century to seek wealth or religious converts conversely played into the notion that the Chinese represented a source of concern rumbling in the distance.

The fear of a potential mobilization of large numbers of Chinese against foreign interests, whether as mobs, pirates, or robbers, reflected concerns of the failings of the Chinese government to maintain sovereign control within its own borders and to protect foreigners as part of its treaty responsibilities. Likewise, if the Chinese government was unable to protect itself and others from its own citizens, such as the Taiping or ethnic Taiwanese, Americans wondered how the Qing government could even enforce the diplomatic and economic status quo. The emergence of the “coolie trade” also brought to the fore domestic regional American concerns over labor, transport, and antebellum expectations about the extent and limitations of indentured servitude and slavery in the Americas. The question of the extent of the power of the Chinese

---

3 Nancy Tucker focuses on the domestic and foreign policy constraints that the idea and mythologizing of “threat” placed upon the Eisenhower administration during the earliest years of the Cold War. Tucker emphasizes that Eisenhower was constrained, but not limited in policy actions in regards to actions in China because of the dominance of this rhetorical understanding. Nancy Bernkoph Tucker, The China Threat: Memories, Myths, and Realities in the 1950s (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).
state to inflict its will on the people, namely corporal punishment, represented the full extent to which even a stagnant or declining China could exert force over its subjects. The idea of Chinese threat blends with the ideas of opportunity and flaw rather than outweighing them in contemporaneous discourse. “Threat” did not discourage Americans from opening wide the avenues of interaction. Instead, it confirmed in their minds the continued need for further American intervention into the affairs of China under the auspices of American security and success.

Population as a Threat: Mobs, Pirates, and Coolies

If the Chinese population presented significant economic and religious advantages for those trying to expand American influence in China, the same population also presented a danger to the small enclaves of foreigners in the treaty ports. Whether citing the dangers posed by mobs, pirates, or coolies, Americans living in and traveling to and from China often presented the capability of Chinese people to mobilize anti-foreign sentiment as something to be feared and defended against. Emerging during the conflict of the First Opium War, groups of armed Chinese peasants described as “mobs” arose in Canton and attacked the foreign population and property within. After the war, the threat and fear of the Chinese populace remained a consistent theme within the official and unofficial discourse emanating from all of the treaty ports. Regardless of the British victory, Americans and Europeans living in China were vastly outnumbered and their ability to defend themselves without the assistance of the Chinese government was limited. This emphasis on situations wherein Americans found themselves in danger keyed in on their continued desire to have the United States exert a more forceful presence to ensure security either by force or by coercing the Chinese government to do so.
Representatives like Peter Parker hoped that an increased contingent of American naval forces capable of defending national and individual interests would serve as important “floating credentials” in preventing attacks and convincing the Chinese government that it was better to work with the United States than to allow these threats to continue.⁴

Mobs

Shortly after the conclusion of the First Opium War, the American representative to Canton, Paul Forbes, asserted that the frequency with which groups of Chinese civilians disrupted foreign trade in the city was “growing out of the maliciousness of the Chinese and the want of coolness and patience on the part of foreigners.”⁵ Scattered throughout official and private reports were mentions attacks of groups of Chinese against foreigners across the treaty ports, almost always framed as “mob” activity. Americans living in the foreign communities in the ports established a long pattern of emphasizing just how outnumbered they felt; even benign gatherings of Chinese around foreigners were viewed with suspicion.⁶ W. S. W. Ruschenberger explained that on one of his sojourns outside of the boundaries of the treaty port, which in and of itself was in violation of the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia), “We were followed everywhere by some dozen idle Chinamen and boys seemingly from motives of curiosity rather than disrespect.”⁷ The “curiosity” that he noted was a result of the fact that most Chinese

---

⁴ Peter Parker to William Marcy, 56/6/30, ADPP Vol. 6, p. 107.
⁵ John Forbes to Caleb Cushing, June 17, 1844, ADPP Vol. 1, 319.
⁶ Whether through “the late riots at Canton;” a “Chinese mob” attack near Hong Kong; the need for “indemnity against losses sustained by a mob;” or of “mobs” of Chinese protecting thieves who targeted foreigners, Americans felt persistently threatened because of anti-foreign actions in the region. Caleb Cushing to Nelson, July 9, 1844, ADPP, Vol. 2, 235; American Merchants to the Secretary of State, July 8, 1846, ADPP, Vol. 3, 17; Humphrey Marshall to William Marcy, February 2, 1853, ADPP, Vol. 4, 18; and Caleb Jones to William Marcy, June 20, 1855, Despatches from the United States Consuls in Foochow, 1849-1906, 171. Text Fiche, Roll 1.
⁷ W. S. W. Ruschenberger, Notes and Commentaries During a Voyage to Brazil and China in the Year 1848 (Richmond, VA: Macfarlane & Fergusson, 1854), 159.
purposefully had little to no interaction with foreigners because of the restrictions of the Cohong system. While in a crowd of the “lower orders of the Chinese,” he wrote that “[t]he wooden countenances of the poorest [coolie] showed that even they despised us.”8 Whether or not Americans felt they deserved to be caught up in the buildup of anti-foreign sentiment, the idea that the average Chinese person maintained a negative disposition toward all foreigners and that they were ready to act on those sentiments persisted in official and unofficial correspondence.

Even in the new treaty ports, free from the burdens of past clashes, the New York Tribune reported that an ill feeling toward foreigners contributed to a “riotous disposition at Amoy [Xiamen],” and Ball suggested that the fear within the foreign community arose in neighboring Ningbo over rumors that twenty thousand Chinese were arriving to “pillage” the region, blaming the nearby failure of a rice crop on the presence of foreigners.9 Fitch Taylor best summarized this dynamic between foreign populations and the omnipresent concern of Chinese mobilization against them. “The apprehension is,” he wrote, “that as [foreign] numbers are comparatively so small, and a mob of a numerous populace are ever so ready to do the bidding of the reckless and the abandoned, our approach might be attended with danger from the rabble at Canton.”10

In their reports to their superiors at the State Department and through various print outlets, consuls cited instances in which Americans and other foreigners found themselves at the mercy of the Chinese populace, proof of the danger to themselves and their countrymen and women. The Saturday Morning Visitor reported that a group of unemployed Chinese sailors

---

8 Benjamin Lincoln Ball, Rambles in Eastern Asia, including China and Manila, During Several Years’ Residence: With Notes of the Voyage to China, Excursions in Manila, Hong-Kong, Canton, Shanghai, Ningpo, Amoy, Fouchow, and Macao (Boston: James French and Co, 1856), 113.
9 “From China Direct,” New York Tribune (4 Apr. 1845), 2; and, Ball, Rambles, 249.
10 Fitch W. Taylor, A Voyage Round the World, and Visits to Various Foreign Countries, in the United States Frigate Columbia; Attended by Her Consort the Sloop of War John Adams, and Commanded by Commodore George C. Read. Also Including An Account of the Bombarding and Firing of the Town of Muckie, on the Malay Coast, and the Visit of the Ships to China During the Opium Difficulties at Canton, and Confinement of the Foreigners in that City, Vol. 2 (New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1847), 87.
took their frustrations out on missionaries, who they assaulted in “a most barbarous manner.”\textsuperscript{11} But it was not only these misdirected anxieties toward foreigners that resulted in violence. Preble recounted in his journal that the Chinese massed troops outside of the factories at Canton because of the “accidental shooting of a Chinaman from the Provinces by one of the [foreign] clerks.”\textsuperscript{12} Incidents like this, where foreigners purposefully or accidentally harmed Chinese subjects, were never reported in the context of Americans and others violating the laws of China. Instead, accounts of such events focused on the efforts made by the diplomatic corps to ensure the safety of the foreigners as well as attributing other factors to the violence. One such quizzical example of redirecting foreign misbehavior into depictions of Chinese mob activity occurred at the foreign factories in Canton not long after the war. As the documentary record makes clear, Americans were more than aware of the simmering Chinese tensions toward foreigners. In 1844, Americans erected a weather vane at their warehouse in Canton, dismissing Chinese apprehensions about the design and placement of the vane as “superstitious.” Eventually a Chinese attack on the factories to force the object’s removal reinforced in American minds the inability of the mandarin class to maintain control over the “unruly” mobs of Chinese subjects.\textsuperscript{13} What this series of events illustrates was just how unaware Americans were to cultural cues that could create tensions between the foreign legations and locals. They readily passed off “accidental” violence or offences perpetrated by foreigners against the Chinese and instead focused on the resulting threats that detrimentally impacted American interests.

Indeed, American travelers believed that the Chinese did not need a pretext for violence. Ball wrote of one occasion when “The Chinese flocked around, following me in great numbers”

\textsuperscript{11} “Later from China,” \textit{Saturday Morning Visitor} (8 July 1848), 2.
\textsuperscript{12} George Henry Preble, \textit{Voyage on the USF St. Louis}, Manuscript Division, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA., 44/7/6, 295.
because of a combination of curiosity and hostility regarding foreigners. Ball asserted that he “knew the excitability of the Chinese, and how little it would take to turn into a mob such a set of vagabond men and boys.” Eliza Bridgman provided a similar account when the gathering of crowds quickly devolved into violence. While traveling on a ship she “observed a crowd of boys and others making a noise; and presently heard the sound of pebbles against the sides of the boat. Sze Ping [her travel companion] looked alarmed, and closed the blinds; there came small stones with more force. The excitement seemed to increase; there was quite a mob; pieces of mud, and heavier stones came; we barricaded the windows with anything we could find.” Bridgman survived unscathed, but her account further reinforced the potential dangers Americans in China encountered at all times.

The most pressing issue within this discourse was how the implied threat of crowds resulted in actual attacks on Americans. “The crowd,” Abeel recalled “which began to collect on our reaching the shore, and which followed us through the streets... urged its way into our temporary abode” and attacked the inhabitants. He noted that he and his companions sent word to Chinese officials for help, but a succession of mandarins of higher rank dismissed the apparent danger and did not provide protection Abeel believed the treaty stipulated. Similarly, Ball relayed the story of a friend and his colleagues who “were mobbed by the rabble, robbed of their watches and valuables, almost entirely stripped of their clothes, and barely escaped with their lives.” Less common than the occasional scuffle between foreigners and locals in the treaty ports were instances that resulted in the deaths of foreigners, which clearly dominated reports

14 Ball, Rambles, 285.
15 Ibid., 398.
16 Eliza J. Gilleit Bridgman, Daughters of China; or, Sketches of Domestic Life in The Celestial Empire (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853), 62.
18 Ball, Rambles, 112.
and accounts from China when they occurred. Bridgman lamented the fate of a group of missionaries who strayed beyond the treaty ports in order to ply their evangelical trade. Citing the rapidity with which the mob attacked the missionaries and emphasizing their innocence, she wrote “They had not proceeded far on their way, before they were surrounded by a great many Chinese, who attacked them with violence, and killed two of their number immediately. The other four fled, and were pursued through the village.” The two missionaries were “barbarously murdered” by the Chinese without provocation, and Bridgman added the lurid detail, “It was evident from the marks upon their bodies that they were dreadfully tortured.” These cases help to illustrate the pattern of American willingness to overlook the culpability of foreigners in triggering violence – whether leaving the confines of the treaty ports or not understanding if missionary activities would be tolerated by locals – within the larger issue of emerging Sino-foreign conflict.

As these occasions of Sino-foreign violence indicated to American observers, the Chinese government was either unwilling or unable to maintain the protection of the foreign communities in the treaty ports. Many writers asserted that that vigilance was needed to protect Americans living in China, especially the more “frail” women and children who increasingly moved to China to live in the foreign communities with their husbands or fathers. One consul expressed a personal concern that his wife was “spit upon,” and that, “my own family are not protected from insult” by the Chinese. During the concluding months of the First Opium War, Tiffany believed that foreign women in particular should maintain their distance from China, as he heard rumor that the Chinese contemplated setting fire to buildings adjacent to the foreign factories

19 Bridgman, Daughters, 123.
with the hope that the blaze would spread into the foreign community.  

The belief was that the Chinese did not want to risk a direct attack on the foreigners for fear of retribution, but that officials could dismiss a fire as accidental rather than purposeful. Bridgman recalled an instance when foreign women perceived danger to themselves. “I remember the ladies of our company were afraid of an outbreak and riot, knowing the excitable temperament of the Cantonese.”

The seemingly continuous recitation of dangers posed to the American communities in China led those living there to assert that constant watchfulness was needed on the part of the foreign community so as to avert danger. David Geitsinger wrote in his correspondence from China, “The irritable condition of the Chinese populace at Canton, referred to in your letter, should furnish an additional incentive to American Citizens at your city, to the exercise of unusual prudence and circumspection while this inflamed condition of the public mind continues.”

Likewise, before his mission to China was complete, Caleb Cushing explained that the pattern of attacks by “mobs” had “shown the necessity of some provision for the better security of the foreign factories.” Other accounts indicated that groups daily perpetrated “robberies of the most flagrant character,” but that the Chinese government did not and could not exert any force to stop them.

The general expression of these references to the concern of mob attacks within these reports was the idea that Americans were “at the mercy of the mob to be robbed and our house

---

21 Osmond Tiffany Jr., *The Canton Chinese, or The American’s Sojourn in the Celestial Empire* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1849), 240.
22 Bridgman, *Daughters*, 85.
23 David Geitsinger, *David Geitsinger Correspondence*, Manuscript Division, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA., 49/3/11, 2.
25 Jones to Marcy, June 20, 1855, ADPP, Vol. 20, 171.
destroyed from over our heads by them at pleasure.”

Once again playing off of the notion that foreigners were vastly outnumbered by the undesirable classes of Chinese mobs, Ball estimated that there were over eight thousand paid “banditti” in Canton alone, claiming “there are plenty of robbers here on land, as well as on the water,” connecting assaults on the land with the problems of piracy. While it was claimed that robberies were more common outside of the city walls, and the accounts of violence against foreigners traveling outside of the treaty ports seems to anecdotally corroborate this, Americans maintained the small comfort that “within the walls, such daring attacks have seldom been attempted.”

But even the security of the foreign communities did not prevent robberies against American and Chinese interests. “Three weeks previously,” Ruschenberger recalled of his host’s home that “two Chinese burglars had entered the premises, and, after carrying out from the chamber where he was sleeping, two large chests, and lifting them over the garden wall, returned for a box containing some silver.” Along with the resultant loss of property, Ruschenberger noted that his host felt compelled to hire a watchman to serve as security in and around his home.

The threat of robbery extended well beyond the idea of spontaneous mob actions against foreigners who were caught unawares. Americans even believed that robbers used the general threat of danger as a cover for their illicit activities against foreigners. In one instance the New York Tribune alleged that a fire in Canton allowed robbers the distraction to ply their trade with impunity, resulting in foreigners having to defend the factories from fire as well as fiends.

---

26 Issachar Roberts to Secretary of State, April 10, 1854, ADPP, Vol. 9, 241. During periods of transition within the American State Department, consular officials frequently addressed their dispatches to the “Secretary of State” when it was unknown who occupied the office.

27 Ball, Rambles, 217.


29 Ruschenberger, Notes, 142.

purposefully committed arson as a preamble to their crimes. “Fires are frequent in Canton,” Sears recorded, “and are usually caused by incendiaries, who rob and plunder, during the attendant confusion, with impunity.”

Owing to the “excitable” nature of the Chinese, or the “irritable” relationship maintained between China and foreigners, Americans were certain of the threat posed against them by the Chinese. Whether they posed a threat against property or the bodies of Americans, what was clear according to accounts emanating from China was that the Chinese population posed a real and imminent threat to the security of American interests. The rhetoric of “mobs” served as a clear and tangible explanation to prove the danger posed to Americans living in China, but dangers were not limited to the mainland.

*Piracy*

Like their mobbish compatriots on the shore, pirates represented a persistent threat to safe transport and trade, particularly as a goal of consular and naval officers in China was to maintain the efficacy of ports and shipping avenues in the region. One official noted that “bands of men . . . in the tens of thousands” grouped together to perform acts of piracy. The “kindred evils” of robbery and piracy, as Peter Parker defined them, required constant attention on the part of foreigners. By the end of the First Opium War, consular officials reported that British naval forces were already needed in the region to control piracy, and by the 1850s they requested an

---

32 Peter Parker to William Marcy, June 20, 1854, ADPP, Vol. 7, 9.
33 Peter Parker to James Buchanan, January 27, 1848 ADPP, Vol. 3, 216.
increase in American ships to be tasked with identifying and neutralizing “piratical crafts” to ensure the safety and security of Americans from the threat of these roguish Chinese.\textsuperscript{34}

As with mobs, Americans framed pirate activity through its effect on the American presence in China. Most importantly for those writing about piracy in Southern China was the impact that the illegal activity played in dampening the economic capabilities of foreigners and Chinese alike. They viewed the threat of pirate attacks as a logical explanation for why the China trade had not reached the apex of profit predicted by more opportunistic observers. The geography around Hong Kong and Canton, with innumerable islands and inlets, was said to provide “admirable hiding places for the pirates, whose existence has given to this Archipelago its distinctive title of Ladrone. In fact the Strait is named after a celebrated pirate who once commanded there.”\textsuperscript{35} According to traveler J.W. Spalding, locals on these islands tacitly supported piracy by housing them in a “collection of Chinese hovels, which form nests for the river pirates,” but they were also often victims along with the “fast and post boats on their way to Canton.”\textsuperscript{36} Disruptions of the larger social and political order in China, namely the Opium Wars and the Taiping Uprising, contributed to the ease with which pirates plied their trade. “The pirates are getting exceedingly bold all along the coast,” Lowrie lamented. This boldness, he explained, resulted in the shutdown of coastal businesses, and he warned “it is hardly safe to venture out to sea” to do any form of business.\textsuperscript{37} Those who did venture to trade on the open waters risked violence against their ships and themselves as one mail boat found out when it “was attacked during last night by pirates, and robbed, and that some of the boatmen were killed

\textsuperscript{34} Peter Parker to James Buchanan, July 19, 1846, ADPP, Vol. 3, 46; Humphrey Marshall to William Marcy, May 30, 1853, ADPP, Vol. 4, 41; and Peter Parker to William Marcy, September, 27, 1855, ADPP, Vol. 6, 25.
\textsuperscript{36} J. W. Spalding, \textit{The Japan Expedition: Japan and Around the World – An Account of Three Visits to the Japanese Empire, with Sketches of Madeira, St. Helena, Cape of Good Hope, Mauritius, Ceylon, Singapore, China, and Loo-Choo} (New York: Bedfield, 1855), 186.
\textsuperscript{37} Lowrie, \textit{Memoirs}, 420.
or drowned.” As with mobs, the presence of pirates along the shores of China rhetorically reinforced the inability of the Chinese government to secure its own territorial integrity along with its guarantees of the safety of foreigners enshrined in the treaty agreements. Nevertheless, just as Americans breaching treaty port boundaries served as a trigger for simmering anti-foreign actions, the continuation of Americans engaging in the opium trade also fueled the presence of piracy which endangered the economic and diplomatic interests of all parties.

While the American treaty with China prohibited the import of opium into China, with the aid of American and British shipping companies Chinese pirates often smuggled opium into China under the guise of the American flag so as to bypass local customs officials. Officials fretted whether the continuation of smuggling brought “disrepute” to American interests in the region. They determined that “the American flag is now the only cover for this illicit trade,” so it was as important to limit its use by local smugglers as it was to discourage foreign traders from promoting the trade of opium. But smuggling was not the only “outrage on the flag of the United States” blamed on Chinese piracy. American ships, particularly those that became damaged or shipwrecked due to storms, frequently found themselves looted by pirate vessels. The seas surrounding the island of Formosa [Taiwan] was of particular concern. One consular official noted that the native population of the island was “in a constant state of warfare with the Chinese,” and because of this lack of control “The west coast is a nest of Pirates, who are a scourge to the whole of the mainland from [Guangdong] in the South to [Shandong] in the

---

38 Ball, Rambles, 209.
39 As the United States explicitly agreed to exclude the opium trade, the Chinese reciprocated by exempting American ships from searches for opium. Thus, sailing under the flag of the United States became a convenient way for an international array of smugglers and pirates to bypass official channels meant to curb the illicit trade.
40 Lawrence Kearney to Sturgis, April 22, 1843, ADPP, Vol. 1, 12.
41 Lawrence Kearney to Secretary of the Navy, May 19, 1843, ADPP, Vol. 1, 15.
42 James Armstrong to Secretary of the Navy, December 10, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 13, 328-30.
North.”

Not only did consular representatives blame these attacks on the pirates, but the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia) made the Chinese government culpable for the value of any cargo that could not be retrieved because of the lack of security in its territorial waters. When the Qing government could or would not recover the stolen goods it further undermined its position in the eyes of American representatives and merchants alike.

Piracy drew the ire of Americans concerned with merchant security due to its economic impact of hindering American access to Chinese trade. Many cited pirates, “which have for several years preyed upon the commerce of China,” as the source of many of the disturbances in the region. To Americans, the failure of the Chinese government to ensure the safety of its coastline was a de facto breach of the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia). The inability of the government to subdue piracy was phrased in terms of “infestations” that could not be removed either because of weakness and/or corruption. Ball alleged that “The Chinese often give up to these pirates, without a word of opposition,” and concluded that it was usually that case that “The Chinese government is unable to subdue or detect them.” On the rare instance when rewards succeeded in the capture of alleged pirates, the accused was usually “beheaded with little ceremony,” which did little to engender trust in the fairness of the Chinese legal system among expatriates. The ladrones – a Spanish polyglot word for thieves applied to the islands near Hong Kong as well as to pirates – “infest the vicinity of the densely-populated cities” along the coast, according to Spalding, which aided their ability to avoid capture. Particularly troubling to the British, who were attempting to build Hong Kong as an important mercantile

---

43 Townsend Harris to William Marcy, March 24, 1854, ADPP, Vol. 12, 94-5.
44 Humphrey Marshall to William Marcy, October 10, 1853, ADPP, Vol. 9, 235; and Caleb Jones to William Marcy, October 10, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 11, 31.
45 E. Cunningham, Our Commercial and Political Relations with China, by an American Resident in China (Washington, 1855), 7.
46 Ball, Rambles, 211.
47 Spalding, Japan, 176.
entrepôt, the Americans found solace that the English government increased its patrols of waters “infested” with pirates so as to preserve and reinforce regional economic security. Both the New York Tribune and the Anti-Slavery Bugle published articles in March 1848 outlining the extent to which pirates were said to “infect/infest” the coastal waters of China. They reinforced the problems Americans faced in maintaining commercial and transportation links with China, and continued the discussion of Qing recalcitrance to defend foreigners from threats.

