This dissertation is the first study to examine the Irish and Chinese interethnic and interracial dynamic in the United States and the British Empire in Australia and Canada during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Utilizing comparative and transnational perspectives and drawing on multinational and multilingual archival research including Chinese language sources, “The Global Irish and Chinese” argues that Irish immigrants were at the forefront of anti-Chinese movements in Australia, Canada, and the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century. Their rhetoric and actions gave rise to Chinese immigration restriction legislation and caused major friction in the Qing Empire’s foreign relations with the United States and the British Empire. Moreover, Irish immigrants east and west of the Rocky Mountains and on both sides of the Canada-United States border were central to the formation of a transnational white working-class alliance aimed at restricting the flow of Chinese labor into North America.

Looking at the intersections of race, class, ethnicity, and gender, this project reveals a complicated history of relations between the Irish and Chinese in Australia, Canada, and the United States, which began in earnest with the mid-nineteenth century gold rushes in California, New South Wales, Victoria, and British Columbia. While the Irish were often the foremost enemies of the Chinese and the dominant pattern in relations between both groups was one of racial conflict and economic competition, they were also the ethnic group most likely to intermarry with the Chinese and a few were among the most outspoken champions of Chinese racial equality. Chinese sources indicate that the Chinese did not view their “excluders” as a monolithic white nativist constituency but rather often singled
out the Irish as culpable in leading and exacerbating anti-Chinese movements. Furthermore, the Chinese were not passive victims but rather challenged their Irish opponents in myriad ways. This study makes sense of the complex relations between the Irish and Chinese in North America and Australia, which provides insights into the study of migration and empire, race and ethnicity, gender and class, and the connections between immigration and foreign relations.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CPR—Canadian Pacific Railway
CYMA—Catholic Young Men’s Association
CPRR—Central Pacific Railroad
DA—District Assembly
FOTLU—Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions
KOSC—Knights of St. Crispin
LA—Local Assembly
MPL—Miners’ Protective League
MGS—Mulligan Guard series
NSW—New South Wales
TTLC—Toronto Trades and Labor Council
TLCC—Trades and Labor Congress of Canada
UPRR—Union Pacific Railroad
VIC—Victoria
NOTE ON LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY

Chinese names, places, and terms are rendered in pinyin, except in cases where other forms of romanization are more familiar to English-language readers such as Hong Kong (pinyin: Xianggang) and Canton (pinyin: Guangzhou). Traditional Chinese characters, which were in use during the period covered in this dissertation, are provided where known, with the exception of Chinese names, places, and terms widely known in romanized form. Chinese names are presented in accord with Chinese convention (family name preceding given name), except for those who follow the Western practice of placing the given name before the surname.
INTRODUCTION

The dominant leitmotifs regarding Sino-Irish relations in the recent discourse of Irish and Chinese heads of state, government officials, diplomats, journalists, and policy analysts are the friendly relations between Ireland and China and their shared history of imperialism and colonialism. Xi Jinping, during his visit to Ireland in 2012 as Chinese Vice President, told the Irish Times that the “Chinese people cherish friendly sentiments towards this country…. China and Ireland have always respected each other and treated each other as equals.” “Our two cultures are united in friendship,” Irish President Michael D. Higgins remarked in a speech at Shanghai’s Fudan University in 2014, and “China fully appreciates the fact that Ireland is exceptional in being a Western European country without a colonial or imperialist past…. so, when Ireland and China come to exchange views on important matters, we can do so in all sincerity and with genuine mutual respect for our shared experience of resisting domination.”¹ According to most observers, relations between Ireland and China began in earnest when they established diplomatic relations on June 22, 1979, and within this narrow context it is understandable that many invoke the twin expressions of friendship and a common experience of subjugation. However, when situated within the broader historical context of worldwide capitalist growth, global migration, and British and US imperial expansion since the late eighteenth century, the central themes in Sino-Irish relations are racial conflict, economic competition, and Irish oppression of the Chinese.

After an Irish-born ship captain, John Green, inaugurated direct contacts between China and the United States in 1784 and an Irish-born diplomat, George Macartney, established official relations between the British Empire and the Qing Empire in 1793, countless Irish ranging from ship captains and missionaries to diplomats and soldiers were integral to the expansion of British imperial power. 

and US imperial interests in China. This imperialism helped stimulate mass Chinese emigration from southern China to various parts of the world and after the mid-nineteenth century gold rushes in California, British Columbia, New South Wales, and Victoria, which attracted thousands of Chinese and Irish, North America and Australia displaced southern China as the main areas of contact between both groups.  

“The Global Irish and Chinese” is the first study to examine the Irish and Chinese interethnic and interracial dynamic in the United States and the British Empire in Australia and Canada during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Utilizing comparative and transnational perspectives and drawing on multinational and multilingual archival research including Chinese language sources, this dissertation argues that Irish immigrants were at the forefront of anti-Chinese movements in Australia, Canada, and the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century. Their rhetoric and actions gave rise to Chinese immigration restriction legislation and caused major friction in the Qing Empire’s foreign relations with the United States and the British Empire.