As with the problems of “mobs” on the land, so too did the personal and diplomatic record emanating from China outline specific instances whereby the threat of piracy imperiled the lives of Americans in and around China. Recorded in his ships’ log, Preble wrote about having come upon a foreign ship under attack from piratical assailants.

At about 2 Pm observed one of the schooners fire a gun on coming up to her found she had fired at a fleet of small Pirate Junks. We threw the guns of three of them overboard, and burnt four of the Pirate Junks. They were armed with guns, spears, fire arms, bamboo filled with powder &c. &c. One of [the] junks succeeded in landing her guns & taking nearly everything from her cabin.

Records from merchants are replete with these exchanges, outlining brief skirmishes between foreign ships and their Chinese assailants, but unlike the utter helplessness Americans felt at the hands of mobs, on the sea they asserted that superior naval technological power could be exerted. On one of his earlier voyages Preble had his own encounter with a pirate attack, but unlike the aforementioned schooner it managed to fare better. “Our boat voyage up & down [to and from Canton] was without interest except that once an alarm of ‘pirates’ was raised when we seized our muskets and made such utter warlike demonstrations that the pirate pulled back in such haste

48 Macaulay, Kathay, 178.
50 George Henry Preble, “Ships Logs, 1852-63,” Manuscript Division, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA., 55/7/10, 77.
as showed him more frightened than we were."\textsuperscript{51} The fending off of the pirates by Preble and his compatriots was but one outcome of attacks on American shipping in the region. Just as likely as a show of force was to deter violence, Americans also found themselves the victims of successful pirate attacks. Preble later recorded in his diary of the news “of the plunder of a ship, the \textit{Caldera}, by pirates down the coast, and there the crew and a lady passenger [found themselves] at the mercy of the wretches.”\textsuperscript{52}

The rhetoric of the persistent threat of piracy in the coastal waters of China helps explain some of the larger American concerns during this period. In their attempts to establish and expand economic connections, piracy represented the clearest and most tangible risk to the success of these mercantile endeavors. Pirates represented a real danger to vessels and sailors as well as to the profit that could be made through the successful exchange of goods. The inability of the Chinese government to control piracy, much as with mobs, led Americans to believe in the limited capacity of Chinese institutions. The situations also led many to question the ability of the imperial state to meet its treaty responsibilities if the basic matter of security could not be dealt with.

\textit{Coolies}

Pirates were not the only concern of Americans on the high seas. As many texts on the subject have noted, the discovery of gold in California in late 1848 sparked a surge of Chinese labor immigration to the west coast of North America.\textsuperscript{53} Throughout the remainder of the

\textsuperscript{52} Preble, Ibid., 54/10/22, 351.
\textsuperscript{53} Elizabeth Sinn, \textit{Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong} (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press); and, Dong Wang, \textit{The United States and China: A History from the Eighteenth Century to the Present} (New York: Rowman and Martin, 2013).
nineteenth century this influx triggered racial and economic backlashes against Chinese and Chinese-Americans in the United States. But equally important, as Chinese laborers, colloquially known as “coolies,” made their way to gold mines in California and sugar plantations across South America, the Caribbean, and eventually even to the southern United States, American shipping companies found transporting shiploads of Chinese laborers to the Americas to be as profitable as importing teas and silks. As Moon-Ho Jung notes in his study of Chinese immigrants to the American sugar plantations of Louisiana, the word “coolie” does not appear in American dictionaries until 1848. Owing to this late and conflicting arrival of terminology, “coolie” was a word amorphously and generally applied to all Chinese immigrants, regardless of occupation or class. Even before the consolidated rise of anti-Chinese sentiment in the West, there existed a concern among Americans that the transportation of the coolies themselves carried moral and physical dangers for all involved. What was uniformly expressed by American officials in China was the need for tighter restrictions on the coolie trade, as a series of reports presented these workers as a source of danger to American vessels and sailors.

The most notorious case depicting the dangers of the coolie trade was that of the Robert Browne, an American merchant vessel traveling from southern China to San Francisco. With over four hundred Chinese laborers on board, the Robert Browne ran aground near Formosa.

---

54 There are many theories as to why the Chinese became the targets of discrimination in California. Chiu Ping asserts that the cause was mostly economic. Because they were willing to work for the lowest wages, and because they were already feeling displaced by the growing role of industrialized labor, Americans took their frustrations out on the small number of Chinese laborers. Chiu Ping. *Chinese Labor in California: An Economic Study* (Madison, WI: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1967). Matthew Jacobson asserts that social and cultural hierarchies of “whiteness” drove those at the bottom of the system, namely the Irish and other immigrant groups, to mobilize anti-Chinese sentiment as a matter of improving their own status. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). The reality of anti-Chinese sentiment was likely a complex and individualized matter of race, religion, culture, and economics brought to the fore by outbreaks of mass anti-Chinese actions.

[Taiwan] during a storm. In what was called a “nefarious tragedy” by Commodore John Aulick, the laborers killed the American captain during his attempt to stop them from fleeing the ship.\textsuperscript{56} American sailors from another ship captured seventeen of the fleeing coolies, and rather than assert U.S. naval jurisdiction American officials turned them over to the Chinese government with the hope that they would curry favor with the local government and the expectation that the accused would be tried and convicted for killing a foreigner. Instead, fifteen of the seventeen were acquitted of all charges, the Chinese government citing mistreatment of the workers by the captain and his crew. American officials determined that in the future U.S. jurisdiction would be asserted in such cases to prevent further judicial malfeasance by the Chinese and to decrease the threat of “piracy and murder” that the coolies posed.\textsuperscript{57} The \textit{Robert Browne} incident, and others like it, convinced many that the risk of transporting Chinese laborers was too great and that the United States risked its security through the “importation of Chinese vagrants” selling their services as coolies.\textsuperscript{58} The incident also hit the nerve of the converging problem of if the coolies were examples of free labor seeking employment or whether the violence that marred their departure indicated the presence of something more akin to indentured servitude or slavery.\textsuperscript{59} The continued threat of coolie uprisings on ships resulted in extreme cases of violence on the part of foreign shippers, and justifications for this violence in consular reports. On a French ship transporting coolies to Manila, the workers attempted to revolt against the crew because of mistreatment. In response, the crew sealed the coolies in the lowest level of the ship. Two-

\textsuperscript{56} John Aulick to Graham, June 16, 1852, ADPP, Vol. 17, 303.
\textsuperscript{57} Peter Parker to Daniel Webster, May 21, 1852, ADPP, Vol. 17, 277
\textsuperscript{58} Peter Parker to William Marcy, August 26, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 6, 129.
\textsuperscript{59} It was not until the Page Act of 1875 that the United States explicitly attempted to prohibit the immigration of Chinese laborers under questionable circumstances. The question of forced prostitution of women and indentured servitude for men played into nativist rhetoric of the inability of the Chinese to ever fully integrate into the social and economic fabric of the United States. Dong Wang, \textit{The United States and China: A History from the Eighteenth Century to the Present} (New York: Rowman and Martin, 2013).
hundred and forty Chinese suffocated to death before the crew realized what was happening. American officials described the coolies in their reports as “sacrificed” to keep the crew safe, “destroyed” in an accident, “unfortunate beings” who died because of their violence, or “sacrificed in a most inhuman manner.”\textsuperscript{60} Nowhere did the officials describe the Chinese as being killed or murdered, so while their fate may have been “inhuman,” it was framed in terms of an accidental “sacrifice” instead of as a result of the malfeasance of Westerners.

Efforts to curb, or at least improve, the conditions of the international coolie trade were phrased in moral comparisons to African slavery by abolitionists.\textsuperscript{61} A primary concern with the coolie trade was whether the workers were laboring voluntarily or involuntarily, and the deaths at Formosa, Manila, and elsewhere indicated to officials and abolitionists alike that the latter was the case. As Stacey Smith notes, the same scenarios that made California a haven for free (white) labor also made it enticing for semi-enslaved labor to arise as competition.\textsuperscript{62} In addition, they criticized American ships for maintaining conditions that were “little better in their operation, it is feared, than the African slave trade.”\textsuperscript{63} Despite these fears, no legal definitions arose at this time to clarify who was a “coolie,” nor were any restrictions on immigration enacted until 1862. American ships proceeded to transport coolies from China to other nations, and the profitability of the coolie trade drove its continuance throughout the late 1840s and 1850s despite the concerns of American officials in China.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{60} Peter Parker to William Marcy, January 14, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 6, 48; Peter Parker to William Marcy, August 26, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 6, 130; Palmer to William Marcy, November 9, 1855, ADPP, Vol. 17, 345; and Peter Parker to William Marcy, January 14, 1856, ADPP, 17, 148.
\textsuperscript{61} While the Page Act attempted to end the forced immigration of Chinese workers into the United States, no official action was taken during this era to altogether halt the immigration of Chinese workers until the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882.
\textsuperscript{63} Thomas Hyatt to William Marcy, May 1, 1855, Despatches from the United States Consuls in Amoy, 1844-1906, 53. Text Fiche, Roll 1.
\textsuperscript{64} Jung, Coolies and Cane, 34-35.
The fact that these laborers found employment as semi-indentured workers blurred the lines between free labor and slave. If their labor truly was free, then it begs the question as to why violence was needed to maintain the security of the ships, or why they did not have the liberty to disembark at the location of their choosing. Smith convincingly writes that the emergence of coolie laborers, along with that of freedmen and enslaved blacks, and *peones* from Central and Southern America, disrupt the idea of the American west as a bastion of free labor, where hard-working men and women could gain their fortune. Instead, she muddles the historical picture by elaborating on the multiple, competing relationships between capital and labor, and how much of the work was done under regimes of “wage slavery.”

Coolies existed in that unsettling middle territory, posing a challenge to the optimists’ claims to the unfettered value of their labor in the American west. Chinese labor posed a danger to those facilitating transport, and perhaps posed a larger threat to the idealized notion of the strength of “free labor” in the expanding American west.

So while primarily referring to the Chinese people in negative, collective terms, some patterns can be elicited from the plethora of reports. The perception of grave threats brought about by mobs, pirates, and coolies was a persistent concern for Americans. Yet, these reports relied on a similar system of description to describe the actions of these groups. Initial accounts defined the danger of the Chinese to themselves and foreigners in general. Dispatches then shifted to the threat to Americans in particular. And finally, they made assertions as to how Americans addressed the problems. Sometimes these steps were contained within individual messages, other times they extended across a series of reports. Regardless of the frequency of these documents, what is key is that in describing the Chinese people in such negative terms,

---

65 Smith, *Freedom’s Frontier*, 17.
Americans presented a scenario in which continued political, diplomatic, military, and economic interaction could be employed in order to ensure American trade and improve the situation in China itself. The danger groups of Chinese posed to Americans could be overlooked if the benefit was great enough.

**Murder**

The actions of mobs, coolies, and pirates all circulated around the central discourse of the physical safety of Americans interacting with the Chinese. While accounts emanating from China outlined the varieties of physical and mental distress placed on Americans living in the Middle Kingdom, the central logic around this rhetoric was that the Chinese had the capability to kill foreigners. For these travelers, the threat of murder was portrayed as an omnipresent aspect of their lives, and whether on land or at sea, beyond the treaty ports or behind the walls of foreign communities, discussions of Americans and other foreigners killed in China were of great import in the communications to the United States, both in moral outrage and through demands for increased security from Chinese and American officials.

What was arguably one of the most reported attacks from all American perspectives was the attack on and death of the Portuguese governor at Macau. While the governor was not American, his death rocked the foreign communities region-wide. It was alleged that the governor was the target of an attack because he approved construction in the colony that would have disturbed the burial sites of the ancestors of locals. An American representative to China,

---

66 In actuality, by a significant magnitude foreigners were more likely to die from disease or during an accident during transit to and from China than they were to die as victims of violence in the region.
Robert DeSilver, described the attack to Michigan Senator Lewis Cass as “a most barbarous act of atrocity.”67 Ball, who was also in China at the time, echoed the same language in his account, stating that the governor was “assassinated in the most barbarous manner.”68 Macaulay alleged a much more personal connection between the murderer and the governor. He wrote that the governor was “cowardly slain” by a man whose ancestral tomb was disrupted by a gateway, noting that the governor was decapitated as a result of the attack.69 Spalding presented a slightly altered report, explaining that the Macanese governor “was cut to pieces by the revengeful Chinamen, because of his having caused a road to be made through one of their burial-places in the vicinity.”70 Americans cared about the death of the Macanese governor because if an official of his stature could fall at the hands of the Chinese, what were the options for security for the average foreigner? The failings of the Chinese government to assist the Portuguese in tracking down the alleged assailant fueled the belief that the Qing could not maintain the security of foreigners.

Americans were not immune to deadly assaults either, as Consul General Peter Parker noted that “one of our Countrymen had been most brutally murdered by a mob of Chinese without the slightest provocation whatever.” He continued on to say that despite a number of witnesses proving that it was an “unmitigated murder,” Chinese officials were unwilling and unable to bring the known culprits to justice.71 The consuls and diplomats representing the United States also found their lives threatened on occasion, resulting in newsworthy scandals back home. The *Fayetteville Observer* attempted to rally the outcry of its readers, explaining

---

68 Ball, *Rambles*, 311.
69 Macaulay, *Kathay*, 47.
71 Peter Parker to William Marcy, July 26, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 11, 254-55.
“An outrage of a right-handed character had been perpetrated against the United States Government,” after one consul representative was shot and injured while in China. In addition, the paper alleged that “Other outrages had been perpetrated,” which resulted in demands “calling loudly for redress.” What these reports made clear was that no foreigner, whether a common merchant or a colonial governor, was safe from fatal attacks, and that the Chinese government was doing nothing to stop them. Likewise, other diplomats noted that during the period when the Taiping Rebellion gained momentum, the Chinese government was unable to stop a rise in the murder rate between its own subjects in Shanghai. As a result of continuing conflict, Abbott wrote that “Hundreds of women and children were found to have been murdered on the retreat of the enemy.” The instability fomented by the presence of the Taiping only further undermined American confidence in the Qing. While these messages addressed Chinese assertions that foreigners killed Chinese subjects as well, and that both sides were often equally culpable in perpetrating violence, American officials usually added that Chinese deaths at the hands of Americans were almost always in self defense.

Formosa

Along with the burden posed by the Taiping on the territorial security of Chinese and American alike, the other dominant source of uncontrolled threat throughout this period remained the inhabitants of Formosa. As Emma Teng writes, throughout the nineteenth century the Qing government maintained only a tenuous control of the island and its non-Han

72 “Late Advices from China,” *Fayetteville Observer* (16 Nov. 1854), 2.
74 Jacob Abbott, *China and the English, or the Character and Manners of the Chinese, as Illustrated in the History of Their Intercourses with Foreigners, To Which is Added an Account of the Late War* (Cooperstown, NY: H. & E. Phinney, 1843), 304.
inhabitants. Only by the end of the century, spurred on by Japanese expansionist ambitions, did the government manage to assert a more formal control of the territory, only to lose it after the First Sino-Japanese War.75 Ball warned his readers that the Formosans were “hostile and treacherous,” and that the “interior has never been subdued” by the Qing.76 Lowrie painted a much more nuanced picture of the governmental situation found on Formosa. “The western part is under the dominion of the Emperor of China, but the inhabitants of the mountains in the centre have not been subdued, and the eastern shore is almost unknown.”77 It was that “unknown” aspect of Formosa and its inhabitants that proved troublesome for foreign sailors and merchants. Framing the issue in terms of missed economic opportunities, Macaulay viewed the violent disturbances on the island as a hindrance to resource development.

Although the Chinese government asserts supremacy over Formosa, and subjects its inhabitants to tribute, yet amongst the aborigines are several tribes, which it has never been able to subdue, and who as yet successfully dispute its authority, overrun the peaceably disposed districts, and prevent this extensive island from being more thoroughly explored, and its vast resources fully developed.78

Peter Parker blamed the “inefficiency and mismanagement” of the provincial government for the dangers Formosa posed to the physical and economic well-being of foreigners, but others placed the blame squarely on the indigenous Formosans.79 Shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing, the Vermont Phoenix reported that Formosans had taken a number of stranded British sailors captive on the island, but nothing was said as to their fate.80 Even almost ten years later, accounts of sailing crews being stranded, or worse murdered, on Formosa continued to emerge.

75 Emma Teng, Taiwan’s Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).
76 Ball, Rambles, 222.
77 Lowrie, Memoirs, 291.
78 Macaulay, Kathay, 150.
79 Parker to Webster, 51/6/20, ADPP Vol. 12, 15.
80 “China,” Vermont Phoenix (16 Sep. 1842), 3.
from published accounts of contemporary China.\textsuperscript{81} After his own brush with danger in the region, Macaulay, relieved, wrote “The inhabitants of this part of Formosa are savages, some say cannibals. Had we fallen into their hands, defenceless \textit{sic}, there was but little chance of escaping, so greatly did they outnumber our crew.” He explained that much of his hesitancy in approaching Formosa was due to hearing of how a previous shipwrecked crew “saw their unfortunate shipmates lanced, and decapitated,” by the islanders.\textsuperscript{82} And even if Formosans were not the cause of the threat, Spalding asserted that because the island was “the home of a lot of throat-cutting, piratical Chinese refugees,” it remained a danger to foreigners and Chinese all the same.\textsuperscript{83} Macaulay was one of many who asserted that the inability of the Qing government to wield power over the Formosans, and thereby ensure the security of the merchant marine, was justification enough for the colonization of the island by an outside force. “If gain will not induce civilized powers to occupy this as yet undeveloped island, the cause of humanity should interest some such maritime nation as England or America, to at least chastize \textit{sic} those barbarous savages who overrun its eastern shores.”\textsuperscript{84}

What the rhetoric of the physical threat of the Chinese to Americans in China portrayed was a country that was inhospitable to outside interests. While these dangers did in no way stop or even slow the rising demand for American access to greater populations of the Chinese, they did highlight the need for an increased security presence so as to ensure the safe exchange of goods and ideas. The threats to foreigners also posed a particular problem for the Qing government. Foreign deaths were so frequently blamed on the inability of local Chinese officials to keep order that they further fueled allegations of the disintegration of the Chinese state. The

\textsuperscript{81} “India and China,” \textit{Burlington Free Press} (19 Sep. 1851), 3.
\textsuperscript{82} Macaulay, \textit{Kathay}, 140 and 152.
\textsuperscript{83} Spalding, \textit{Japan}, 205.
\textsuperscript{84} Macaulay, \textit{Kathay}, 152.
smallest conflicts became projected to international scale and foreigners focused on every slight and perceived danger while at the same time ignoring their role in inspiring violence against outsiders.

**Threats to American Ideals**

Beyond the proliferation of physical threats that Americans perceived during their journeys to China, the actions of the Chinese provided an entirely different range of threats to the idealized position Americans wished to occupy in the region and on the world stage. Breaches of diplomatic protocol, difficulties in engaging in trade, significant efforts focused on preventing the Chinese from “cheating” in their interactions with foreigners, and the questionable status of Americans engaged in the coolie trade all posed significant problems. Rather than assessing the role of foreign complicity in the problems of foreign and economic relations, Americans instead focused on the ways in which the status quo failed to fulfill the panoply of their ambitions.

Paramount to the difficulties between Americans and Chinese during the intra-Opium War period was the continued inability of foreigners to gain regular access to the highest echelons of imperial officials so as to discuss new and continuing problems between Americans and their Chinese counterparts. While Qing representatives made many concessions to the United States and other nations, the continued resistance to allow diplomatic access to the capital remained a major sticking point by the time the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia) was to be renegotiated in 1856. Without access to the imperial capital, Americans felt that they were subject to the whim of local and provincial officials, who they perceived to be less than hospitable to outside influence. As the issues of mob and piratical violence indicated, the threat of physical danger threw into contrast the promises of security made in Chinese treaties – or at
least those believed to be part of the treaty – and the inability or unwillingness of the Chinese
government to protect foreign activity.

Such are the difficulties which have been almost continually occurring between the
Chinese government and their European customers. These difficulties arise in some
degree from the peculiar spirit of the Chinese character and the Chinese law, but more
especially from the absence of all settled arrangement and understanding between the
government of China and those of the nations whose merchants trade with them.Jacob Abbott’s writings indicate the general sentiment most Americans in China felt at this time.
Problems continued to emerge because of cultural differences and a lack of clear diplomatic
guidance toward reaching an amicable resolution. It is not surprising that as the treaties between
China and its new trading partners came up for renegotiation before the Second Opium War,
foreign insistence regarding access to Peking [Beijing] increased.

There were many ways that Americans believed the Chinese themselves damaged
positive relations between the United States and China. Foremost was the conviction that the
Chinese bureaucracy actively sought to undermine the position of foreigners in the treaty ports.
Shaw posited that the “jealousy of the government confines all intercourse” between China,
while Humphrey Marshall wrote to the secretary of state that “indifference, if not contempt” was
the primary sentiment expressed by Chinese bureaucrats toward foreigners. Whether that
contempt emanated directly from the emperor or was a result of power-mad mandarins was
unknown. Recalling the strain placed on Sino-foreign relations before and during the First
Opium War, Abeel believed that Commissioner Lin’s opium confiscation was part of a larger
scheme by the Qing to undermine outsiders. “The object of the Chinese is to starve or annoy the
foreign community into subservience to the commands of the Emperor's minister.”

---
85 Abbott, English, 123.
86 Samuel Shaw, The Journals of Major Samuel Shaw, the First American Consul at Canton, Ed. Josiah Quincy
(Boston: W. Crosby and H.P. Nichols, 1847), 167; and, Marshall to Secretary of State, ADPP Vol. 4, 53/2/7, 14.
87 Williamson, Abeel, 186.
combination of cultural hierarchy and anti-foreign sentiment, Ball explained the problems American officials often had with mandarins. “Though they professed to meet as equals, their countenances indicated a feeling of superiority, so firmly does prejudice seem to have rooted itself in them.”88 The enduring practice of the “kow-tow,” or ritual bowing to the emperor, was another factor of formal relations that Americans found aberrant and abhorrent in their understanding of how foreign relations should be maintained. Foreigners, Americans included, believed that the representatives of foreign nations were to be treated as direct emissaries of their heads of state. The belief was that actions such as kow-towing humiliated the representative as well as his home country.89 Either as a result of direct malice or recalcitrance toward foreign issues, Americans generally viewed the actions and inactions of the Chinese mandarin class with an air of suspicion. Although framed in the paternalistic attitude of the United States acting as a purveyor of “correct” avenues of foreign relations, these comments were squarely positioned within the purview of protecting overall American interests in the region from threats. Yet, the peculiarities of Chinese governance affected not just the diplomatic relationship Americans desired but also American economic expectations.

As the presence of merchants far outweighed the diplomatic, missionary, or other related endeavors in China, the question of how Chinese behavior negatively impacted international trade was critical in American attempts to understand why Sino-American trade did not reach the acme of expectation. Among many of the complaints was a lack of Chinese infrastructure to reinforce the security and efficacy of foreign trade. As Dong Wang emphasizes in her book *The United States and China*, the pre-Opium War status quo worked for the Chinese because it

88 Ball, *Rambles*, 337.
limited trade to Canton in the south and it isolated the imperial center through layers of bureaucracy. In addition, foreigners had to undergo four steps – including offloading their cargo onto Chinese ships to travel past Whampoa midway between Canton and Macau – that ensured a firm control over foreign trade. After the war, the elimination of those layers of bureaucracy created a pell-mell of foreigners arriving to take advantage of the new opportunities, but the new system lacked the same sophistication as the old, resulting in a steady stream of complaints from Americans as to how China could improve the ports for the benefit of foreigners. Among the complaints was the perceived danger of transporting goods in China’s coastal waters, and if the persistent stream of reports of shipwrecks on Formosa was any indication, the danger was not entirely fabricated. Lowrie proposed a system of lighthouses and buoys in the Yangzi delta in particular as a means to ensure the safe passage of ships traveling to and from Shanghai. Nevertheless, the people of China were deemed to be more of a risk in trade than the geography of its coastline.

The treaty ports also presented an economic danger in the threat of Americans being taken advantage of by unscrupulous Chinese merchants left unfettered by the elimination of the Cohong system. While Cohong merchants maintained responsibility for the debts and actions of its members, the same cannot be said of postwar trading partners. Interestingly, the same facets of Chinese mercantile exchange that some Americans praised as a hopeful indication of potential market access, namely their drive for money, was a double-edged sword that posed a challenge to American economic activity. Caleb Cushing, upon concluding the treaty, wrote that he hoped the Chinese would establish a system for aggrieved parties “by way of precaution against the

---

91 Lowrie, *Memoirs*, 293.
danger of a peculiar character incident to trade with the Chinese, dangers likely to be increased by the multiplication of the free ports.”

Among the “dangers” that existed for American merchants was the perceived unscrupulous attitude of Chinese merchants for foreigners. “The shopkeepers are really tedious in their importunities,” Ball wrote, as they were likely to harass foreigners in an effort to sell items and ensure their own profit. The grip that Chinese merchants allegedly maintained was so deep that even the most profitable of trade goods, namely tea, was defended as a state trade secret. The failure of foreigners to get seeds from tea plants in the interior, far from the treaty ports, acted as proof to Bongynge that “the jealousy of China is too well known, to suppose she would part to foreigners the means of shutting up one of her two greatest exports.” But to this point, others were aware of the role foreigners played in undermining the Chinese economic systems, especially those that peddled opium, in diminishing Chinese opinions of American merchants. Nathan Allen, in his diatribe against the opium trade, made a distinct argument that opium use drove profits at the expense of capital available for the purchase of other goods. As American merchants only controlled as much as 10 percent of the opium trade, compared with the near monopoly of British imports from their plantations on the Indian subcontinent, Allen viewed the trade as undermining products Americans could sell to compete with the British. In addition, “This evil prejudices the Chinese against all commercial intercourse with foreigners, and destroys all desire or ambition on their part to improve their circumstances or cultivate habits of industry.”

93 Ball, Rambles, 106.
94 Francis Bongynge, The Future Wealth of America: Being a Glance at the Resources of the United States and the Commercial and Agricultural Advances of Cultivating Tea, Coffee and Indigo, the Date, Mango, Jack, Leechee, Guava, and Orange Trees, Etc. With a Review of the China Trade (New York: Published by the Author, 1852), 102.
95 Nathan Allen, M.D., The Opium Trade; Including a Sketch of Its History, Extent, Effects, Etc. As Carried on in India and China (Lowell, MA: James P. Walker, 1853), 66.
Although Allen brought forth the idea that opium use endangered Chinese “habits of industry,” conversely Americans concerned themselves with the idea that Chinese merchants were inveterate cheaters, using their industriousness to take advantage of unwise foreign counterparts. The American Sunday-School Union went as far as to ascribe “their love of money” as an inherent aspect of the Chinese character, evidenced by its continued importance even after death through the ritual burning of paper money in Buddhist ceremonies for deceased ancestors.96 Ritual burning of fake paper money aside, living Chinese were accused of being equally voracious in their efforts to obtain wealth and money. In their zero-sum conceptualization of economics, every silver piece in the hands of the Chinese meant one less in the pockets of Americans. Shaw wrote of one Chinese merchant as being “ever loath to part with ready money.”97 Americans who had experience engaging with Chinese merchants made it clear to their readers that informed foreigners were well aware of the strict monetary habits of the Chinese. Macaulay met one Chinese merchant in Java who had been to the United States. He wrote that this merchant’s experience abroad was verified in that “he cheated us entirely to our satisfaction, and with such a grace as almost to make us fear he was robbing himself.”98 While Macaulay’s story maintains a sentiment of jest and amusement, it reinforced the notion that the Chinese were not to be trifled with when it came to making a profit, nor was this greed isolated to individual merchants. Ball maintained the opinion that “The Chinese are great cheats, the whole of them, I believe.”99

---

97 Shaw, Journals, 300.
98 Macualay, Kathay, 30.
99 Ball, Rambles, 206.
The records of merchants and travelers in China detailed the many means by which they negatively experienced the shrewdness of Chinese merchants. The most frequent complaint was the “oversell” by Chinese when quoting prices of goods to foreigners. While they expected to negotiate for the terms of deals, Americans were usually aghast at the techniques of Chinese negotiation. Boatmen in particular, according to Ball, “always demand more than was agreed on with them, or a larger remuneration than is usual.”\textsuperscript{100} He later added that, “In trading with the Chinese they generally ask double what they intend to take for their goods, as all learn after a little experience with them.”\textsuperscript{101} Even when not intending negotiations, Ball found himself caught within a system of negotiation through overvaluation. Ball wrote that he accidentally killed an old woman's chicken, and when trying to pay a remuneration for the damage he had done she tried to charge him double the worth of the chicken. Once he agreed to a price, “The whole party of Chinese then moved off, laughing, talking, and bestowing upon us their signs of approbation, like so many children.”\textsuperscript{102} The problem of foreign overpayment, however, was not limited to labor and commodities. Lowrie consistently complained that Americans paid rents that were “twice as much as the Chinese pay” in the treaty port cities.\textsuperscript{103} Nor did the Chinese limit themselves to merely asking for double the value of their goods and services.

The Chinese are good merchants. They are systematic, obliging to customers, and indefatigable in the pursuit of money. So much cannot be said of the generality of small traders with whom foreigners come in contact, who are as great rogues as can be found anywhere; and most of them will ask four or five times as much for an article as they expect to get.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 302.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 95.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 347.
\textsuperscript{103} Lowrie, Memoirs, 316.
\textsuperscript{104} P. T. Barnum, Ten Thousand Things on China and the Chinese: Being a Picture of the Genius, Government, History, Literature, Agriculture, Arts, Trade, Manners, Customs, and Social Life of the People of the Celestial Empire, as Illustrated by the Chinese Collection (New York, J. S. Bedfield, 1850), 83.
These writers were certain of their accusations of Chinese economic danger. Overlooking potential cultural differences in the expectations of basic economic exchanges, they truly believed that they were treated unfairly in the processes of negotiation simply because of their status as foreigners. The fact that the Chinese did not conform with American expectations of “fair trade” shows the extent to which these allegations of unfairness were predicated on the belief that the Chinese needed to earn money like Americans, or perhaps more deeply the idea that Americans resented not having the upper-hand in the relationship.

Outright hostility against the methodology of negotiation process was often partnered with the paranoia of product adulteration, especially in the tea trade. As foreigners had no access to the tea producing regions of China at this time, Americans were constantly concerned that the tea that they purchased was of an inferior quality to that produced and sold domestically. Sears reported that colored and adulterated tea byproducts were often sold to foreigners for well above their actual value.105 The Jeffersonian Republican wrote that it was “Sorry Comfort for Tea Drinkers,” knowing the extent of the “deception” within the tea industry and the limited abilities of tea merchants to halt the practice.106 It was less about the fact that Americans found themselves subjected to inferior tea and more about the high price they paid for the substandard product. Bonynge recalled that Americans had to “pay 100 cents per lb. for Chinese refuse teas, and tea house sweepings, mixed up with worthless leaves.”107 The fact that Americans could do little to stop being swindled by the Chinese helped to reinforce the concept that they felt they were still in the dark regarding the intricacies of China, and the damage that that was doing to American interests. The lack of access beyond the ports and the continued mysteriousness of

105 Sears, Pictorial, 308.
106 “Sorry Comfort for Tea Drinkers,” Jeffersonian Republican (6 Nov. 1851), 1.
107 Bonynge, Future, 115.
things such as tea production imperiled the supposed economic success these merchants believed they should have reaped.

The perils of engaging in the China trade, from deception to the difficulties of negotiation, often paled in comparison to the overall liability of attempting to trade in China. Americans maintained the notion that the previous Cohong system was “grossly unjust and oppressive,” and that the treaty port regime was little better.108 The reluctance of the Chinese government to even abide by its treaties with the United States, specifically the reticence of imperial officials immediately to open ports after the conclusion of the Opium War, was also a concern.109 But larger still was the issue of the security of China as a whole, which was starkly challenged when the Taiping Uprising interrupted internal trade networks and disrupted American aims at expanding influence further afield. At one point, the threat of the Taiping to the stability of the Qing system was said to be so great as that Chinese merchants were rumored to be converting their wealth to gold and minimizing their trade expenditures until the uncertainties passed.110 Not only did the Taiping directly affect Sino-American trade, but the additional expenditures of doing business in that environment also levied an additional toll. The New York Tribune alleged that foreigners were being “black mailed” by locals to guarantee safe trading passage, especially in the areas around Shanghai where the Taiping exerted the most influence.111 If the language of risk and danger in engaging in the China trade was not enough, a brief discussion of the cost of even considering doing business in China is warranted. A billet from the China Mutual Insurance Company gives some indication of the perceived risk involved. The company required a substantial $1,000 buy-in to invest in funding a venture, with a massive

108 Abbott, English, 130.
$500,000 maximum liability if the endeavor fell through for a variety of potential dangers.\textsuperscript{112} While the actual economic gain of a successful venture was quite real, the danger of a failed voyage was equally authentic – though usually because of climatic rather than nefarious reasons.

Americans alleged that the dangers involved in working with the “crooked dealing and faithless John Chinaman” were many.\textsuperscript{113} Defining the physical, logistical, and cultural difficulties reveals just how engaged Americans found themselves in the China trade while at the same time it uncovered how unprepared they were in the process. The alleged problems of cheating, overpayment, governmental intransigence, and even adulteration of goods were well defined, but these fears were clearly in conflict with the opportunistic endeavors in which many hoped to engage. The troubles may have been many, but the potential profit in the China trade could not be denied. The dangers involved for those engaged in the China trade were often based on the risks involved by individuals who made the decision to travel to China, or at least to invest in a venture. As Sino-American trade expanded, so too did the risk of engaging with the Chinese in trade beyond China, as the issue of the Coolie trade brought many of the concerns about the dangers of the Chinese to the domestic arena.

**Coolies and the Threat of Expanding Slavery**

In the aftermath of the First Opium War, increased American interest in China was perhaps best typified by the desire to make a profit by engaging with Chinese labor. How Americans framed the potential of Chinese physical labor, coupled with assertions that wealth could be found by facilitating Coolie transportation around the Pacific region, conflicts with a period better known for the origins of anti-Chinese movements in the American West. Many of

\textsuperscript{112} “China Mutual Insurance” Broadside, Manuscript Division, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

the same firms and families that were engaged in the African slave trade underwrote investments in transporting coolies across the globe. They often found a more than sevenfold rate of return, but that benefit was met with the cost of a harrowing death rate of over 11 percent during transport of these contract laborers.\textsuperscript{114} Because of the similarities of profit and death between transporting coolies and the Atlantic slave trade, contemporaries did not view these issues in isolation from the larger debates regarding chattel slavery.\textsuperscript{115} Indeed, one can see how perceptions of the Chinese and the China trade played within the increasingly sectionalized ideologies emerging in the mid-nineteenth century under the broader thematic concept of opportunity. Abolitionists and “free soil” advocates, while concerned with the conditions of Chinese laborers in places like Peru and Cuba, sometimes found common ground with their pro-slavery counterparts in advocating for the importation of Coolie labor as an alternate labor source to slaves.

The domestic issue of slavery became a convenient scaffold on which Americans framed the emerging presence of Chinese labor. As such, and depending on the persuasion of the observer, coolies could either solve the question of slavery in their offerings of cheap labor or could find themselves trapped in a system equally as abhorrent. Rather than challenging the well-trod historiography of anti-Chinese sentiment in the United States, this analysis adds to the existing narrative by focusing exclusively on the rhetoric that the transportation of this labor inspired. By analyzing the language of those engaged in describing the Coolie trade, we see not an accurate image of the value or danger of the Chinese but instead how contemporaneous


\textsuperscript{115} Erik Foner, \textit{Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). Foner’s work describes how the 1850s saw a massive and unprecedented political reorganization which resulted in the establishment of a Republican party with a focus on anti-slavery and “free labor” ideals. These ideals were a driving force behind anti-Chinese and anti-Coolie sentiment, as their contracted labor and paltry wages fed into racialized economic tensions in California.
Americans mobilized this issue within a larger discourse on Pacific economics, labor, race, and the problems of slavery. Alexander Saxton notes that in California “The dominant society responded differently to Irish or Slavic than to Oriental [i.e. Chinese] cheap workers, not so much for economic as for ideological and psychological reasons.\textsuperscript{116}

In \textit{The Coolie Speaks}, Lisa Yun describes coolie workers as “a conundrum of contradictions: hypermobile yet immobilized, owned by one and owned by many, fluid yet enslaved.” Utilizing a variety of means and routes, over 100,000 Chinese traveled to Cuba and 140,000 to Peru in 1847 alone – showing that these avenues were already well traveled before the discovery of gold focused journeys toward California.\textsuperscript{117} With its origins in the Hindi word \textit{kuli} for laborer, as Elizabeth Sinn notes, it is both incorrect and inaccurate to classify all Chinese emigrants as “coolie” laborers, as Chinese on both sides of the Pacific acted as merchants, trade agents, investors, and a wide variety of other professions that gravitated toward the value of the Pacific trading networks.\textsuperscript{118} Yet, this understanding of actual Chinese labor activity conflicts with the contemporary American perception that the vast majority Chinese immigrants were laborers. For the rhetoric surrounding the labor value of coolies, their imagined role as pliable and movable workers trumped the reality of a much more hierarchical penetration of the California labor market.

\textsuperscript{116} Alexander Saxton, \textit{The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California} (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1971), 2. Saxton emphasizes the “unskilled” nature of Coolie labor, though this conflicts with Elizabeth Sinn’s recent assertion that, after the initial wave of gold-seeking workers, the Chinese found a wide array of non-mining employment opportunities and were more tightly organized and connected than other racial, ethnic, or religious groups, which often drew the ire of others. Elizabeth Sinn, \textit{Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong} (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012).

\textsuperscript{117} Yun, \textit{The Coolie Speaks}, xvi, 7, and 10.

\textsuperscript{118} Elizabeth Sinn, \textit{Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong} (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012).
Much of the discussion regarding the value of transporting Chinese laborers compared their perceived capabilities and beneficial attitudes with that of other racial groups in the United States. Rev. William Speer explained that one benefit of Chinese immigrants was that they always paid their debts. “The difference between the Chinese miner and the pale-faced miner, is this: the former manages to live always within his means; the latter, too often, beyond. So that the profit the storekeeper derives from his Chinese customer is apt to be lost by crediting the French, Irish, and Americans.” Speer added that self-policing among the Chinese was an effective means of ensuring debt payment, preventing public begging by other Chinese immigrants, and eliminating scenes of public drunkenness from taking place because of their fellow countrymen.  

Likewise, George Sampson’s report on the opium trade highlighted the “unfitness” of Indians to perform difficult labor in the West and advanced the growing belief “that the negro is destined to be superseded in [the West] by the Chinaman.”

This pre-American Civil War conceptualization of Chinese workers decreasing dependence on slave labor was a recurring trend among some abolitionists. The Jeffersonian Republican, for example, explained that the presumed work abilities of the Chinese meant that “the Asiatic is destined to supplant the African,” providing labor to the south as Irish immigrants provided in urban areas in the north. For his part, Speer advocated a truly abolitionist approach when he explained, “Chinese immigration, indeed, extends a hope of the emancipation of the negro. Their free labor would be cheaper than their labor as slaves. Reasonable Southern men proclaim themselves glad to be relieved from the responsibilities, anxieties, hazards, and

---

120 George Sampson and Lewis Tappan, Report on the Committee Appointed by the Government of the “Board of Trade,” to Take into Consideration the Communication of Messrs. Sampson & Tappan (Boston: J.H. Eastburn’s Press, 1856), 9.
manifold and continued burthens [sic] of such ‘property.’” The proposed value of Chinese labor also found itself viewed through a lens of competing racial ideology and hierarchies of economic value. Unlike successive waves of European immigrants enticed or driven to the United States who had assured or at least arguable racial status as “white,” Chinese immigrants to California were gradually denied the legal, economic, and social benefits associated with whiteness.\textsuperscript{122} Although the Chinese were not white in this estimation, they were also not black, creating an uncertain space within racialized categories of labor that existed before the Civil War in which they could be simultaneously desired and reviled in their faculty to perform labor in the United States and elsewhere.

In this flexible capacity, the role of Americans to clearly and effectively employ Chinese labor was key. In his papers of his time engaged in the coolie trade and transportation between Hong Kong and South America, William Comstock wrote, “Our impression is that the customary rate of wages for Cuba laborers is $4 per month and they to pay their own doctors bills, and that no provision is made for returning them to China.” He included the observation that Panamanians paid a better wage, offered medical care to their workers, and “transport[ed] them back to China” as ways of enticing Coolie labor, keeping them happily employed, and ensuring their eventual departure.\textsuperscript{123} Sampson added that an English clergyman in Lima, Peru, told him, “if the Coolies were fairly and honestly engaged in China, with a full knowledge of what they were to do, and the engagement with them kept in good faith, there could be no earthly objection” to making a profit off of transporting them to and fro across the Pacific Ocean. Speer

\textsuperscript{122} A number of recent studies on “whiteness” as a category of analysis has helped to clarify the complex means by which race was not a simple binary of black or white, and whereby the rules of inclusion or exclusion within these categories changed over time. Thomas A. Guglielmo, \textit{White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Theodore W. Allen, \textit{Invention of the White Race} (New York: Verso, 1994).

\textsuperscript{123} William Ogilvie Comstock, \textit{William Ogilvie Comstock Papers, 53/8/1}, Manuscripts Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.
claimed the need for increased immigration from Asia, as “Our own Atlantic States cannot spare a large continued emigration to California. But by the supervision of foreign labour, American knowledge and energy will in time advance California to an equality with the proudest portions of our land.” He continued, “We believe none that are foreigners can be found superior to the Chinese,” especially when it came to agricultural work, again emphasizing their use as unskilled laborers. In a separate publication, Speer also noted the estimated potential of over one million dollars in profit from transporting Chinese workers, not to mention income from domestic transport and mercantile supply for these groups. So while it is known that these influxes of labor triggered increasing anti-Chinese sentiment, there also existed a vocal contingent who continued to advocate on the behalf of Chinese labor, or at least on behalf of using Chinese labor for American profit.

These advocates emphasized the positive aspects to using Chinese labor, such as their purported work ethic and the fact that the vast majority of these laborers were not permanent immigrants, but were in essence migratory laborers. By using news accounts they challenged anti-Chinese rhetoric in America by illustrating how the Chinese who had already immigrated to Jamaica and other Caribbean islands in order to work on sugar plantations were as “laborious,” “trustworthy,” and “more skillful . . . in performance of their work than the blacks.” They also noted that in the Caribbean, coolies who worked on plantations there were “employed at the [contractually agreed upon] rate of three dollars per month in China, and bound to service for a specified term of years.” Others commented on the fact that many Chinese only lived in these

---

124 Speer, China, 94.
areas temporarily, returning to their homeland after earning enough money. These sources often cited the intention of brief employment as another reason the Chinese were more valuable than other immigrants, as their temporary residence did not require the issues of citizenship to be broached.\footnote{\textquotedblleft From China,	extquotedblright \textit{Vermont Watchmen} (22 Apr. 1854), 1.}

The premise of economic gain extended beyond the value that the Chinese provided in the context of labor, as the transportation of their physical bodies brought out conflicting assessments concerning the relation of this trade to chattel slavery. American shipping companies found transporting Chinese laborers to the Americas to be as profitable as importing tea and silks. Yet, American consular officials in China uniformly expressed the need for tighter restrictions on the coolie trade, as incidents like the \textit{Robert Browne} presented transportation arrangements as dangerous to ships’ crews and the coolies themselves, as well as a challenge to the notion of free labor. The desire for labor and increased profit from the “most laborious and trustworthy people in the world” conflicted with the “barbarian ferocity” that emanated from them, according to the \textit{Nashville Union}, because of their role as victims in “white slavery.”\footnote{“Chinese Coolies,” \textit{Nashville Union} (May 5, 1853), 2.} Thus, the Chinese maintained a level of whiteness that assured them a status that protected them from slavery, but conversely did not protect them from indentured servitude. The \textit{New York Tribune} pulled no punches in its equivalency of the Atlantic slave trade and the emerging coolie trade. “The so called cooly [sic] trade is replete with irregularities, immoralities, and revolting and inhuman atrocities, strongly resembling the African Slave trade.” It was filled with the same “barbarity, treachery, and deceit” engaged by traders to get Chinese labor, and the reports of injuries and deaths shared similar traits.\footnote{“Havana,” \textit{New York Tribune} (Aug. 8, 1856), 6; and, “Seisure of the Mail,” \textit{New York Tribune} (Mar. 7, 1853), 7.} Accounts of suffocation

\begin{flushleft}
\footnote{\textquotedblleft From China,	extquotedblright \textit{Vermont Watchmen} (22 Apr. 1854), 1.}
\footnote{“Chinese Coolies,” \textit{Nashville Union} (May 5, 1853), 2.}
\end{flushleft}
Below decks, Chinese committing suicide by leaping from the ships, and malnourishment of the workers upon their arrival further intensified criticism of the coolie trade as coequal to the evils to the Atlantic slave trade.\footnote{Palmer to William Marcy, November 9, 1855, ADPP, Vol. 17, 345; “On February 12 . . .,” \textit{New York Tribune} (Jul. 10, 1856), 4; and, “Kidnapping and Slavery of Chinese Coolies,” \textit{Anti-Slavery Bugle} (Apr. 12, 1856), 2.}

The \textit{Robert Browne} confrontation, and others like it, convinced many that the risk of transporting Chinese laborers was too great and that the United States risked its security through the “importation of Chinese vagrants” selling their services as coolies.\footnote{Peter Parker to William Marcy, August 26, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 6, 129.} Indeed, the \textit{Anti-Slavery Bugle} reported a separate case where 201 of 605 coolies drowned or died on one voyage alone, lamenting that the “miserable wretches” were caught in a system no better than the “selling of Chinese slaves.”\footnote{“A New Kind of Slave Trade,” \textit{Anti-Slavery Bugle} (Mar. 8, 1856), 3.} The threat of coolie uprisings on ships resulting in extreme cases of violence sparked calls for the prohibition of American companies from the “unchristian and inhuman business,” “the inhuman traffic,” and the “inhuman trade” of the coolie exchange.\footnote{“The Peruvian Slave Trade,” \textit{Anti-Slavery Bugle} (Apr. 12, 1856), 1. Peter Parker to William Marcy, 56/2/12, Vol. 6, 47.} Indeed, the shift in perception from the idea that the Coolie trade was beneficial, to one of danger and concern, was so swift that a Mr. Sampson, of the shipping firm Sampson and Tappan – one of the primary beneficiaries of the trade – publicly claimed coolie deaths were the result of an “abuse of the emigration system” that needed to be addressed, while affirming that his company had ceased its role in the trade so as to shield himself from criticism.\footnote{Sampson, \textit{Report}, 16.}

This narrative of fluctuating American acceptance of the role of Chinese labor could not escape the overwhelming gravity of the discourse of the economics of slavery. The role of Americans in transporting Chinese workers both to the United States and regionally tapped into notions of the value of labor, the treatment of workers, and whether or not coolies would replace,
interrupt, or fall into the same categories of labor exploitation that the Atlantic slave trade represented. Moon Ho Jung deftly illustrates in his work *Coolies and Cane* the notion that these same arguments for the increase of Chinese labor even found traction as a dynamic force in the post-American Civil War south. What is clear is that this interest emerged decades earlier and before sizable numbers of Chinese workers found their way beyond the California mining fields. Considering how Americans framed Chinese labor potential as coolie laborers, and whether or not those workers would serve a greater national purpose or worsen the problems of slavery, deepens the historiographic understanding of the issue of rhetoric and labor. Anti-Chinese sentiment in the United States may also have found its origins at this time, but it did not exist in a vacuum. The role that Americans played as the primary conveyors of Chinese workers to the Americas – often in spite of these larger economic and racial concerns – helps to clarify how competing national visions of slavery, abolition, and American economic expansion used the issue of the coolie trade to frame discussions of immigration, labor, and the perceived value of the Chinese people to the national polity in the mid-Nineteenth century. As Alexander Saxon notes, the Chinese were simultaneously “indispensable” as labor to help fully take advantage of westward expansion and economic growth, but were also useful in creating a racially charged labor hierarchy in which nativist sentiment equated with success through exclusion.136

---

Corporal and Capital Punishment

Figure 30: *Tricks played with the queue,* and Figure 31: *Mode of exposure in the Cangue.* In addition to punishing men by removing their queue, Williams illustrates how tying men’s hair together also served as a punishment that had the capacity to cause both physical pain and social ridicule. Williams’ text also incorporates several images of corporal punishment in China, including this one of a Chinese man imprisoned in a cangue. In addition to criticizing the public nature of the punishment, Williams condemned the social stigma attached to the cangue, in that the person was forced to rely on others for sustenance and that the name of the crime committed is written on the planks.137

While the exclusion of Chinese from American legal protections continued throughout the nineteenth century, the inclusion of Americans into the Chinese judicial system threw into disarray their expectations of extraterritoriality. Although Americans claimed the Chinese government continually failed to contain the masses of Chinese people, the ability to assert power over individuals by the Chinese government was equally maligned. Consul Marshall noted that the real power of the mandarins came from their “oppression of the defenseless.”138 American officials moralized the “oppression” of the Chinese people by the government by highlighting the latter’s use of corporal punishment. In a report to the secretary of state, then

137 Williams, *Middle,* Vol. II, 32; and Vol. 1, 411.
138 Humphrey Marshall to William Marcy, October, 10, 1853, ADPP, Vol. 9, 236.
consul Peter Parker explained that “corrupt officials” near Shanghai decapitated a number of farmers and laborers accused of aiding a local rebellion.\textsuperscript{139} Other reports noted that Chinese subjects accused of crimes were “bamboed [beaten with bamboo poles]” severely as a consequence for breaking the law.\textsuperscript{140} These reports bore witness to disciplinary actions undertaken as part of a pattern of punishment “with a degree of severity exceeding their demands” according to observers.\textsuperscript{141} The notion of Chinese corporal punishment is important to consider within the rhetorical structure of “threat” because these reports highlighted the severity of Qing governmental authority over the individual. If the Chinese government could so easily wield its authority through corporal punishment, Americans wondered why their personal security remained questionable. Understandings of the hierarchies of Chinese punishment, as well as American’s lurid and graphic descriptions of the processes carried out, fueled fears held by many that there would be little foreigners could do if the Chinese government shifted its harsh penalties against them.

Despite the critiques of Qing incompetence regarding the protection of foreigners from mobs and pirates, \textit{The People of China} acknowledged that the rare instance when criminals were “enclosed in the net of the law, it is difficult for them to make their escape.”\textsuperscript{142} Oftentimes, though, foreign observers reported that the penalties were much too harsh, or that they were meted out without a sufficient level of legal justice. Peter Parker relayed a message to Secretary of State Daniel Webster that in many instances “corrupt officials” were responsible for executing “powerless and friendless” farmers and laborers unfairly accused and convicted of crimes.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{139} Peter Parker to Daniel Webster, August 21, 1851, ADPP, Vol. 12, 78.
\textsuperscript{140} Peter Parker to William Marcy, July 26, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 11, 255.
\textsuperscript{141} Peter Parker to James Buchanan, January 27, 1848, ADPP, Vol. 3, 213.
\textsuperscript{142} American Sunday-School Union, \textit{People}, 121.
\textsuperscript{143} Parker to Webster, 51/8/21, ADPP 12, 78.
Observers attempted to understand why the Chinese government was so quick to dispense corporal punishment, and much of it referred to the belief of the imminent collapse of the Qing dynasty. The predilection of the Qing to rely on corporal punishment of all sorts, according to Ball, owed to “the political state of the country since the commencement of the rebellion; for the present dynasty does not hesitate to execute its political offenders.” Likewise, piratical activity faced the same swift action, once an action had been taken, though Ball alleged that Chinese pirates executed without trial by the Chinese government would likely have been freed in Hong Kong for lack of sufficient evidence. Distinctions like this brought to the forefront the concern that Chinese legal governance needed to be adjusted from its current trajectory, and that American actions served as an important point of contrast and distinction.

As such, the Chinese judicial system came under fire as both corrupt and inherently unfair. Bridgman cited the former as a reason for a number of executions carried out under spurious conditions. “Things were reported to the officers of government, the case was examined, search was made and several men supposed to be implicated in the affair were beheaded, but whether they were the true murderers was a matter of doubt among the foreign residents at Canton.” As for the latter, “It not infrequently happens,” Sears wrote, “that a culprit is brought to the place of execution, gagged, and when this does occur, it is because a poor man has been substituted for a wealthy delinquent who has bought himself off, by bribing his mandarin, and the latter fears that the poor wretch may make the disclosure, should his tongue be left at liberty.” In an article on “Purchased Substitutes,” the Jeffersonian Republican bluntly stated that “wealthy Chinese will pay others to take torture/decapitation for

144 Ball, Rambles, 373.
145 Ball, Rambles, 235.
146 Bridgman, Daughters, 125.
147 Sears, Pictorial, 210.
their own punishments."\textsuperscript{148} For the equivalent of three hundred dollars, some claimed in the \textit{Boon's Lick Times} that “In China a man condemned to death can procure a substitute by paying” the family of the latter to take their place.\textsuperscript{149} What these anecdotes conveyed was the perceived unfairness built into the Chinese system, whereby the government was either too reticent or incapable of locating the correct culprits, or that when the accused was found guilty an innocent could be purchased to take his place in facing justice.

Americans found the coercive nature of these proceedings in which the alleged met their fate at the hands of an executioner disturbing not only for the individual but also for the scale at which Chinese corporal punishment was reported to take place. What was generally the purview of newspapers attempting to include garish details of Chinese corporal punishment, the rate and means of sentence and executions frequently made their way into the domestic press. “The place of execution has been a vast carnage field, where hundreds have daily been put to death, in the hopes of striking terror into the minds of the population,” the \textit{New York Tribune} reported. “All accounts agree representing the foul atrocities committed by the Mandarins. Nearly five hundred prisoners have been put to death and some were tortured in the most frightful manner before being put out of the way.”\textsuperscript{150} Later that year the \textit{Tribune} included an article on the treatment of Taiping prisoners by the Qing government. It alleged that the executioners decapitated over 150 prisoners per day, the executioners “dexterous as butchers” in cutting men apart while still alive, with a rebel leader suffering the worst fate of allegedly being cut into some two hundred pieces.\textsuperscript{151} The \textit{Perrysburg Journal} wrote of Qing treatment of Chinese rebels that the execution

\textsuperscript{148} “Purchased Substitutes,” \textit{Jeffersonian Republican} (2 Sep. 1847), 1.
\textsuperscript{149} “In China,” \textit{Boon’s Lick Times} (22 Apr. 1848), 3.
grounds smelled worse than slaughter houses, that many condemned committed suicide to prevent dishonor and torture, and while upwards of two million had died as a result of the conflict the government executed hundreds of them as punishment for their role in the uprising.\footnote{152}{"The Chinese Rebellion," \textit{Perrysburg Journal} (8 Mar. 1856), 3.}

As with foot binding in Chinese society, there was seemingly no limit to the depth with which Americans analyzed the details of the Chinese system of corporal and capital punishment. In particular, they attempted to understand the gradations of punishment based on different offenses. Some penalties were viewed with an air of whimsy, as in the case of dishonest silver smiths. The \textit{Burlington Free Press} reported that it was common practice for Qing officials to deceive less than clever criminals by having them drink “lie water,” which was a placebo used to trick them into freely admitting their wrongdoing.\footnote{153}{"Remedy for Chinese Lying," \textit{Burlington Free Press} (10 Mar. 1843), 1.} The predisposition of the sliver merchants to cheat was only defeated by officials taking advantage of Chinese superstitions. On the more extreme range of Chinese punishment was the allegation that as a result of murdering his wife a Chinese man was sentenced to death by sleep deprivation.\footnote{154}{"Chinese Punishment," \textit{Gallipolis Journal} (30 Jan. 1851), 2.} P. T. Barnum classified five levels of punishment within the Chinese legal system, beginning with flogging by bamboo of two sizes, the use of the gangue with weights added “according to the heinousness of the crime,” banishment from ones home region, exile from China temporarily or for life, and finally reaching the level of capital punishments, which included strangling, beheading, “and a slow ignominious death, sometimes termed cutting into ten thousand pieces.”\footnote{155}{Barnum, \textit{Collection}, 36.} A Chinese man convicted of strangling his mother suffered the fate of the most extreme punishment according to the \textit{Columbia Democrat}. The man was reportedly cut into no less than 10,000 pieces by the
executioners. Allen also reported the existence of stages of discipline within the Chinese legal system, especially when it came to buyers and users of opium. He wrote that punishments for opium use ranged from “the wooden collar [cangue], imprisonment, banishment, and the entire confiscation of his property; yes, even more, the severe penalty of capital punishment, either by public decapitation or strangulation.” Regardless of the severity of the crime, Sears determined that “[t]he punishments are in general most cruel, and ill-proportioned to the crimes for which they are inflicted,” and that the occasional punishment of family members of the accused “frequently followed by the execution of his children and nearest relations” grossly overcompensated for the situations at hand.

The language of extremes, especially for the processes of capital punishment, illustrate the garish interest Americans exhibited regarding the topic. The details that they provided to their readers included the most minuscule and gut-wrenching explanations of executions. But why did Americans concern themselves with the minutiae of the Chinese judicial system? Part of their justification was built on the same reasoning as their fascination with foot binding. The social practices of punishment styles were allegedly so divergent from what Americans experienced in their own country that the differences only served as further evidence of the cultural gulf between the two societies. Additionally, as the vast majority of these descriptions emanated from newspaper and print sources, a certain level of voyeuristic fervor was apparent in the details presented to the readers. For example, Sears wrote that for the practice of “hewing the living victim to pieces . . . the extremities are first severed one by one, in slow succession, from the trunk, and all vital parts are carefully avoided to the last, in order to prolong the pain

157 Allen, Opium, 46.
158 Sears, Pictorial, 241.
and suffering of the unfortunate victim."\(^{159}\) “Oriental Punishment” was described in one instance as resulting in over five hundred executions in a span of eight months, in which the convicted were pinned to the ground and decapitated.\(^{160}\) The *New York Tribune* republished an article describing the execution of the wife of a rebel leader. The article unflinchingly described how she was nailed to a cross, her skin removed from portions of her extremities, her bones systematically broken, and finally her heart removed.\(^{161}\) These reports fueled the belief that the Chinese “revel[ed] in human gore, putting to death all who fall into their hands indiscriminately,” and that the rebellion actually served to provide “victims to satiate the Mandarin's thirst for blood.”\(^{162}\) The language and detail surrounding explanations of Chinese corporal and capital punishment are important in considering the limits to which Americans believed the Qing government was willing to go to ensure its power and influence. As such, through the gore and grizzly details Americans could sit in judgment of Chinese society and could therefore justify diplomatic efforts to keep American citizens as far removed from the Chinese legal system as possible for fear of the consequences.

The use of corporal punishment both amused and concerned American observers. Ball noticed a Chinese prisoner in cangue, a type of mobile stocks popular as a punishment for minor infractions. The punished “looked so demure, and so ridiculous, that I could not help laughing, though he seemed to think it no laughing matter.”\(^{163}\) Indeed, with their hands and head immobilized, those in the cangue required outside assistance for even the basic tasks of eating and drinking. In addition, many Chinese were said to be reticent to assist those being punished

\(^{159}\) Sears, *Pictorial*, 241.  
\(^{163}\) Ball, *Rambles*, 355.
by the state. Americans viewed other corporal punishments as requiring outside intervention because of their perceived severity. Ball recounted the actions of a local governor who “kept a Chinaman hung up by his arms three days in his house, and only liberated him on the interposition of the consul.”\textsuperscript{164} It was clear that Americans were willing to intercede in instances when they believed the Chinese government exceeded the bounds of proper behavior. Or, as Speer put it, “Let us hasten to set them free from a misery of soul in this life more dreadful than all those tortures of screws, and lamps and cords, with which, in their own country, they sorely wring out a confession from a presumed or pretended culprit; which is worse than forcing a man to keep upright and without sleep, by stabs, and blows, and pistol shots in his ears, till he dies of fatigue; for it is the torture of Satan and of fiends, over the souls of those who are not ‘prisoners of hope,’ but bound in the chains of hell.”\textsuperscript{165}

While the modes of corporal punishment did receive some attention, the actual performance and result of capital punishment received the greatest amount of attention. Ever the documentarian, Sears explained that in terms of capital punishment:

\begin{quote}
The mode of execution usually adopted is beheading: the malefactor kneels upon the ground, the executioner twists his hand in is long tail, raises the other hand, and strikes off the head with a clumsy sword of native manufacture; frequently, from the want of dexterity or nerve evinced by the headsman, the blow has to be repeated many times, before the poor wretch is decapitated. The severed head and body are allowed to remain here for some days, unless permission has been granted to the friends of the culprit to remove them; and as executions are frequent in this part, it is a ghastly sight to behold a row of human heads under a mat shed, the bodies lying near them, a mat having been originally thrown over them, which has been pushed aside by the inquisitive curiosity of the passers.\textsuperscript{166}
\end{quote}

In his own tour of the execution grounds around Canton, Benjamin Ball described “thirty heads, with the long tails or braids of hair, still attached to them, thrown together promiscuously, like

\textsuperscript{164} Ball, \textit{Rambles}, 333.
\textsuperscript{165} Speer, \textit{China}, 100.
\textsuperscript{166} Sears, \textit{Pictorial}, 210.
heads of calves in a slaughterhouse . . . It was a very disgusting sight.” From the sheer number of remains, to the estimated execution statistics of at least one daily, Ball came to the conclusion that there had to be many “criminals” in China to justify the quantity of executions.\textsuperscript{167} Indeed, executions were thought to be of such regularity that Malcolm described the heads left for display on execution grounds as a result of the “little notice or formality” in which officials carried out the punishments.\textsuperscript{168} Thus, even American travelers who did not witness the executions firsthand were certain to describe the aftermath – though it is somewhat unsettling as to the implications of the popularity of frequenting execution grounds by expatriates. On his visit, Spalding described the remnants of an executed man “on a cross, suspended so that his feet just cleared the ground . . . above his head an inscription telling the offence for which he had suffered; while under a shed, nearby, was a pile of heads, their long queues matted in blood.”\textsuperscript{169} As part of an article describing “The Way they do Things in China,” the \textit{Belmont Chronicle} reported the experience of one American at the execution grounds. “It was cleared of dead bodies, and was only revolting by the sight of a bin of decaying human heads which would measure as much as a cord of wood, and the black, blood-soaked ground emitting a sickening effluvia.” In later walking by during executions, estimated at some fifty to sixty that week, the unknown author describes the process of decapitation, but noted sensing the “indignant feelings” of the spectators who feared the mandarins.\textsuperscript{170}

Many believed that the indignant attitude originated from the brutality with which these executions took places, and the fact that beheadings were not the only means by which

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ball, \textit{Rambles}, 272.
\item Howard Malcolm, \textit{Travels in South-Eastern Asia: Embracing Hindustan, Malaya, Siam and China; with Notices of Numerous Missionary Stations, and a Full Account of the Burman Empire} (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1853), 339.
\item Spalding, \textit{Japan}, 195.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
authorities dealt with convicted criminals. Preble witnessed a day’s worth of executions, ending in the dismemberment of a woman “who had poisoned both her husband and father. She was cut up accordingly to rule in twenty five parts. The first and second cuts took off the eyebrows and this butchering was continued by cutting off the . . . fists, legs, hands, arms etc. until the vital parts were removed and then the head was cut off from the mutilated trunks.”

“They punish people queerly in China,” the Jeffersonian Republican asserted. “For robbing a peddler, the culprit was lately put into a mortar, and fired against a stone wall,” thus serving justice.

Bridgman determined that the extremes of such executions proved that the Chinese were “very severe and cruel in their punishments.” The descriptions of firsthand witnesses to executions and execution grounds, as well as the moralizing of which executions were and were not justified, served the purpose of elevating the morality of Americans over the Chinese. By denigrating both those accused of the crimes and those entrusted with carrying out the executions, Americans placed themselves above the entire Chinese judicial system, a position they needed to be in if they were to avoid falling prey to its intricacies.

Collective Punishment and Bodily Control in the Sino-American Relationship

Paramount to the threat posed by Qing corporal punishment was the underlying fear of the premise of collectivity within the Qing legal system. Viewed by some as an odd aspect of the judicial process in China, a factor of Chinese legal practice reportedly included punishment of the extended family of those convicted of crimes against the state and society. Barnum claimed that the family of a man convicted of offenses against the emperor were “immolated for

171 George Henry Preble, “Diary of a Cruise to China and Japan, 1853-1856,” Manuscript Division, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA., 54/10/1, 344.
173 Bridgman, Daughters, 68.
his crime; his sons, even of tender age, are strangled, and the females of his family sold into bondage in provinces far distant from their home.” As Americans understood it, the Chinese dealt harshly even with abridgments of proper Confucian behavior. A man and his wife severely beat his mother according to an account relayed in the People of China. As a result, “The principal offenders were put to death; the mother of the wife was bambooed [sic] and exiled; the scholars of the district were not permitted to attend the public examination for three years; the magistrates were deprived of their office and banished; the house in which the offenders lived was razed to its very foundations; and the spot where the offence occurred was anathematized, or made accursed!” The idea that the entire region became responsible for the crimes committed by individuals befuddled Americans. Families serving prison sentences for the crimes of relatives who had fled the regions were deemed the result of the “supercilious” attitude of the government.

These reports focused on the simultaneous unintended and intended consequences of Chinese actions toward foreigners, and the tenuous position outsiders held within the Chinese judicial system. Chinese officials affronted American representative Davis by their “supercilious bearing towards all foreigners,” to the point where he threatened a blockade of Canton’s port with the American ships in the region. The journey of four America sailors and their experience within the Chinese legal system found traction in the popular press and within diplomatic correspondence. These men abandoned their ship off of the coast of “Corea” and made their way into the Chinese empire. When discovered, Chinese officials transported them to the nearest foreign enclave in Shanghai. The men recalled that compared to their travels into

174 Barnum, Collection, 39.
175 American Sunday-School Union, People, 111.
Korea and Manchuria, the Chinese treated them poorly, and the conclusion of their trip through
China culminated in their unceremonious expulsion.\textsuperscript{178} The sailors, though, perhaps considered
themselves lucky, as Shaw claimed that a widespread belief that if a foreigner ever made it to the
capital that they would be “ever suffered (never allowed) to return” to their home.\textsuperscript{179}

The issue of foreign access beyond the treaty ports, while an engaging challenge for
some, remained a puzzling legal conundrum for others. These men represented one of the most
geographically extensive breaches of the Chinese prohibition on foreign access. Aside from the
temporary nature of some incursions just beyond the edge of treaty boundaries, the experience of
the sailors showed the great legal lengths the Qing government was willing to go in order to
maintain territorial and security integrity at the expense of the mobility of foreigners. Shaw
blithely complained that the Chinese were always apt to “lay new impositions” on foreigners
based solely on whim.\textsuperscript{180} He cited a more concrete example of the Macanese when attempting to
explain the variety of travails outsiders faced when dealing in China. Owing to its proximity to
China and its distance from any major foreign entrepôt in the region, Macao relied on the
mainland for most of its supplies. The Macanese, Shaw claimed, were subject to the “sufferance
of the Chinese” for the food and goods needed to maintain the well being of the colony.\textsuperscript{181} Thus,
in his opinion, the Chinese maintained an unfair hold over the lives of the foreigners living there.

In contrast to the more ethereal issues of political power, the persistent issue over the
failings of the Chinese government to ensure security within its territorial boundaries presented a
 corresponding concern over the protection of foreigners from the Chinese government itself.
Abbott referenced no less than 115 separate cases of missteps in foreign relations with the

\textsuperscript{178} “Journey of American Sailors through China,” \textit{Nashville Union}, (6 Apr. 1854), 2.
\textsuperscript{179} Shaw, \textit{Journals}, 156.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., 185.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 163.
Chinese, with many resulting in Chinese officials executing foreigners for a number of crimes against the state. One of the primary issues that Americans had with the Chinese legal system was that “The laws of China make no distinction between murder and homicide.” Therefore, deaths caused by accidents caused by foreigners, or even instances of self defense, were met with the same punishment under Chinese law as premeditated murder. Humphrey Marshall bitterly complained to Secretary of State William Marcy that despite Article XXI of the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia) granting extraterritorial sovereignty over American citizens, Americans often found themselves within the Chinese legal system. To Marshall this represented a severe challenge to ensuring security for citizens of the United States and left them with little real access to Chinese law as they were not Chinese subjects. As Consul Parker described the situation, the execution of an American by an unresponsive Chinese government was little more than “judicial murder,” and as such he suggested an increase in the American naval ships in the region as a show of force and resolve to prevent future mishaps. With these issues at hand it is not surprising that ensuring and enforcing extraterritoriality continued to be a factor as negotiations during the Treaty of Tien-tsin [Tianjin] reiterated the right of American consular officials to enforce legal and judicial control over their citizens. So while the descriptions of Chinese corporal and capital punishment may have served the domestic purpose of selling newspapers and reinforcing cultural differences between the United States and China, they also highlighted the dangers Americans faced if they broke Chinese laws and could not hide behind the shield of extraterritoriality.

---

183 Sears, *Pictorial*, 143.
184 Humphrey Marshall to William Marcy, 53/10/10, ADPP Vol. 9, 237.
185 Peter Parker to William Marcy, 56/12/12, ADPP Vol. 13, 71.
186 Treaty of Tian-tsin - Article XI, 1856.
Conclusion

The notion of the Chinese “threat” was as far ranging and intertwining as its rhetorical counterparts of opportunity and flaw. The emerging relationship between China and the United States saw challenges to personal, economic, and even moral boundaries. China was perceived to be dangerous for both its strengths and its weaknesses. Americans portrayed the inability of the Qing government to ensure enforcement of its treaties – especially in the arena of security against mobs, pirates, and the Formosans – as a particularly dangerous development. It was these dangers, perceived and imagined – that drove Americans to cling more fervently to foreign enclaves than most other expatriate communities. But the counterfactual argument also existed that the Chinese government had the capability of being too strong, as evidenced by its use of corporal and capital punishment and the fear that foreigners could fall victim to its practices. The rhetoric of threat and danger also found competing outlets in describing the coolie trade. The economic advantages of cornering the Pacific coolie transport market and the hopefulness of abolitionists in identifying a source of competing labor to slavery sharply contrasted with the violent outbursts that occurred on vessels transporting coolies, and the fear that the use of coolies as indentured servants was no better than expanding “wage slavery” to the west. Whether it was a danger to interests, ideals, or bodies, the perceived threat of China and the Chinese was a real and ever present aspect of the ways in which Americans understood and wrote about China. Along with the other thematic counterparts, the idea of threat was important in the ways Americans conceptualized the difficulties that emerged in the Sino-American

---

187 Terry Caesar notes that in many instances Americans viewed their experiences of travel abroad as a freeing, and that they enjoyed the notion of being different to the point where they ignored and avoided other Americans to maintain that new, unique identity. This was not the case in treaty port China. *Forgiving the Boundaries: Home as Abroad in American Travel Writing* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 17.
relationship. As such, the proposed benefits, difficulties, and dangers involved in engaging with the Chinese served as the useful and necessary basis for the rhetoric of American success with China. Only by understanding the problems that China and the United States had with each other could Americans be presented with a narrative of the successes found in the ever expanding relationship.
Chapter 5: Redefining “Success” in the Sino-American Relationship

“...The United States Government is upon the most amicable footing with both the Government of England and China, and as it is the settled policy of our Government sanctioned alike by justice and prosperity not to interfere in quarrels between Nations with whom we are at peace. American Citizens resident in China should be careful to abstain from any participation, whether direct or remote, in any conflict that may exist or may hereafter arise between England and China, or between the subjects of these governments. A prudent caution and strict neutrality is indispensable on our part, in order to escape the censure of legitimate nations, and to receive the approbation of the civilized world.” – Letter to Peter Parker

The correspondence between Consul Peter Parker and superiors in Washington reflects the conflicting attitudes of Americans as the relationship between China and the United States matured after the First Opium War. While Americans found themselves trying to maintain neutrality in China’s internal and external conflicts so as to develop special favor with the imperial bureaucracy, they were unwilling to simply sit by and hope that religious, economic, and political rewards would appear. Parker wrote to the secretary of state that it was in America’s best interest “to adhere to . . . principles of strict and impartial neutrality” when it came to dealing with China. Less than a year later, as tensions between China and foreigners intensified over the issue of treaty renegotiation, Parker revised his previous position. He now called for the creation of a of a “concurrent” policy of supporting British and French aims at expanding foreign access while still overtly maintaining neutrality, with the goal of gaining a seat at the negotiating table if conflict were to break out. Even America’s chief diplomat in

1 David Geitsinger, ‘Letter from Davis to Peter Parker,’ David Geitsinger Correspondence, Manuscript Division, Massachusetts Historical Society, 49/3/11, 1.
3 Peter Parker to William Marcy, 56/12/12, ADPP, Vol. 13, 73.
China was driven by the realization that success in the Sino-American relationship was marginal at best, and that any advantage needed to be exploited.

If the preceding examination of the concepts of mystery, opportunity, flaw, and threat has demonstrated anything, it is that Americans maintained many concurrent opinions about how the United States should interact with China. No one advocated a hands-off approach. Instead, Americans held their nation up as a paragon for China to emulate as it sought to re-gain its vaunted position among “civilized” nations. By tapping into the existing narratives that presupposed a massive potential of consumers and converts, the rhetoric of stagnation, and the threat posed to foreign interests in the region, Americans emphasized the ways they witnessed the Chinese adapt to the new global reality under the influence of the United States. Even as the treaty with China was in negotiation, the Vermont Phoenix relayed a news article from a Boston paper. The article began, “We make the following extracts from the correspondence of the Boston Advertiser, as it contains more particulars of the proceeding of our officers at Canton than have as yet been published. The impression produced by them appears quite favorable.”

Interested parties like the Advertiser portrayed the favorability of American involvement in China as the revelation of Chinese mystery, the successful harnessing of Chinese opportunity, the correction of Chinese flaws, and the blunting of China’s threat to the United States. Without the narrative of American successes there would have been little reason for continued support for interacting with the Chinese.

---

4 “China,” Vermont Phoenix (16 October 1842), 1.
Opium Prohibition and the Creation of a Unique American Identity in China

In *Imperialism and Idealism*, David Anderson notes the “quandary” that Americans exhibited in the 1860s in whether to admonish other Western powers for their imperialist actions or to ally their interests with them for national benefit.\(^5\) While Anderson explains that there was no explicit cooperation between American and European governments in coordinating their China policies until after 1861, it is clear that earlier American rhetoric and debate over involvement in China before that era frequently cited European interests and actions as major points of consideration. This often focused on creating an image of the United States as distinct from its European counterparts, establishing a front of well-meaning beneficence when approaching the Chinese empire, especially when it came to opium sales. Walter Lowrie wrote that headway had been made in establishing a positive reputation for Americans among the Chinese. “The people are as civil and obliging as could reasonably be expected, considering the severe and uncalled for treatment they received during the war. We are better treated here, by far, than a Chinaman would be in New York or London.”\(^6\) Americans also sought early on to make clear the differences between themselves and other foreigners. Caleb Cushing went as far as to limit his stay in Hong Kong on his way to negotiate the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia) for fear that local Chinese officials would assume he maintained a friendly disposition toward the British, or worse, that he was British himself.\(^7\) In this process of creating an idealized American image to present to the Chinese, Americans persistently highlighted the malfeasance of other foreigners, past and present, in their attempts to counter the persistence of anti-foreigner

---


\(^7\) Caleb Cushing to Abel Upshur, 44/2/26, ADPP Vol. 1, 177.
sentiment in China. In an article on the successes of American missionaries, William Morrison went as far as to ascribe the origins of negative sentiment to the arrival of the Jesuits centuries earlier. “The people were proverbially jealous of strangers; the government utterly opposed to their admission into the empire; and in a special manner, opposed to the Christian Religion – their slight but disastrous knowledge of which had been derived from the unprincipled graping [sic] and ambitious Jesuits.”

American accounts did not lack examples of how European influence in the region failed to create an environment of cultural and social improvement. Humphrey Marshall commented to his superiors in Washington that China was “a lamb before the shearers [Europeans]” in the drive for resources and trade goods, while only the United States and its citizens maintained the moral wherewithal to concern themselves with the stability of the Middle Kingdom. Osmond Tiffany harshly criticized the Portuguese for failing to maintain a high standard of living in Macau, with its crowded and dingy buildings, not to mention their failure to establish a “free port” in which foreigners could trade with little obstacle. In his estimation, the poor performance of the Portuguese made it difficult for others to convince the Chinese that foreigners could exert a positive influence in the region. Others, like Lowrie, wondered how individuals could improve their own actions to create a beneficial attitude among the Chinese toward Americans. He roundly criticized those professing to be good Christians as hypocrites for attempting to convert locals while still taking advantage of their labor on the Sabbath. Likewise, Howard Malcolm concluded, “It must be confessed that if the beauty of Christianity has not convinced Orientals, it

---

10 Osmond Tiffany Jr., The Canton Chinese, or The American’s Sojourn in the Celestial Empire (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1849), 262-2.
11 Lowrie, Memoirs, 134.
is principally by reason of the bad opinion which the avarice, treachery, invasions, and tyranny of the Portuguese, and, some other Christians in the Indies, have implanted in them.”

Malcolm even turned some of the criticisms of failings of Chinese culture, particularly foot binding, back onto European and American societies. “We rail at the Chinese,” he wrote, “for compressed feet with little reason, so long as we persist in compressing the waist. Nor are we wholly exempt from the folly of crushing the feet also. Our easiest shoes, though less absurd than the Chinese, are by no means patterned from nature.”

Although these explanations provide perceived reasons as to why the Chinese may have been less than amenable to outside influence and why foreigners perhaps did not deserve the respect of the Chinese, the issue of opium smuggling far outweighed all others. The conclusion of the First Opium War and the perpetuation of the opium trade provided the most obvious realm where Americans believed they needed to maintain a distinct identity in the China trade. Parker stated that it was well known that the “evils” of foreigners engaged in opium smuggling was the largest hindrance to the “tranquility” of China.

While Americans accounted for some 10 percent of the opium flowing into China, as John Rodgers Haddad points out there was a significant domestic debate regarding the morality of the trade. He explains that most American merchants who partook in the opium trade from the Ottoman Empire to China did so because it was the most expedient way to make as large a profit as possible in the China trade. Given the fact that many of these men – including the prominent Massachusetts merchant Robert Forbes – later regretted their role in selling opium, Haddad asserts that to the merchants it was a matter of

---

13 Ibid., 338.
14 Peter Parker to James Buchanan, 48/1/27, ADPP, Vol. 3, 209.
practicality. They traded in opium as a way of minimizing the time spent abroad while maximizing gain, given the months that it took just to reach the treaty ports and the variability within the markets for most other goods.\textsuperscript{15} In his account of the war, Jacob Abbott wrote that it was well known “that the smuggling of opium into China was wrong, and . . . [that] the Chinese had a perfect right to stop its importation.” He criticized the British for adopting “such unjust and unheard of measures . . . in defiance of all the customs of civilized nations” in going to war with the Chinese over such an immoral activity.\textsuperscript{16} The \textit{New York Tribune} used much more direct imagery to present a similar analysis. An article titled “America and the Anglo-Saxons” alleged that the United States ought to maintain its distance from Britain, as it “poisoned China with deadly drugs that it might rob the corpse.”\textsuperscript{17} Nathan Allen, in his anti-opium screed, concluded as many others had that “we see that England was an interested party, and would naturally be disposed to justify recourse to war, in order to secure indemnity for loss and a continuance of the trade.”\textsuperscript{18}

But it was not just that the British went to war explicitly over the desire to maintain the opium trade, Americans also had the concern that the opium trade intensified after the war and that this increase harmed American interests. With Hong Kong as a new hub for the “deleterious drug,” Cushing’s agreement to ban Americans from importing opium in the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia) created a clear distinction compared to the British Treaty of Nanjing, which

\textsuperscript{15} John Rogers Haddad, \textit{America’s First Adventure in China: Trade, Treaties, Opium, and Salvation} (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014). In addition, British dominance of opium production in and from India forced American merchants to rely on the more distant and less potent Ottoman product.
\textsuperscript{16} Jacob Abbott, \textit{China and the English, or the Character and Manners of the Chinese, as Illustrated in the History of Their Intercourses with Foreigners, To Which is Added an Account of the Late War} (Cooperstown, NY: H. & E. Phinney, 1843), 277.
\textsuperscript{17} “America and the Anglo-Saxons,” \textit{New York Tribune} (3 February 1851), 5.
\textsuperscript{18} Nathan Allen, M.D., \textit{The Opium Trade; Including a Sketch of Its History, Extent, Effects, Etc. As Carried on in India and China} (Lowell, MA: James P. Walker, 1853), 50.
purposefully ignored the opium issue. Those Americans who did continue to smuggle opium into China drew the ire of their compatriots in the effort to present Americans as different from Europeans. Described as “The great blot on foreigners” in China, Malcolm made the argument that profit alone was not a sufficient justification for smuggling and selling opium.

A smuggler in Canton is no more honorable than a smuggler on any other coast; in some respects less so. There is less chivalry, hardihood, fatigue, exposure, and inducement, than in the case of a poor man, who braves both the war of elements and legal penalty, to obtain subsistence for his family. So well do they know the moral and physical evils of opium, not one of them ventures on the habit of using it himself. For Francis Bongynge, the sale of opium surpassed chattel slavery in its immorality. “Still slavery could point to many fair and bright spots, to redeem it in a manner in the minds of the justly reflecting man. The opium trade – alas, there is no one bright spot, no one redeeming virtue can be found in the whole course to its man-devouring, hellish course.” The belief that opium use, and by association the opium trade, had no “redeeming” qualities other than profit led Henrietta Shuck to determine that the continued sale of opium by Americans constituted a “national sin” that needed to be expunged from the soul of the United States. As such, the means by which the discourse could be turned to the benefit of American aims in China was clear. Americans needed to be at the forefront of the anti-opium movement to improve both their moral standing and their standing with the Chinese. Bongynge was one of the

19 J. W. Spalding, The Japan Expedition: Japan and Around the World – An Account of Three Visits to the Japanese Empire, with Sketches of Madeira, St. Helena, Cape of Good Hope, Mauritius, Ceylon, Singapore, China, and Loo-Choo (New York: Bedfield, 1855), 121-23.
20 Malcolm, Travels, 346.
21 Francis Bongynge, The Future Wealth of America: Being a Glance at the Resources of the United States and the Commercial and Agricultural Advances of Cultivating Tea, Coffee and Indigo, the Date, Mango, Jack, Leechee, Guava, and Orange Trees, Etc. With a Review of the China Trade (New York: Published by the Author, 1852), 102.
21 Nathan Allen, M.D., The Opium Trade; Including a Sketch of Its History, Extent, Effects, Etc. As Carried on in India and China (Lowell, MA: James P. Walker, 1853), 166.
clearest voices expressing the goal of ending the opium trade for moral purposes. He stated that there needed to be a concerted effort “to suppress one of the evilest and most fiendish trades that could be invented or suggested by the common enemy of the human race. I mean that foul, accursed opium trade, which is fast demoralizing and depopulating the Eastern world. Americans! In your trading with China you aid in perpetrating that wrong on human kind.”

He continued on, citing both God and treaty compliance as the major reasons why it was right for the government of the United States needed to “compel” adherence to the anti-opium stipulations. Any hesitation to do so would result in “the detriment to American honor,” but its success, he hoped, would influence the British to cease their own opium trade.

Lowrie mentioned the domestic effort to curb alcohol consumption in the United States as a parallel by which the Chinese could learn how to end opium use in their own state. “The use of opium in China will never be abolished, until a reformation, similar to temperance reformation of America, commence among the people themselves.” Interestingly, though, his solution put the onus of a successful outcome squarely on the Chinese people, implicitly bypassing the Chinese government entirely. The drive to encourage Americans to help stop the opium trade in China was not entirely self-sacrificing. Forbes, an American who profited as much as any other from the sale of opium in China, admitted in his own report on the China trade that continued smuggling was not a tenable economic scenario. He posited that the full abolition of the opium trade would have the benefit of freeing Chinese currency to be spent on American manufactured goods – goods that he was more than happy to supply and transport for a profit.

---

23 Bonynge, Future, 24.
24 Ibid., 180.
26 Robert B. Forbes, Remarks on China and the China Trade (Boston: Samuel S. Dickinson, Printer, 1844), 56.
persisted was that until the British, with their near monopoly, ceased opium production, Americans were at a distinct economic disadvantage.

Although Americans were quick to place the blame for many of China’s ills on the failings of other foreigners – namely merchants engaged in the opium trade – they also viewed the United States as the purveyor of the solutions the Chinese were using to improve their situation. Americans emphasized the immorality of Chinese opium use not so much because it degraded the individual body of the user, but because of larger, systemic issues that opium use brought forth. At least publicly, American traders involved in Turkish opium sales in China expressed a willingness to support wider American anti-opium aims for the specific purpose of improving China’s economic standing. This sentiment of intervening on behalf of the Chinese in helping convince merchants to end opium sales was not about ending opium use in China. It was about allowing the United States to aid the Chinese in solving a problem they could not stop themselves so that Americans could reap the political and economic rewards of being the only nation to do so. This rhetorical shift indicated not a success in the reality of ending the opium trade but instead a means by which Americans believed they could distinguish themselves in the eyes of the Chinese – which would result in other benefits in the future.

The Success of Security

The desire for Americans to rhetorically, if not actually, rescue the Chinese from aggressive European economic influence was rivaled by the desire to save Americans from the Chinese. Accounts of danger and threat posed by the Chinese logically manifested in responses where Americans were able to ensure the safety and security of the expatriate community. Success in enforcing treaty negotiations and in repelling mob and pirate activities often served to
justify a continued American presence in China despite the alleged risk. Much of American security against the Chinese came in the form of the extraterritoriality guaranteed by the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia). As Eileen Scully wrote, “Unlike the more familiar ‘diplomatic immunity’ shielding diplomatic personnel stationed abroad from local law enforcement, extrality [extraterritoriality] was portable, transferable, almost irrevocable, and buttressed – not by reciprocity and custom – but by gunboats and coercive treaties.”27 The security that extraterritoriality provided explicitly focused American aims around the ability to enact sufficient influence granted by the wider berth allowed in the treaty ports. In large part the legal protection that extraterritoriality permitted belies a complicated and overlapping set of systems that emerged. As additional nations created their own treaty arrangements with the Chinese, and as successive treaties emerged after conflicts like the Second Opium War, foreigners lived under a series of shifting protections in the treaty ports. The mere presence of Americans in an area protected by the treaties meant a great deal in creating an understanding of geographic security. For example, Macaulay wrote of his time in Shanghai that as the Taiping “made rapid advances towards the capital, our consul . . . thought our presence in the neighborhood might prove beneficial to American interests.”28 In other words, the mere presence of the American representative was thought to be sufficient to ensure the safety and security of foreigners in the face of a group intent on overthrowing the Qing government.

The notion of considerable successes of American self defense in China came from repelling the disorganized, yet seemingly pervasive danger of mobs. A letter written to Peter Parker clearly spelled out the responsibilities of the U.S. government and its representatives. It

28 Macaulay, Kathay, 54.
was to be “the duty of the American Government to render the most prompt and efficient aid of its power to protect the rights and property of Americans citizens wherever or whenever wantonly or improperly assailed, such aid will be promptly and [to the] extent of his means efficiently tendered by the Commodore of this station.” ²⁹ Native of New York and consular official Paul Forbes, however, proposed a more proactive approach when he suggested that, “we must act with decision and energy in order to make a lasting impression on the vile but unfortunate creatures whom it appears, the Mandarins are either unwilling or unable to control.” ³⁰ In these discussions, the debate circulated around the notion of what rights Americans had to defend themselves when threatened abroad. Were they subject to the laws and jurisdiction of China, or could they legally assert American laws in a foreign state? While there was general agreement that Americans did not expect or desire access to the Chinese legal system, the question remained whether or not extraterritoriality guaranteed the right to defend persons and property based on American law, and to what extent that right extended. Fearing that a more proactive approach to defense might inflame further contention, Robert McLane wrote to Secretary of State Marcy that it was in the nation’s best interest to adhere to a “strict policy of self-defense” when it came to threats from China. ³¹ For many contemporary Americans, the ability to defend themselves against attacks from the Chinese came from a sense of martial responsibility. David Geitsinger asserted that the commodore of the Pacific fleet had the right and the responsibility to protect American citizens and property in Canton, in addition to the property and citizens of any nations at peace with the United States. ³²

²⁹ David Geitsinger, Davis to Peter Parker, David Geitsinger Correspondence, Manuscript Division, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA., 49/3/11, 1.
³⁰ John Forbes to Peter Parker, June 18, 1844, ADPP, Vol. 1, 298.
³¹ Robert McLane to William Marcy, May 4, 1854, ADPP Vol. 5, 32.
³² David Geitsinger, Davis to Peter Parker, David Geitsinger Correspondence, Manuscript Division, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA., 49/3/11, 1.
Chinese naval exercise near Canton Geitsinger stated that, “I am certain that three European long-boats, properly equipped, might have forced their way through them, had they been five times as numerous,” thus asserting the capabilities of superior foreign technological and martial prowess against the hypothetical imposition of threat by the Chinese.33

It was not only hypothetically dangerous scenarios whereby officials claimed “the citizens of the United States would defend themselves against the attacks of a mob.”34 They clearly defined the successes of American self defense throughout the public record as proof of to the relative safety of engaging with the Chinese. This protective rhetoric ranged from the minimal to the considerable. Ball recalled how one Mr. Hunt had “a large bull-dog, which [was] kept chained on the roof to guard against the Chinese” in the American factory in China.35 Whereas Mr. Hunt’s dog provided local safety and security, accounts also noted the successes of American forces against the widespread threat of piracy. In the news “From China,” the New York Tribune reported that a “piratical Chinese junk” attacked an American ship, but American forces quickly captured those responsible for the attack. As opposed to the accounts of pirates successfully evading imperial forces in China, or finding loopholes in the legal system to evade punishment, the article noted how foreign officials brought the pirates to Hong Kong to face justice in British, not Chinese courts.36 Americans believed that even the potential for a show of force helped to assure a modicum of security in the face of Chinese piracy, particularly with the American fleet moored near Canton to “protect American interests” in the region.37 Ball assured his readers that “They [pirates] would not dare to attack a foreign vessel, unless they could bring

33 Ibid.
34 Unknown, June 9, 1846, ADPP Vol. 3, 19.
35 Benjamin Lincoln Ball, Rambles in Eastern Asia, including China and Manila, During Several Years’ Residence: With Notes of the Voyage to China, Excursions in Manila, Hong-Kong, Canton, Shanghai, Ningpoo, Amoy, Fouchow, and Macao (Boston: James French and Co, 1856), 99.
some twelve or twenty junks to bear against it,” because of the belief in foreign armament superiority and the proximity of larger foreign fleets.38

The ability of these fleets to repel pirate attacks also built on this sense of increasing maritime safety in the region. The Vermont Phoenix relayed an account of a joint Anglo-American endeavor that resulted in the successful defeat of an entire pirate fleet near Hong Kong. “The chastisement which the pirates have thus received,” the article stated, “will teach them that they cannot carry on their depredations with impunity.”39 In other instances, diplomats wrote to the State Department that Americans and other foreigners successfully retaliated against piracy by burning Chinese junks suspected of being involved in attacks against foreigners and foreign interests.40 This practice was part of a pattern of reinforcing calls for continued federal support for ensuring naval protection of the China trade, as Ruschenberger cited Samuel Wells Williams as saying “the Chinese . . . need instruction as well as intimidation” in ensuring a fruitful relationship with the United States.41

Relaying instances of defeated piratical fleets in the south, many viewed the economic and political situation of foreigners as one of improving relations between the United States and other nations through the shared anti-piracy effort. The Rutland County Herald reported that a combined force of American, French, and Portuguese ships managed to “disperse” sixteen pirate ships and capture two others.42 While on one of his voyages George Preble participated in one of these anti-piracy maneuvers and praised the diplomatic and security improvement that Americans reaped from such actions. After a combined American, British, Portuguese, and

38 Ball, Rambles, 344.
39 “Battle Between a Chinese Pirate Fleet and United States and British Sailors!” Vermont Phoenix (16 May 1855), 3.
40 Keenan to William Marcy, December 16, 1852, ADPP Vol. 11, 49.
41 W. S. W. Ruschenberger, Notes and Commentaries During a Voyage to Brazil and China in the Year 1848 (Richmond, VA: Macfarlane & Fergusson, 1854), 157.
42 “A Fleet . . . ,” Rutland County Herald (10 November 1854), 2.
Chinese attack on pirates, “The result of our operation,” he wrote, “was the destruction of forty seven piratical junks [and] the capture of over 100 cannon.” Going beyond the victory in terms of ships and weapons, this combined force struck a larger blow to piracy in the region. He celebrated in the destruction “of a piratical depot that had put the Chinese government at defense for over five years, and whence had issued cruisers to murder whenever opportunity offered. We also took some 15 or 20 prisoners and killed between 5 & 8 of the pirates. The only casualty in inflickting [sic] this victory was the death of one of my men John Morrison killed by a shot in the head.”

Preble presents shows the capabilities of Americans to ensure their own security while bolstering regional maritime safety. Although he lamented the loss of Morrison, for Preble the blow Americans helped to deal to pirates made up for it. He even noted that, “I imagine this is the first expedition in which Englishmen, Americans, Portuguese, and Chinese have cooperated as allies. A precedent he hoped signaled a positive development in the Sino-American relationship. He added, “In the pirate Junks we found tea, netting, and other articles plundered from the Caldeina,” a foreign ship that was captured by pirates not long before.

Thus, these endeavors not only improved relations between these disparate national groups, but also aided in the retrieval of valuable cargo. The successes of Americans and their naval allies against piracy helped to create an aura of safety to the point that John Peyton assessed that “the Americans and other private traders, having rarely experienced the slightest inconvenience from any tumults between their [Chinese] sailors and the natives,” continued to trade and profit undeterred.

---

44 Preble, Diary, 54/11/14, 370.
Successful self defense also found its use against the threat of actual mob attacks. “There had been a quarrel between some of the merchants and people,” according to Eliza Bridgman. “Recourse was had to arms, the mob would not desist from violence, they were fired upon and several Chinese [were] killed” by Americans.46 Parker noted that attacks on the consulate endangered “countrymen, women and children,” but that in most instances the “mob was checked by the foreigners” through their ability to defend themselves.47 By evoking the danger that mobs represented to foreigners, especially to their families, the representatives described retaliatory actions in terms of martial success. In a letter sent through the diplomatic corps from American merchants in Canton, they explained that “the citizens of the United States would defend themselves against the attacks of a mob” if the American or Chinese governments were unable to do so.48 Or, as a Mr. Kearney wrote to the secretary of the navy, American trade would only be secure if “the Emperor and officers of the Chinese government are convinced of our power.”49

American confidence in the successes of ensuring bodily and mercantile security addressed the persistent concerns as to the instability of doing business in China. Despite their frequent complaints of the inability or inaction of the Qing to carry out the protective provisos in the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia), the success of Cushing in gaining those guarantees established a benchmark of expectations in the minds of Americans. The ability of Americans to address security issues, or bypass the threat of falling victim to the Chinese legal system through extraterritoriality, helped to prove that some of the dangers had been mediated. Missionaries,

46 Eliza J. Gilleit Bridgman, Daughters of China; or, Sketches of Domestic Life in The Celestial Empire (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853), 59.
47 Peter Parker to James Buchanan, July 18, 1846, ADPP, Vol. 3, 44.
48 American Merchants to Secretary of State, July 9, 1846, ADPP, Vol. 3, 19.
merchants, and diplomats showed that the ability of the United States to establish its own identity in China while ensuring the safety of the foreign communities in general had the result of reinforcing the successes of their respective interests. Bodily security allowed missionaries and merchants to ply their trades with the knowledge that it was the policy of the United States to enforce the status quo of self-defense.

**American Missionary Success**

Under the new regime of interaction between China and foreigners, Lowrie hailed a imperial ordinance in China passed in 1844 as granting Protestant and Catholic missionaries and converts the same religious protections granted to Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism.50 Along with the opening of the treaty ports and the guarantee that missionaries could establish permanent bases of operation in these cities, the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia) burst through the barriers that once held missionaries mostly at bay, resulting in what John Haddad defines as a “dispersal” of people, goods, and ideas beyond the treaty ports.51 What resulted from this unprecedented religious access was a flurry of reports and papers detailing how missionaries achieved their spiritual goals with the intention of further bolstering domestic support of their endeavors.

The aims of missionaries in China could not have been any clearer, but their means often belied their goals. Peter Parker explained that it was an extension of American “manifest destiny” to ensure the spread of Christianity in China.52 In his capacity as a representative of the United States to China, Parker’s writings often indicated the continued indistinct barrier between

---

52 Peter Parker to William Marcy, May 7, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 6, 96.
missionary and diplomatic endeavors. William Lowrie worried that this haziness contributed to distrust among Chinese officials, who viewed the actions of American diplomats as having an ulterior religious motive, which many of them did. “It is well known that the Chinese have a peculiar attachment to their own religious customs and deeds and look with jealousy upon those who come to their country to interfere with them. The Govt. of China is even more jealous than the people and I am sorry to say that both are under the impression that the Government of the United States [has] a special interest in overturning the religion of the country.” Thus, to Lowrie, the continued use of former missionaries as diplomats and translators like Parker had the ill effect of damaging more important national interests in China. 53 But overall the actions of missionaries as diplomats dovetailed with the overarching national efforts to expound American moral superiority in China. Writing about an independent missionary, Ball witnessed how “She dispenses many charities among the Chinese, is very ambitious to do good, and has quite a philosophic turn of mind, with a disposition to regard things in the best light they will bear.” 54 Many expressed this ambition in highly paternalistic terms, believing that American missionaries were the only actors that had any impact. “Indeed we must follow our Saviour's direction,” Eliza Bridgman opined, and “become as little children,” in order to get access to the Chinese mind. 55 James Bridgman – no relation to Eliza and her husband Elijah – also phrased the successful acts of missionaries in terms of parental responsibility to actual Chinese children. “They were as sheep having no shepherd as when I met with these apparently well-disposed in many respects, but neglected and poverty affected children.” His goal was to “save” them through education.

53 John Forbes to Davis, Peter Parker Papers, Harvey Cushing/John Hay Whitney Medical Library, Yale University Libraries, 2.
54 Ball, Rambles, 232.
55 Bridgman, Daughters, 33. Christopher Jespersen describes the paternal attitude of Americans toward the Chinese as “unique in its longevity and pervasiveness” from the 1840s to the present day. Christopher Jespersen, American Images of China, 1931-1949 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), xviii.
and to make them “useful” in spreading missionary influence outside of the treaty ports.\textsuperscript{56} With the intention of salvation in mind, missionaries focused on the new avenues of access – both direct and indirect – that post-war engagement provided their cause.

\textit{Access}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{tract_distribution_chinese.png}
\caption{“Tract Distribution among the Chinese” – The American Sunday-School Union emphasized the success of tract distribution as one of the key means by which missionaries could reach as large an audience as possible. The image above not only shows the process, but it presents an idealized version in which the Chinese literally clamored for these new ideas.\textsuperscript{57}}
\end{figure}

The aftermath of the First Opium War succeeded in having China “opened” to Christian missionaries of all stripes – and that access manifested in many different attempts to bolster domestic support of the newly claimed religious foothold.\textsuperscript{58} Eliza Bridgman wrote happily about boxes of needed supplies and care packages arriving from the United States sent by “Christian ladies, whom we never saw, and never shall see, in the land of our pilgrimage.”\textsuperscript{59} Sears wrote of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{56} James Bridgman, \textit{Journal of James Bridgman}, American Board of Commissioners – Amoy Papers, Yale Divinity Library: Special Collections, Reel 231, 9.
\textsuperscript{57} American Sunday-School Union, \textit{The People of China; or, A Summary of Chinese History. Revised by the Committee of Publication of the American Sunday-School Union} (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1844), 221.
\textsuperscript{59} Bridgman, \textit{Daughters}, 116.
\end{footnotesize}
the new access, “Since the opening of the consular ports, greater facilities are afforded to both American and English missionaries.”60 Yet, how successful the missionaries actually were in their primary objective of gaining converts was a highly contested discourse at home. As Haddad points out, the medical and educational side-projects of missionaries, like Peter Parker and his ophthalmologic hospital and the Bridgmans’ school for girls, drew praise from the public in shaping a more positive attitude among the Chinese toward Americans, but missionary boards in the United States only marginally tolerated these ventures as tangential to their primary purpose.61 Like Parker and the Bridgmans, David Abeel expressed frustration in the single role their headquarters expected missionaries to play versus what missionaries in China thought to be the most beneficial activities for their interests. He wrote “money ought be most preferably expending in establishing schools. The children might be taught to read the simple Christian books without usual difficulty, and . . . [the school] might make an excellent place for a preaching station.”62 Although Abeel’s vision of the educational mission did not stray from proselytization to a great degree as the school trained students in Christian theology, the fact that these institutions had other goals beyond religious training remained in question by the mission organizations at home.

The American public, however, lauded the role of missionaries in expanding printing presses in a region noted for the general literacy of its populace, relying on the notion that the Chinese were not uncivilized, but that they needed encouragement to develop properly under American tutelage. The New York Tribune stated that it was the responsibility of missionaries to

61 Haddad, Adventures, 81.
62 David Abeel, Journal of David Abeel, American Board of Commissioners – Amoy Papers, Yale Divinity Library: Special Collections, Reel 231, 4.
take advantage of the combined opportunities of access and literacy to spread the gospel in “that idolatrous nation.”\textsuperscript{63} The publishing of religious tracts was probably the least controversial of missionary side projects in China, as the main goal of the translation and printing endeavors aimed directly at convincing literate Chinese to convert. Anderson wrote that even the proximal access missionaries had in the treaty ports resulted in “hundreds of thousands of Chinese [having] been brought to knowledge of some of the truths of God. This knowledge has been communicated orally and by means of books; and we are not to suppose that it will be without good results.”\textsuperscript{64} The massive size of the Chinese population once again reemerged in the rhetoric of tract publishing. Writers compared any success in reaching a larger audience against the potential millions waiting beyond the coastline. Hubbard wrote to Elias Bridgman of the success of his printing press in producing 1,200 copies of the “Christian Almanack,” 5,000 copies of the Ten Commandments, another 5,000 on the topic of “The Ways to Worship God,” and thousands more on other topics. Hubbard lamented that, “What are these? Not one tract for each 30,000 souls! There are at least a million of souls in this one city – and will you not let us have funds sufficient to give these from each a single tract or a single leaf? Christianity is now tolerated, and many are inquiring about this new doctrine.”\textsuperscript{65} Thus, even successes in spreading their Christian message had the result of perpetuating discontent over not having total access to the Chinese people and the limited backing they had received at that time. Or, as Barnum stated, “No Protestant missionary has penetrated into the interior; but confined as they are to the borders

\textsuperscript{64} Rufus Anderson to Elijah Bridgman, 45/11/24, American Board of Commissioners – Amoy Papers, Yale Divinity Library: Special Collections, Reel 231.
\textsuperscript{65} Hubbard to Bridgman, 46/1/1, American Board of Commissioners – Amoy Papers, Yale Divinity Library: Special Collections, Reel 231.
of the Empire they have been diligent in founding schools, hospitals, and printing-presses, and in
publishing and disseminating the gospel and tracts among its myriads of idolaters.”

Like education and religious instruction at schools, many of these missionary side
endeavors overlapped. Ball recounted dispensing Christian tracts and practicing western
medicine on a journey around a treaty port city with Elias Bridgman. The draw of medical
treatment created the necessary proximity to spread information via sermon and tract. Anderson
wrote back to the American Board of Commissioners that in addition to tract distribution, “The
hospital practice also affords the opportunity of daily intercourse with numbers to whom the
truth is made known.” Sears also confirmed the positive spiritual effect that the medical efforts
had in convincing the Chinese to take the first step of listening to the missionary message. The
Medical Missionary Society, he wrote, succeeded in “alleviating the sufferings of the benighted
heathens, and when the glow of gratitude is fresh in the heart, for benefits received, then is the
time to speak of the healing power of the gospel, when it is applied to the soul groaning under
the weight of sin.” Using hospitals was a convenient way to attract Chinese directly to the
missions, but as with schools mission organizations in the United States chaffed at spending
valuable resources on endeavors that were not directly preaching to the masses. As missions
established churches, hospitals, and schools in the treaty ports, the impetus shifted to the
capabilities of missionaries and their converts to go out and spread the message as far as
possible.

Anderson wrote of one of his first experiences traveling beyond the boundaries of Amoy:

66 P. T. Barnum, Ten Thousand Things on China and the Chinese: Being a Picture of the Genius, Government,
History, Literature, Agriculture, Arts, Trade, Manners, Customs, and Social Life of the People of the Celestial
Empire, as Illustrated by the Chinese Collection (New York, J. S. Bedfield, 1850), 52.
67 Ball, Rambles, 402.
68 Anderson to Unknown, 45/7/9, American Board of Commissioners – Amoy Papers, Yale Divinity Library:
Special Collections, Reel 231.
69 Sears, Pictorial, 280.
I have spent three days in the country, visiting 20 villages, containing a population of about 25,000, supplying the readers with tracts and exhorting the people to repentance and faith. In these itinerary labours, moreover, may be regarded as the preparatory to future, more steady efforts of the salvation of the thousands on this island. He closed his letter to the American Board with an account of the first local baptism at the Amoy station, giving proof that his endeavors truly provided fruitful results. Most missionaries in China presented the first goal of any successful endeavor to be a foothold in the Chinese family – usually through the baptism of women and children. Eliza Bridgman made frequent use of two of their first students as examples of how Americans could improve the amenability of the Chinese to Christian theology, especially young girls, through educational projects. She wrote that “The sight of these two clean looking native children always secured our introduction to the family” in the effort to gain more students – and potential converts – for the school. Indeed, missionaries were keenly aware of how they presented themselves so as to inspire inquiry rather than anti-foreign sentiment. Anderson wrote to Elijah Bridgman that entire families of missionaries from the United States should be encouraged to move to China. “There can scarcely be a greater cause of joy,” he explained, “than the sight of a child putting on the Christian armor, and entering the ranks of those who are the instruments of God in subduing all nations & all hearts unto himself.”

Conversion

Rather than simply going out and preaching the gospel, American missionaries in China believed firmly that their broad approaches to engaging with the Chinese on medical,

---

70 Rufus Anderson to William John Pohlman, 46/5/1, American Board of Commissioners – Amoy Papers, Yale Divinity Library: Special Collections, Reel 231.
71 Bridgman, Daughters, 149.
72 Rufus Anderson to Elijah Bridgman, 44/5/10, American Board of Commissioners – Amoy Papers, Yale Divinity Library: Special Collections, Reel 231.
educational, and literary fronts resulted in a more positive reception of Christian and American ideas. Elijah Bridgeman confided in his personal journal that he believed “The members of our mission . . . have enjoyed good health, [and their] labors have been prosecuted with good success.” Several newspapers also reported the favorable accounts of missionary expansion, their ability to gain converts – or at least drum up interest – their role in establishing schools for the Chinese, and the increasing support found among imperial officials in China for the missionaries’ causes. The true indication of the success of missionaries, and to a related extent the role of the treaty systems in ensuring the protection of their work, came when Emperor Keying declared that the practice of Christianity in China by foreigners and Chinese alike was to be permitted, lowering what Americans considered a major hurdle toward gaining converts. Even Barnum noted just how rapidly missionary endeavors took hold under the new treaty system, and the inspiration it provided for an increasing number of Americans willing to travel to China. “The zeal and enterprise of individuals have also been awakened. Christian communities are adding to the number of their Missionaries among this nation of idolaters.”

The ability of missionaries to emphasize the success of their activities came first as an explanation of the Chinese opening their minds to Christian ideas, and then through accounts of Chinese people actively expressing religious conversion. William Gammell predicted that “Their [the Chinese] career and their destiny will undoubtedly be greatly affected by the changes which may take place in the East, – now just beginning to be deeply stirred by the influences of western commerce and western civilization. The events of every month are accumulating new

---

75 “Religious Toleration in China,” *Vermont Phoenix* (7 May 16), 2.
76 Barnum, *Collection*, 3.
proofs of the amazing superiority of Christianity over all the systems of oriental faith, and are loosening the hold of Buddhism upon the minds of the people.”

Missionaries also expressed amazement at the rapidity with which they could use native converts as conduits of proselytization beyond the treaty port boundaries. Eliza Bridgman wrote that the children who attended her school and their families had “become colporteurs of Christian books among their neighbors, where the voice of the living speaker does not reach.”

Because missionaries could not legally travel beyond the treaty ports, these native converts became an increasingly valuable tool in inspiring inquiry and conversion beyond the direct influence of the missionaries, drawing the Chinese in to the missions as opposed to missionaries traveling outward. “A Chinese lady has asked for baptism,” Elija Bridgman wrote of one of these “colporteurs,” and he made sure to clarify that she gave “evidence of being a true convert.” For missionaries in China, the access granted to them by the treaty system provided a multiplicity of ways that they could connect with and convert the Chinese people, thereby justifying the dangers in which they placed themselves and providing evidence of those who had supported their endeavors.

Americans lauded converts like Leang Afa as proof of the effectiveness of American and Christian influence. Regarding Leang, Sears noted that “His habits are temperate, exemplary, and industrious. He is naturally less social than many of his countrymen; but his temper, though formerly unaccommodating, is now patient, forbearing, and amiable, especially in domestic life.” The language of deference and adaptation were key in convincing the reader that the Chinese like Leang could convert, and that they were willing and able to submit to American

---

78 Bridgman, *Daughters*, 194.
79 Permanent Committee to E.C. Bridgman, 44/7/8, American Board of Commissioners – Amoy Papers, Yale Divinity Library: Special Collections, Reel 231.
80 Sears, *Pictorial*, 274.
authority in the process. Leang was not the only success story presented to the American people under these terms. The American Sunday-School Union wrote of the ability of their associated missionaries in convincing the Chinese to convert. “Yielding to the influences of the Holy Spirit, they forsook their pagan altars, and bowed to the authority of the Redeemer.” Eliza Bridgman used similar language of deference when she asserted that “To listen to the sweet songs of Zion, from the lips of pagan children; to see them bowing down in prayer before Jehovah, the only God of Heaven and Earth, to be instrumental in guiding them in such a service, is a privilege that Gabriel might desire to share.” She also described how the influence of Americans had already overcome many of the local superstitions among recent converts. She recounted how after the death of a convert the willingness of Americans and Chinese Christians to carry “the mortal remains to one of the spacious front hongs” helped to prove how the latter had overcome their fear of touching the dead. Emphasizing the flexibility of the Chinese to submit to Christian ideals was key to showing that these converts were ideal for as well as amenable to outside influence.

---

81 American Sunday-School Union, People of China, 102.
82 Bridgman, Daughters, 165.
83 Ibid., 74.
**Figure 33:** “Leang Afa, the Chinese Evangelist.” Leang Afa was perhaps the most famous Chinese convert of his day in the United States. Americans lauded his conversion story and his ability to convince his fellow countrymen to at least listen to missionary ideas. \(^{84}\)

The ability of these missionaries to describe how the “moral influences of Christianity” radiate[d] from converts was key in understanding how even in the limited treaty environment the missionary endeavor still had room to grow. \(^{85}\) Talmadge confided to Anderson that “The conduct of our church members in general still continues to give us much cause for gratitude. Many of them we think give evidence of growing in Christian status,” among the Chinese. \(^{86}\) Whether Americans measured success in the China field in terms of access, influence, or in simply providing accounts of conversion, missionaries provided plenty of justification for their presence in China. \(^{87}\) The language they employed, like other rhetorical points of achievement, deemphasized the difficulties of their endeavors while applauding the feats that they

---

\(^{84}\) Sears, *Pictorial*, 275.

\(^{85}\) Townsend Harris to William Marcy, March 24, 1854, ADPP, Vol. 12, 94.

\(^{86}\) Talmage to Rufus Anderson, 53/4/22, American Board of Commissioners – Amoy Papers, Yale Divinity Library: Special Collections, Reel 231.

\(^{87}\) “Roman Catholic Missions in China,” *Nashville Union* (16 July 1854), 1.
accomplished. Perhaps more than any other interest group, missionaries combined the notions of opportunism and success to a high degree. Every convert, every patient, and every Chinese subject handed a pamphlet represented the distinct hope that the marginal achievements obtained after the war would multiply exponentially until American missionaries would hold sway over millions of Chinese people.

**Bringing “Light” to China**

Citing the original concerns over the failings and stagnation of Chinese civilization, many Americans took to emphasizing the variety of ways that, in addition to religion, they and their compatriots moved China forward on the path of progress. The New York Chamber of Commerce declared that China had been “renovated by the light of Christianity and true science,” both of which Americans provided.⁸⁸ The rhetoric of light versus dark seemed to be key in the framing of the cultural and social benefits Americans succeeded in providing – though specifics were fairly general. The *Tribune* framed the questions still remaining about Chinese society having “yielded to the lights of modern research.”⁹⁰ Likewise, Abbot wrote that “a new era has dawned upon the Chinese empire,” and Sears confirmed that the Chinese “are becoming more enlightened respecting the relative position, extent, resources, and civilization, of China, compared with the rest of the world.”⁹⁰ Each of these writers, in emphasizing the differences between eastern and western societies, referenced the beneficial notions of light and enlightenment. Or, as Peyton put it, “Though the people of the East are more backward in this respect than those of Western Europe and the United States, they are not wholly unaffected by the progress which has been going on in other quarters. Their industry has been stimulated and

---

the production of their labor greatly increased."\textsuperscript{91} Thus, according to his estimation, the impact of American radiance was less the creation or establishment of these new ideals, but in fact a “stimulation” of long dormant tendencies already inherent within the Chinese people. In other words, Americans were solving the issues of stagnation that they believed plagued the Chinese empire.

One of the foremost areas of Chinese culture that Americans believed benefited from their radiant influence was that of language. The seemingly innumerable number of characters in the Chinese language, the competing dialects spoken in different treaty ports, and imperial prohibitions on teaching foreigners before the First Opium War created a scenario where Americans were not only learning the language for the first time, but believed they were improving upon it. “If the Chinese language is destined to survive,” Andrews shrewdly hypothesized, “I expect that it will be indebted to the treatment it will receive at the hand of the missionaries and philologists of Christian lands.”\textsuperscript{92} Americans also criticized the means by which the Chinese communicated en masse, namely their means of printing. “All the printing is done in China with such blocks as this [single carved pages]. They have no movable types; but the American missionaries, at Macao and Hong-Kong, are printing books in Chinese with movable types made in France.”\textsuperscript{93} This criticism belies the complexity of Chinese print technology, which generally eschewed movable type for the practical reason that creating numerous, individual blocks for thousands of characters – instead of a few dozen alphabetic characters and punctuations – would have been an extremely time and space consuming process.

\textsuperscript{91} Peyton, Massachusetts Historical Society, 18.
\textsuperscript{93} Barnum, \textit{Collection}, 132.
Utilizing page length print blocks facilitated a faster, cheaper, and larger duplication of books and documents, which some historians have argued bolstered literacy rates in China.\textsuperscript{94} Nevertheless, Americans viewed adapting Chinese script to western modes of printing as a positive step. The fact that the Chinese were believed to be adept at learning English was another step toward better mutual understanding. “A writer on China speaking of the aptitude for Christian civilization, of juveniles at canton says: ‘The children are intelligent and sharp; they pick up English easy. Almost all the young blackguards [\textit{sic}] about the place swear in very good English.’”\textsuperscript{95} Swearing aside, the perceived malleability of the Chinese language and the ability of the Chinese to learn English provided for the notion that change was underway.

Americans viewed improvements in science and medicine in China with the same belief, that American influence was to be credited for the changes underway. Ball asserted, “The better informed are beginning to adopt our system of medicine, especially surgery, though with rather superstitious views in regard to it.”\textsuperscript{96} Improved hygiene also found connection in these arguments. Eliza Bridgman wrote of the girls in their school, “Order, and cleanliness, were the first two things insisted on. In a word, our object was to transfer them from the low condition and disorder of a pagan family, to the privileges and enjoyments of a Christian household.”\textsuperscript{97} There was, however, a caveat to the positive impact of western medicine in the context of a changing China. The impact of foreigners on Chinese practices had its limitations, and many times foreigners were acutely aware of where those limitations lay. Bridgman lamented that in

\textsuperscript{95} “A Writer on China,” \textit{Fremont Journal} (11 April 1856), 1. It should be reiterated that the vast majority of Americans who traveled to China never learned Chinese. As missionaries had the added impetus of trying to convert locals using their own language, they were one of the few groups who made a concerted effort at learning Mandarin and other regional dialects. As such, missionaries almost always served as the primary translators for important diplomatic and economic exchanges, further blurring their primary purpose.
\textsuperscript{96} Ball, \textit{Rambles}, 391.
\textsuperscript{97} Bridgman, \textit{Daughters}, 186.
one instance “it was inexpedient to give our medicine [to a dying girl], lest if she died, her death should be attributed to the foreign influence.”98 Still, Bridgman believed that the superstitiousness and moral grey areas that led to the girl’s poor standing in Chinese society were giving way to new relationships between men and women, and locals and foreigners in China. As such, the moral improvements of bringing light to the Chinese included shining a beacon into the lives of the most benighted in China: the Chinese woman.

**Improvement of the Status of Chinese Women**

While Henrietta Shuck wrote early on that “Christianity is cure for poor treatment of women” in China, the Bridgmans were by far the most vocal advocates for unraveling the patriarchal system in China to the extent of using female converts to influence the religious persuasion of their families.99 In every way the Bridgmans claimed to have succeeded in molding Chinese women into good, literate, pious Christians, ready to support their converted husbands and children in spreading the word of God. But the difficulties were many. Eliza Bridgman wrote of the challenge of teaching a young woman to read, even in her native language. “I handed the lady a crimson card on which was printed the Lord's Prayer; she read a few of the characters, but was unable to read the whole of it. I tried to tell her of the doctrines it taught, but it seemed to be a dead letter to her darkened mind.”100 As a means of bringing light to the “darkened mind” of Chinese women, the Bridgmans prescribed lessons in music, language, domestic duties, and sewing, all meant to improve the status of these women, but still keeping them firmly rooted in the home. As Isabel Morais writes, the conversion-education

---

98 Ibid., 163.
100 Bridgman, *Daughters*, 71.
relationship was key in missionary aims. Their efforts “promoted western norms of gender roles” while providing a larger role for missionary women than they would have had at home.\(^{101}\)

While educating young Chinese girls in western styles of music, Bridgman quipped that “their voices are yet to be modulated to musical softness” required to sing in a truly pleasant manner.\(^{102}\)

Routine was at the core of their educational method. “In domestic duties, cooking, sweeping, scrubbing, washing, sewing, etc., they are all called upon to take part every day, the Sabbath excepted.”\(^{103}\) And the impact of this training was not lost on other Chinese women. “A great many Chinese women visited the establishment, who always seemed gratified and much surprised at the interest manifested in behalf of the girls, particularly in seeing them taught to sew in their own style, make, mend and wash their own clothes.”\(^{104}\) In their endeavors to inculcate the next generation of Chinese women with domestic and Christian knowledge, missionaries charted the spread of American influence.

“Female education, in China, is still in its incipient stage of progress. Though all true Christians will readily admit that it is the steady and holy influence of the Gospel that has given her, in enlightened countries, her true position in society – the position which the great Creator designed she should occupy; yet but few have begun to realize what woman is without the gospel.”\(^{105}\) As with Leang Afa, the Bridgmans publicized the successful conversion experience of Ah-yee, a young girl they took in. They specifically aimed at educating Chinese girls in part because of the cultural challenge posed in gaining access to them. “For as yet we knew not of a single instance in Canton, where a female child had been given up to a foreign lady for


\(^{102}\) Ball, *Rambles*, 237.

\(^{103}\) Bridgman, *Daughters*, 191.

\(^{104}\) Bridgman, *Daughters*, 218.

\(^{105}\) Ibid., 28.
education.”106 Whether it was because they successfully convinced her father, or because of her family’s poor treatment of her, the Bridgmans soon came in contact with Ah-yee. After their first encounter, Eliza Bridgman described Ah-yee as “a child of fine countenance, poorly clad, filthy as a vagrant, though her father made a respectable appearance. [Her father] was unwilling to bind himself to any term of years; said she was betrothed; but, being straitened in his circumstances, he was glad to get her provided for.” Not only was it a great challenge to be the first missionary entrusted with the education of a Chinese girl, but Bridgman admitted that “With us it was an experiment.”107

The Bridgmans took pride in their successes in teaching Ah-yee and wrote of her as the prototype for future conversion efforts. Eliza wrote that she “took great pleasure in the unfolding of her mind” to western and Christian ideas.108 They used Ah-yee as a gateway into the homes of locals, introducing the foreigners and their religion to a skeptical public. Unfortunately for their experiment, Ah-yee’s stay with the Bridgmans was only temporary, as after four years her father returned to take her home for betrothal to a young man. While they were upset at not being able to save her from the system of arranged marriages in China, they maintained a sense of optimism. “We have since received no intelligence from Ah-yee, but we have great hope that the seed sown in her young and tender mind for four years, will yet spring up and bear fruit unto Eternal life.”109 They supposed that their success would manifest itself through the remainder of her life, and if possible, she would serve as a model for other potential converts even without continued contact.

106 Ibid., 48.
107 Ibid., 76.
108 Bridgman, Daughters, 82.
109 Ibid., 170.
Americans believed that success manifested across China despite the many limitations placed on the lives of women. One Chinese man interviewed by the Bridgmans explained his enthusiasm for the changes he witnessed in his recently converted wife. “He said that one of the improvements in his wife was, that before she learned the new doctrines, she only washed herself once in two or three days, now she washed herself every day! I told him the necessity of a clean heart . . . but I was pleased and amused with his simplicity.”¹¹⁰ But it was more than just a moral and hygienic influence Americans touted as having brought to the women of China. In an article on the “Growing Respect for Missions” in China, the Vermont Phoenix reported that Christian and American ideas were growing in their appeal across all of the classes in China, and it went on to claim that foreigners now frequently saw Chinese women in public because of American influence.¹¹¹ A few weeks later, the Phoenix added to its previous statements of American benevolent influence in China. Citing foreign intervention, the newspaper reported that the Qing government began to enforce restrictions on female infanticide, a major victory in the minds of missionaries.¹¹² While it is clear that these news accounts disregarded the commonplace sightings of working-class Chinese women by foreigners, or the fact that infanticide as a practice did not end in China, these observations showed the willingness of Americans to consider any perceived change in the lives of Chinese women as an indication of greater success.

The Success of Wanghia

Politically, the clearest and most important accomplishment that Americans achieved out of their early experiences was the overarching success of the establishment of the Treaty of

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 69.
Wanghia (Wangxia). As Haddad points out, the ability of the Americans to negotiate an agreement on par with the access and availability that the British obtained after the war was not guaranteed, but the results Caleb Cushing obtained far exceeded even his own expectations. As a result, the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia) secured the political, economic, and religious avenues that Americans so desperately desired.\textsuperscript{113} Nevertheless, the realities of ensuring the enforcement of the treaty soon came into conflict with the complexities of the Sino-American relationship. As Pär Kristoffer Cassel notes, under the treaty extraterritoriality was more of a “practice” than a bedrock system at this time. What existed were “overlapping complexities of interests and control enveloped by linguistic peculiarities within translations.”\textsuperscript{114} In other words, competing interests on both the American and Chinese perspectives guided how each side interpreted the stipulations to the treaty and how both groups responded to issues involving treaty compliance. As a result, China’s efforts after the Treaties of Nanjing and Wanghia (Wangxia) focused on establishing and defining limits on extraterritoriality within the contexts of multiple Qing legal jurisdictions and increasing foreign demands.\textsuperscript{115} It was because of these ambiguities that a much more clearly defined system arose in the aftermath of the Second Opium War and the signing of the Treaty of Tianjin.

American extraterritorial rights in Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia) were a mixed bag of sorts. The treaty theoretically protected Americans from legal retribution by the Chinese government – included but not limited to capital punishment – and consular protections could be revoked for those caught trading opium.\textsuperscript{116} It was this balance between successfully securing

\textsuperscript{113} Haddad, \textit{Adventures}, 4.
\textsuperscript{115} Cassel, \textit{Grounds}, 11-12. Cassel explains that both Qing China and Tokugawa Japan maintained legal systems that carried a “plurality” of different rights and restrictions for the Manchu ruling class in the former and the shogunate in the latter.
\textsuperscript{116} Cassel, \textit{Grounds}, 53.
protections for American interests and the symbolism of actually working with the Chinese government in its anti-opium campaign – as opposed to wresting concessions from the Chinese as the British had done – that led Caleb Cushing to declare that the treaty ensured “the style of perfect equality between the U.S. and China.” He added that Americans were now situated in “a position alike honorable and independent in China,” as opposed to being associated with the dastardly British. The difficulties of establishing a new relationship with the Chinese tempered the fanfare for the victories found in the treaty negotiations. Whereas Robert McLane described the United States as having the “moral force of treaty requirements” to support its claims, what actually occurred during the inter-Opium War period was the adaptation of American and Chinese diplomatic processes, each attempting to navigate their own interpretations of the agreement for their own benefit. Americans found that the advantages of extraterritoriality had the downside of potentially disrupting Sino-American relations at every turn. Consuls and diplomats worried that too lenient of enforcement on their part might result in angering the Chinese and damaging the position of the United States in China. Likewise, as American access to treaty ports began, the lack of official tribunals to establish a unified rule of law for American expatriates left these representatives with the unenviable task of trying to enforce agreements in the face of rampant international opium smuggling. As such, Fitch Taylor suggested that it would be prudent for the United States to appoint consuls as “officers with fixed salaries, sufficient to raise them above the necessities of their engaging in trade,” so that the needs of the United States would be elevated above personal and economic interests.

117 Caleb Cushing to Abel Upshur, April 7, 1844, ADPP, Vol. 2, 221; and, Caleb Cushing to Nelson, July 5, 1844, ADPP, Vol. 2, 225.
118 Robert McLane to William Marcy, September 19, 1854, ADPP, Vol. 5, 185.
119 “I Invite…,” Jeffersonian Republican (16 December 1847), 4.
alone. Forbes, the largest beneficiary of the expanded China trade, even measured his public expectations of the extent of the success of the treaty. He wrote after the signing:

There can be no doubt that the opening of new places of trade will enable us to get rid of a larger quantity of domestic goods; but we must reiterate the opinion expressed in the early part of the last year, in a letter published in the *Daily Advertiser*, that the prospective extension of the China trade, in consequence of the opening of four new ports, is very much over-estimated.

It is clear that even in the face of this expanded contact that Americans were already prepared to admit that perhaps the more optimistic strains of pro-China rhetoric needed to be adjusted to the reality of how the relationship was unfolding.

This does not mean that Americans, especially those in the news media, did not tout the successes of the expansion of Sino-American treaty relationship where they could. The *New York Tribune* highlighted the success of expanding the influence of the “American System” of trade into China, particularly in introducing cotton sales to the Middle Kingdom. The *Burlington Free Press* reported spikes in cotton and opium sales at the new ports mere months after the treaty negotiations concluded, and the *Rutland Herald* later confirmed that woven and raw cotton were fetching record prices in the China market. Fueling the desire of Americans to overcome British power in the region, accounts of American cotton products outselling their British competitors were positive indicators. Additionally, the economic benefits were not unidirectional, as by the beginning of the Second Opium War the *Belmont Chronicle* calculated that, “Four and a half million dollars worth of raw silk are imported [annually] from China into

---


122 “It is Stated” *New York Tribune* (22 August 1843), 4; and, “China,” *Burlington Free Press* (26 January 1844), 2.


124 “Why it is that…,” *New York Tribune* (14 September 1844), 2.
this country” creating a positive economic benefit for the Chinese as well as American merchants.125

The political and economic victories garnered from the signing of the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia) were varied and complex. The result of the convergence of feelings of optimism and the failings of the early relationship resulted in the emergence of a more nuanced strain of rhetoric that emphasized the marginal gains Americans experienced in the new treaty port regime within an increasingly defined diplomatic relationship. Along with the religious rhetoric employed by missionaries, the political and economic results focused on areas where observers could agree Americans made headway. But in addition to these specific outcomes, Americans also made it clear that they had begun to broach cultural barriers, and as such the relationship between Americans and Chinese was improving.

Positive Exchanges

The gradual successes of interaction created a sentiment that, over time, Chinese and Americans were solidifying a relationship based on mutual respect borne out of policies meant to help improve the status of Chinese civilization. Early on, Cushing determined that “a pacific policy toward the Chinese would always be the most righteous and successful one for any nation to adopt,” and that it was in the best interest of the United States to do so.126 The ability of the United States to construct institutions like hospitals and schools in China highlighted the ways in which Americans believed China needed to be improved and the ways in which they believed they could help. Writers routinely elevated Peter Parker’s ophthalmologic hospital as an exemplary institution, bringing tangible benefits to the Chinese people and intangible positive

125 “Four and a half…,” Belmont Chronicle (11 December 1856), 3.
126 Caleb Cushing, Caleb Cushing Papers, Cushing to Belihas, Vol. 40, 43/7/5.
sentiment for Americans traveling in China. Fitch wrote that Parker’s hospital “has secured unbounded confidence among the Chinese, who look upon him as something superior to humanity, in connection with the many cures he has effected [sic], and operations he has performed.”127

Observers also characterized American style education as another major draw that increased the strength of the Sino-American relationship. Americans purported that this educational influence had two avenues. Firstly, missionaries in the treaty ports – like the Bridgmans – succeeded in providing western-style education to hundreds of children. Anderson reported to the hesitant American Board of Commissioners that “day schools . . . might be established almost without limits.” Given the sizable population, he went on, “Thousands of children” would end up neglected and ignorant without American schools.128 Conversely, the rare occurrence of a Chinese student traveling to the United States for education – almost always for the purpose of missionary training – drew praise as another means by which American culture influenced the Chinese mind. “It is a significant fact,” the Burlington Free Press wrote, “that many intelligent Chinese are sent to the United States to receive their education.”129 It made the New York Tribune when Yung Wing, one of the first of this generation of missionary students, graduated from Yale University “with the highest honors.” The account continued to praise him as “a young Chinese gentleman of fine talents and great learning for his age.”130 The next day the Tribune wrote that Yung Wing was “proof of the kind of good the missionaries are [affecting] in China.”131 While Chinese children studying at American schools and students at

128 Anderson to Unknown Recipient, 45/7/9, American Board of Commissioners – Amoy Papers, Yale Divinity Library: Special Collections, Reel 231.
universities in the United States represented a minuscule fraction of the overall population of China, like the conversion of Liang Afa these few examples gave the slightest glimmer of hope that Americans were building upon these small successes for future development.

Beyond the personal level of the influence of education, Americans touted the larger successes in presenting the strength and reliability of U.S. commercial institutions and the emergence of true access into the much vaunted China market. Samuel Wells Williams wrote to his son Frederick that even immediately after the First Opium War, “there is also much more intercourse with the people than before,” and compared to previous problems with the Cantonese, “at the north officers do not refuse to see private persons from abroad.”132 At the same time, Cushing confirmed to his superiors that that “the Chinese Authorities [have a] favorable opinion they have already formed of the American character and of the strength and respectability of our Government. Such an impression of course, has its influence in reference to our commercial relations.”133 In addition to this the direct merchant influence on the positive reception of Americans, Macaulay alleged that the reputation of the United States as a growing territorial power garnered interest among the Chinese as well. “We have undoubtedly risen greatly in their estimation since the acquisition of California, and the appearance of our magnificent clipper ships in their waters.”134 American expansion at home only bolstered their claims that a presence in China was a necessary goal.

Writers also emphasized this notion of increasing American strength resulting in an improvement in Sino-American relation through the framework of international economic competition, namely in the ability of the United States to become the preeminent foreign nation

132 S. Wells Williams to William Frederick Williams, 43/5/29, Williams, Samuel Wells Papers, Manuscripts and Archives – Yale University Library, New Haven, Ct.
133 Caleb Cushing to Waldron, Caleb Cushing Papers, Vol. 44, 44/5/14.
134 Macaulay, Kathay, 137.
in China’s waters. Speer declared that “The United States is now, it is worth noticing, in a situation more favorable than her European rivals to realize the advantages of the trade with the Chinese, inasmuch themselves are awakened to its importance.”\textsuperscript{135} Harnessing the belief that American treatment of the Chinese in the treaty negotiation process was amicable rather than exploitative, newspapers interpreted the disturbances between Americans and Chinese as misunderstandings rather than actual signifiers of anti-foreign sentiment. The \textit{Jeffersonian Republican} claimed it was simply a miscommunication that “barbarian” and “red-haired devil” were derogatory terms toward foreigners, and insisted instead that they were complimentary.\textsuperscript{136} The \textit{Vermont Phoenix} split the rhetorical hairs even further when it explained that it was only the British who the Chinese derisively referred to as “red haired,” and that the Chinese had established a distinct preference for “flowry headed” Americans. The article, however, concluded that Americans had much to do in order to maintain that sentiment of preference. “We hope the Chinese will never find out about our Negro Slavery or the Mexican War,” as it assumed knowledge of such practices and events would sully the positive image that Americans succeeded in constructing in China thus far.\textsuperscript{137} Whether emphasizing the institutional or economic value Americans brought to China, it was clear to contemporaries that Americans had succeeded in obtaining valuable access and influence among the Chinese. In addition to these measurable metrics by which they could trace improvement in the Sino-American relationship, American writers often included those who gave their last measure of effort to their goals in China.

\textsuperscript{135} Rev. William Speer, \textit{An Humble Plea, Addressed to the Legislature of California, in Behalf of the Immigrants from the Empire of China to this State} (San Francisco, CA: Office of the Oriental, 1856), 93.
\textsuperscript{136} “Mr. Thomas,” \textit{Jeffersonian Republican} (29 January 1852), 1.
The Success of Sacrifice

A sentiment of success unique to the missionary endeavor in China was that of the recollection of sacrifice, which missionaries projected as an inevitable result of their efforts. Accounts of the difficulties of the China station emphasized missionaries sacrificing their health and sometimes their lives in proving themselves worthy of emulation and conversion by the Chinese. The challenges of learning the language, broaching cultural differences, the risks of travel and disease, the fear of anti-foreigner activity, the dearth of available women to marry, and the supposition that they were never to return to the United States contributed to the notion that missionaries were sacrificing all aspects their lives to the promise of converting the Chinese masses.138 Sears wrote of one missionary, “No pleasant place of abode has the missionary Roberts; no domestic ties to solace him when his daily task is over; no fond wife to wipe the damps of fever from his brow in sickness, or administer the soothing, cooling draught.”139 In essence, missionaries forsook the comforts of the domestic realm to explore and convert the foreign unknown. “Neither the sufferings endured by the pioneers in the Christian cause in China,” Sears added, “nor the increased rigor with which the empire has been shut against foreign creeds, have damped the generous zeal with which missionary societies have been animated.”140

Illness and death served as a martyrdom of sorts, providing a means by which the achievements of individual missionaries and the entire endeavor could be recounted. The

138 Peter Parker and Samuel Wells Williams spent decades in China, and like many of their contemporaries they believed that they would never return home. Joy Schulz writes of the similar conundrum faced by missionaries in Hawai‘i in the first half of the nineteenth century. The distance and separation was so great that mission families often sent their children away to be educated back in the United States fearing that Hawaiian culture would hinder their capabilities to teach their children and that they would be less American because of local influence. “Birthing Empire: Economies of Childrearing and the Formation of American Colonialism in Hawai‘i, 1820-1848,” in Diplomatic History (2014) 38 (5): 895-925.
139 Sears, Pictorial, 278.
140 Ibid., 273.
Nashville Union provided a fairly detailed accounting of the foreign mission community that had developed by 1853. Of the 150 foreign missionaries who were in China, 88 were Americans. Yet, dangers marred their ability to sustain their numbers.

Seventy three are now in China, and five more are absent on account of health, or for other reasons. Of the remaining seventy-two, twenty-five died in the field of labor, or on the passage home, including four who were drownéd, and three who met with violent death at the hands of the natives. Forty-eight have retired, most of them on account of their own ill-health, or that of their families.141

The missionaries themselves were keenly aware of the physical and emotional toll that serving in China could play in their ability to succeed. Eliza Bridgman’s account ends with a description of to how the poor health of her husband forced them to abandon their post and leave China permanently.142 William Lowrie’s memoir listed a spate of missionary deaths in previous year in service of their religious and cultural work.143

In addition to the many reports of death and illness were the inevitable, extensive postmortem analyses of the personal and professional successes of the individuals described. After Henrietta Shuck died, Eliza Bridgman explained “Her religious character was decided, and distinguished by humble and childlike confidence in God.”144 The American Sunday-School Union eulogized the success of a Dr. Milne as having “had the satisfaction of seeing an Anglo-Chinese college erected, for the instruction of Chinese youths, from which much good has resulted.”145 The official report from the American Board of Commissioners outpost in Amoy [Xiamen] described one death as “Through the lingering illness which preceded his death, he manifested a pleasant spirit, & full confidence in the Saviour [sic].”146

142 Bridgman, Daughters, 220.
143 Lowrie, Memoirs, 243.
144 Bridgman, Daughters, 216.
145 American Sunday-School Union, People, 226.
146 Amoy Consular Annual Table, American Board of Commissioners – Amoy Papers, 1856.
These accounts of illness and death populated missionary reports to a great extent so as to provide a written record for mission societies of the endeavors and activities of missionaries that did not return home. In doing so, the laudatory rhetoric that emerged contributed to the larger idea that an American presence in China was having a marked influence. Whether or not the records had the impact of inspiring later generations of Americans to take up mission work is unknown, but these accounts do show the tenacity with which active missionaries believed their cohort approached the China mission and succeeded.

Conclusion

If American representations painted a picture of China as filled with masses of people and bureaucratic hierarchies hostile to foreigners, why then did all of these officials recommend a continued presence in China? The simple answer is that for all of the negative reports about the Chinese people themselves, Americans determined that the advantages of trade and diplomacy in China that they had already gained outweighed the negatives, and that Americans were already making headway in improving the social and governmental problems they believed plagued China. Perhaps the strongest convictions expressed invoked language of a positive American impact on Chinese civilization and morality. Cushing noted in 1844 that China was “highly civilized, just of a civilization different from ours,” and Parker concluded that “western logic will not always apply to the Chinese.”147 These ideas of Chinese separateness connect to Alexander Everett’s conclusion that, “the Chinese kept themselves, in general, entirely aloof from all connexion [sic] with the outside world.”148 But while Chinese civilization was

147 Caleb Cushing to Abel Upshur, February 5, 1844, ADPP, Vol. 1, 171; and Peter Parker to William Marcy, September 3, 1856, ADPP, Vol. 6, 134.
considered separate from that of the West, Everett also noted that, “civilization and humanity have made some progress” in China due to the influence of Americans.\textsuperscript{149}

Diplomat Robert McLane described China as the locale, “Where we would extend the moral power of our civilization.”\textsuperscript{150} The rhetoric of success emphasized this rising tide of American influence in China. Because these writers could not point to territorial expansion or political authority over the Chinese as the result of all of the national and individual effort, the realms of economic, spiritual, and cultural influences served as convenient stand-ins to justify the great personal, monetary, and bodily risks involved. The crafting of the treaty with China resulted in an expansion of American jurisdiction in China, but also as helped establish “an instrument of imperial management” that allowed the Qing to create a mutually understood and enforceable system. The rhetoric of success found a necessary middle ground between the lofty ideals of mystery and opportunism and the harsh perspectives of failure and danger. Americans defined success in terms of influence and reach, and the period between the Opium Wars saw an exponential, though still restrained, growth in both.

\textsuperscript{149} Alexander Everett to James Buchanan, April 10, 1847, ADPP, Vol. 3, 164.
\textsuperscript{150} Robert McLane to William Marcy, June 14, 1854, ADPP, Vol. 5, 61.

From 1843 to 1856 the Sino-American relationship underwent a pivotal shift. The United States approached its interactions with the Chinese in unfamiliar territory both literally and figuratively. The aftermath of the First Opium War obliterated the Cohong system and its limitations on direct diplomatic and public access. The negotiation and signing of the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia) represented two nation-states on relatively equal footing considering the century of extremely unequal treaties that was to follow. Neither side had diplomatic experience, consular chiefs, or policy experts in their capitals directing expectations of how to interact with one another. The Chinese hoped to limit as many concessions as possible, while Americans hoped for the exact opposite. Proficiency in Sino-American diplomatic relations developed extemporaneously while most of the experts – usually missionaries – were on the ground focused on other aspects of the relationship. China had no need to open its doors to Americans either financially or legally, nor did Americans have any real political, economic, or military leverage to force the issue. But the negotiations happened nonetheless, overshadowed by the agreements made by the British in the previous year.

American national interest in securing access to China was not based on a set policy or any real, direct tangible goals. Of course, vague predictions about the intrinsic value of the mythic “China market” guided certain hopes, but Cushing and his compatriots did not embark from the United States with any explicit terms in mind or goals dictated by the federal government. Instead, the balance between what different interest groups wanted and the legal
boundaries established in the Treaty of Wanghia (Wangxia) directed and restrained Americans. In essence, this first generation of interaction was bounded by the capability of Cushing in negotiating the treaty and the willingness (or not) of American and Chinese enforcement. In actuality, American policy in China was more a response to the continuing British presence – gaining the same rights as the Treaty of Nanjing while distinguishing a unique national identity for Americans. Rejecting the hypothesis of John King Fairbanks, Dong Wang writes to remind the reader that the United States was not a merely “junior partner” to Great Britain in China; Americans had their own aims and goals. And as their continued access to trade with China during the Opium War showed, they were willing to take advantage of any opportunity to assert greater influence in the region.1

Within these boundaries, Americans found bountiful opportunities to express their feelings about access to China in terms of individual, organizational, and national interests. Americans involved in all aspects of the China trade viewed their position through a lens of how China could be used to improve American political, economic, religious, and cultural standing in the world. Yet, the inter-Opium War period represented a highly malleable relationship in which Americans expected a certain level of opportunity and success. Nevertheless, they were still subject to the uncertainties of the relationship in terms of failure and threat. The way Americans talked about China through the frameworks of mystery, opportunity, flaw, threat, and success represented the battle between the constraints of the treaty versus the drive to expand national interests. A lack of a singular, national policy resulted in all manner of individual goals projected on an international scale. When responding to larger issues of labor, race, religion, economics, gender, territorial expansion, and national identity, the rhetoric of “China” was

usually a tangent to these ideas in the minds and words of most Americans. Nevertheless, the coherent mobilization of these ideas across thousands of miles, between competing interests, and for over a decade shows how useful understanding the rhetorical frameworks of foreign relations between the United States and China is. Instead of passing over the period of the Opium Wars as a blip on the way to Chinese Exclusion, the rise of the “Bamboo Curtain,” and the eventual political and economic détente that has led to the current relationship, we see that American aims at democratizing, capitalizing, and even Christianizing China are nothing new. If anything, the overlapping rhetoric of mystery, opportunity, flaw, threat, and success have been inherent and continuous parts of the DNA of Sino-American relations since Caleb Cushing stepped off the Brandywine. While the issues have changed and the connections have become significantly deeper, how Americans approach and describe China continues to provide a useful reflection of the position in the world at which Americans believe the United States is located and where they believe it needs to be. At a time of settler colonialism and territorial expansion, as Americans spilled across the continent and into the Pacific they hit a proverbial wall when it came to China. China's own population and hesitancy to deal with foreigners, and the rising power of the British in the waters around Southern and Eastern Asia, forced Americans to employ new tactics in their effort to influence the Chinese, but their tone of racial and economic superiority remained the same. The early Sino-American relationship was one of willing dichotomies. The Chinese were civilized and stagnant; hard-headed and amenable; antipode and familiar. Or, as Harold Issacs puts it, “China occupies a special place in a great many American minds. It is remote, strange, dim, little known. But it is also in many ways and for many people oddly
familiar, full of sharp images and associations, and uniquely capable of arousing intense emotion.”

As this conclusion is being written, so too may another page of the Sino-American relationship be turning. After decades of astounding economic, cultural, and geopolitical growth, China is once again facing accusations from the west that its economy is stagnating. Americans still rapturously hope that as China continues to urbanize, economic forces will impel the Chinese to buy American products to compensate for their own mass consumption of Chinese goods – replacing tea and silks with consumer electronics and other manufactured goods. So too do missionaries hope that Christianity continues to gain traction among new converts, even as the state exerts power over the extent of religious expression. American politicians still opine for expanded access of information about and democratization among Chinese citizens. Computer hackers have replaced pirate attacks as the scourge of American economic interests. And the special economic zones and administrative regions mirror the points of access and exchange to which treaty ports served more than a century and a half ago – in some instances in the very same cities. But unlike the past, the United States does not approach China in a position of diminished power and authority when compared to other nations. In addition, China’s own reemerging power and the continued sway of now over 1.3 billion citizens perpetuates the now age-old efforts of Americans to impress cultural expectations on China without exercising direct control. The expansion of the English language across the Chinese educational system, the influx of American corporate brands, and the massive outflow of eager Chinese students studying abroad in the United States are just a handful of the means that Americans have at their disposal in exerting cultural imperialism in the People’s Republic.

---

The narrative of the Sino-American relationship is one of a continuous effort to define the bilateral relationship and its impact on the United States. As Terry Caesar writes, “Americans travel at least as much to try to discover their own otherness in other countries as they do to use these countries in order to invent themselves.”3 For all of the seemingly conflicting reasons why Americans in the mid-nineteenth century spent months if not years of their lives in search of their own personal successes in China, the language and rhetoric that they employed conjured seemingly monolithic explanations of both Chinese and American culture. Living and working in China and discussing matters of Sino-American relations allowed Americans to paper over sectional differences, political tensions, and the challenges of their desire to expand American hegemony across the continent and beyond. When describing the relationship between the United States and China at the turn of the twentieth century, Christopher Jespersen states that it was “a mélange of often contradictory attitudes, expectations, and hopes.”4 This sentiment seems to bear some resemblance to the dynamic fifty years prior, but when looking closely it does not quite match. Despite the conflicting purposes behind the rhetoric of mystery, opportunity, flaw, threat, and success, a simple logic undergirded the entire endeavor. China could represent whatever the observer wanted, and Americans from 1843 to 1856 used that indeterminacy to the greatest extent imaginable. Americans created an entire discourse of description that could simultaneously and effectively suit the needs of individuals, organizations, and the nation as a whole by cobbling together hopes, dreams, fears, and suspicions under the guise of engagement. Americans hoped that increased access after the First Opium War would serve as a panacea for the problems of misunderstanding that had previously undergirded the

---

Sino-American relationship. But instead of presenting a solution, greater engagement with China only served to open a Pandora’s box, wherein the Chinese represented everything and anything that Americans could desire, and it is that desire that has not only motivated, but controlled the relationship ever since.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbott, Jacob</td>
<td>Historian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abeel, David (Rev.)</td>
<td>Missionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen, Nathan (Dr.)</td>
<td>Physician/Traveler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anderson, Rufus</td>
<td>Head – American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrews, Stephen Pearl</td>
<td>Linguist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aulick, John H. (Cmdre.)</td>
<td>Naval Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ball, Benjamin Lincoln</td>
<td>Physician/Travel Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnum, P.T.</td>
<td>Entertainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biddle, James (Cmdre.)</td>
<td>Naval Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonynge, Francis</td>
<td>Traveler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradley, Charles</td>
<td>Consular Official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridgman, Elijah</td>
<td>Missionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridgman, Eliza J. Gilleit</td>
<td>Missionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridgman, James</td>
<td>Missionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brownell, Henry</td>
<td>Historian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buchanan, James</td>
<td>Secretary of State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calhoun, John C.</td>
<td>Secretary of State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clayton, John M.</td>
<td>Secretary of State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colton, Walter (Rev.)</td>
<td>Missionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comstock, William Ogilvie</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cunningham, E.</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cushing, Caleb</td>
<td>Ambassador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeSilver, Robert P.</td>
<td>Consular Official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everett, Alexander</td>
<td>Consular Official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everett, Edward</td>
<td>Secretary of State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forbes, John M.</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forbes, Robert B.</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frost, John</td>
<td>Historian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gammell, William</td>
<td>Missionary Historian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harris, Townsend</td>
<td>Consular Official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyatt, Thomas</td>
<td>Consular Official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones, Caleb</td>
<td>Consular Official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kearney, Lawrence</td>
<td>Consular Official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowrie, Walter M. (Rev.)</td>
<td>Missionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macaulay, W. Hastings</td>
<td>Traveler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malcolm, Howard</td>
<td>Traveler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcy, William</td>
<td>Secretary of State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall, Humphrey</td>
<td>Consular Official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McLane, Robert</td>
<td>Consular Official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell, A. Augustus</td>
<td>Geographer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murphy, Robert</td>
<td>Consular Official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parker, Peter (Dr./Rev.)</td>
<td>Medical Missionary/Translator/General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perry, Matthew (Cmdre.)</td>
<td>Naval Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peyton, John L.</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pohlman, John William  Missionary
Preble, George Henry  Merchant
Roberts, Issachar Jacox  Missionary
Ruschenberger, W. S. W.  Traveler
Sampson, George  Merchant
Sears, Robert  Historian
Shaw, Samuel (Maj.)  Consular Official
Shuck, Henrietta  Missionary
Spalding, J. W.  Traveler
Speer, William (Rev.)  Missionary
Tappan, Lewis  Merchant
Taylor, Fitch W.  Traveler
Thorndike, S. Lothrop  Merchant
Tiffany Jr., Osmond  Traveler
Tufts, George  Merchant
Upshur, Abel P.  Secretary of State
Webster, Daniel  Secretary of State
West, George W.  Artist/Traveler
Williams, Samuel Wells (Rev.)  Missionary/Translator/Founder of “Chinese Repository” newspaper
Woodward, M.  Merchant


**Bibliography**

**Archival Sources**

**Yale University Libraries**

- Manuscripts and Archives – Yale University Library
  Williams, Samuel Wells Papers

- Yale Divinity Library: Special Collections
  American Board of Commissioners – Amoy Papers
  American Board of Commissioners – Canton Papers
  Peet, Burt Lyman Papers
  Hartwell Family Papers
  Elija Bridgeman Journal
  Hartwell, Emily Susan Papers

- Harvey Cushing/John Hay Whitney Medical Library
  Peter Parker Papers

**Massachusetts Historical Society**

  David Geitsinger Correspondence
  George Henry Preble Diary – Voyage on the USF St. Louis
  George Henry Preble – Diary of a Cruise to China and Japan, 1853-1856
  M. Woodard Letters
  Horace Story Papers
  Thorndike Papers
  Thorndike Diary
  Journal of the Voyage to Indonesia and China
  China Mutual Insurance Company Papers
  Log of the Steamer Lancefield
  Bylaws of the China Mutual Insurance Company
  Speech of Mr. J.C. Clark of New York
  Suggestions on Railroad Communication with the Pacific
  Chinese Musical Burletta Broadside
  Armory Hall Broadside
  Manuscript Map of China, c. 1850
  Jonathan Ingersoll Bowditch Papers
  China and Sandwich Islands
  William Ogilvie Comstock Papers

**Library of Congress – Manuscripts Division**

  Caleb Cushing Papers
Manuscripts

Abbott, Jacob. *China and the English, or the Character and Manners of the Chinese, as Illustrated in the History of Their Intercourses with Foreigners, To Which is Added an Account of the Late War.* Cooperstown: H. & E. Phinney, 1843.


Ball, Benjamin Lincoln. *Rambles in Eastern Asia, including China and Manila, During Several Years' Residence: With Notes of The Voyage to China, Excursions in Manila, Hong-Kong, Canton, Shanghai, Ningpoo, Amoy, Fouchow, and Macao.* Boston: James French and Co., 1856. 2nd ed. [First Ed- 1855]


Cunningham, E. *Our Commercial and Political Relations with China, by an American Resident in China.* Washington, 1855.


“


Jeter, J.B. *Memoir of Mrs. Henrietta Shuck, the First American Female Missionary to China.* Boston: Gould, Kendall, & Lincoln, 1846.


“


“


Parker, Peter, Rev., M.D. *Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Medical Missionary Society in China; and Fifteenth Report of Its Ophthalmic Hospital At Canton, For the Years 1848 and 1849.* Canton: Printed at the Office of the Chinese Repository, 1850.


Ruschenberger, W.S.W. *Notes and Commentaries During a Voyage to Brazil and China in the Year 1848.* Richmond, VA: Macfarlane & Fergusson, 1854.


Spalding, J. W. *The Japan Expedition: Japan and Around the World – An Account of Three Visits to the Japanese Empire, with Sketches of Madeira, St. Helena, Cape of Good Hope, Mauritius, Ceylon, Singapore, China, and Loo-Choo.* New York: Bedfield, 1855.


Taylor, Fitch W. *A Voyage Round the World, and Visits to Various Foreign Countries, in the United States Frigate Columbia; Attended by Her Consort the Sloop of War John Adams, and Commanded by Commodore George C. Read. Also Including An Account of the Bombarding and Firing of the Town of Muckie, on the Malay Coast, and the Visit of the Ships to China During the Opium Difficulties at Canton, and Confinement of the Foreigners in that City.* Vol. II New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1847.


**Diplomatic Record**


**Newspapers**

Anti-Slavery Bugle [New Lisbon, OH]

Belmont Chronicle [St. Clairsville, OH]

Burlington Free Press [Burlington, VT]

Columbia Democrat [Colombia, MO]

Fayetteville Observer [Fayetteville, NC]

Fremont Journal [Fremont, OH]

Gallipolis Journal [Gallipolis, OH]

Glasgow Weekly Times [Glasgow, MO]

Jeffersonian Republican [Stroudsburg, PA]

Lewisburg Chronicle [Lewisburg, PA]

Nashville Daily Union and American [Nashville, TN]
New York Daily Tribune [New York, NY]
Perrysburg Journal [Perrysburg, OH]
The Radical [Colombia, MO]
Rutland Herald [Rutland, VT]
Sunbury American [Sunbury, PA]
The Columbia Democrat [Colombia, MO]
Vermont Phoenix [Battlebro, VT]
Vermont Watchman and State Journal [Montpelier, VT]

Secondary Sources


Hunt and Levine. *Arc of Empire: America’s Wars in Asia from the Philippines to Vietnam.*

Irick, Robert L. *Ch’ing Policy Toward the Coolie Trade, 1847-1878.* Taipei: Chinese Materials Center, 1982.


**Articles**


Lazich, Michael C. “American Missionaries and the Opium Trade in Nineteenth-Century China.” *Journal of World History* 17, 2 (June) 2006, pp. 197-223