3. Nine essays in a book edited by Jerusha McCormack offer the best snapshot of connections between Ireland and China and relations between the Irish and Chinese. However, there is no mention of the Irish who traveled to China under the American flag and no reference to parts of the world in the second half of the nineteenth century, besides the United States, where direct encounters between the Irish and Chinese were most heavily concentrated, namely Australia and Canada. See Jerusha McCormack, ed., China and the Irish: The Thomas Davis Lecture Series 2008 (Dublin: New Island, 2009). Others have examined relations between the Irish and Chinese in various localities in Australia, Canada, or the United States but no work examines Irish and Chinese relations east and west of the Rocky Mountains in North America in addition to the Australian colonies. In contrast to China, there is a considerable body of literature on Irish involvement in the British Empire in India and connections between Ireland, India, and the British Empire. See Barry Crosbie, Irish Imperial Networks: Migration, Social Communication and Exchange in Nineteenth-Century India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

A core argument of this dissertation is that the Irish are central to understanding the emergence of Chinese immigration restriction legislation in North America and Australia. They played a decisive role in nationalizing the anti-Chinese movement in the United States. This engendered the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which imposed a ten-year suspension on the immigration of Chinese laborers to the United States and precluded all Chinese immigrants from acquiring US citizenship. A seminal piece of legislation in US immigration history, the Chinese Exclusion Act was the first major federal law to restrict an immigrant group based on race and set a precedent for US immigration law and policy including the restriction, exclusion, and deportation of other immigrant groups. In Australia, Irish immigrants attempted to introduce Chinese immigration restriction laws, spearheaded the most notorious anti-Chinese goldfield riot, and led one of the most controversial anti-Chinese urban rallies. These events culminated in the Immigration Restriction Act 1901, which virtually ended Chinese immigration to Australia.

5. The Chinese Exclusion Act, passed by Congress and signed into law by President Chester A. Arthur on May 6, 1882, was formally called “An Act to Execute Certain Treaty Stipulations Relating to Chinese,” 47th Cong., sess. I, chap. 126; 22 stat. 58 (1882).


British Columbia, the nucleus of the anti-Chinese movement in Canada, Irish-born premiers led four out of the first five provincial governments and their administrations passed numerous Chinese exclusion laws including acts that politically disenfranchised the Chinese. They and other Irish-born politicians who initiated the movement for Chinese immigration restriction at the federal level helped pave the way for the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885, a statute that imposed a fifty-dollar tax on “every person of Chinese origin” who entered Canada. Also known as the Chinese head tax, it was the first race-based federal immigration restriction law in Canadian history and it set a precedent for the future enactment of more stringent Chinese immigration restriction legislation. Moreover, Irish immigrants east and west of the Rocky Mountains and on both sides of the Canada-United States border were fundamental to the formation of a transnational white working-class alliance aimed at restricting the flow of Chinese labor into North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A second major argument of this project is that Irish anti-Chinese agitation and involvement in the politics of Chinese exclusion caused major discord in foreign relations among empires, specifically China’s foreign relations with the United States and Britain. Historians of

8. The Chinese Immigration Act, formally known as “An Act to restrict and regulate Chinese immigration into Canada,” was assented to on July 20, 1885. See Correspondence Relating to Chinese Immigration into the Australasian Colonies, With a Return of Acts Passed by the Legislatures of Those Colonies and of Canada and British Columbia on the Subject: Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, July 1888 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1888), 60-62 (hereafter cited as Correspondence Relating to Chinese Immigration). The Chinese head tax was raised to one hundred dollars in 1900 and five hundred dollars in 1903. Comparable to America’s Chinese Exclusion Act, there were exempt groups such as diplomats, merchants, and students, but the vast majority of Chinese immigrants to North America were laborers and therefore subject to these Chinese immigration restriction laws.

US-China relations agree that by the 1870s the Chinese exclusion and immigration restriction movement in the United States was “a Gordian knot” in bilateral relations but none provide an in-depth analysis of the Irish role in these phenomena. ¹⁰ Chinese primary sources such as diplomatic cables, newspapers, and the diaries of government officials reveal that Chinese American community leaders and Chinese diplomats did not view their “excluders” as a monolithic white nativist constituency but rather often singled out the Irish as culpable in leading and exacerbating the anti-Chinese movement in the United States. This challenges narratives that depict US-China relations as an exclusively bilateral relationship and contributes to a growing body of scholarship that explores the connections between immigration and American foreign relations. ¹¹ Similarly, works that examine the foreign relations dimension of anti-Chinese movements in British Columbia and the Australian colonies largely overlook the Irish whereas this dissertation shows that Irish anti-Chinese activism in these white settler colonies strained relations between Britain and China. ¹² Moreover, attempts by the Irish in Australia and Canada to undermine Sino-British treaties granting Chinese mobility and racial equality within the British Empire caused tension between the metropole and the colonies.


This dissertation also supplements a growing body of Chinese American and Chinese diaspora studies scholarship that calls into question stereotypes of the Chinese as passive victims. The Chinese were not totally bereft of power or submissive in the face of racial hostility and economic competition from Irish immigrants. From New York to San Francisco and Vancouver Island to Sydney, the Chinese challenged the Irish in myriad ways including with their fists and guns, in courts of law, via diplomatic protests, in print, and by lobbying their host governments.\(^{13}\) While much of the historical scholarship on anti-Chinese movements, as historian Roger Daniels has pointed out, focuses on the “excluders” rather than the “excluded,” this dissertation illuminates Chinese attitudes, perceptions, and actions toward the Irish.\(^{14}\) Chinese-language sources and other materials that uncover Chinese voices reveal that the Chinese were not without prejudice toward the Irish. Cognizant of British oppression in Ireland, aware that the Irish had a long history of mass migration, and mindful that the Irish were an immigrant group whose fitness for citizenship was also questioned by the host society, the Chinese frequently bemoaned Irish influence and often asked why the Irish were entitled to citizenship while they were consigned outside the domain of national belonging. Moreover, the Chinese used this knowledge in an attempt to secure treatment equal to Irish immigrants, roll back racially restricted democracies, and challenge their Irish opponents by aligning themselves with and soliciting support from groups hostile to Catholic Irish immigrants and sympathetic to Chinese immigrants such as Protestant missionaries.


One of the main areas of competition between ethnic groups in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was over images and stereotypes. In this respect the Irish and Chinese were no exception. Well-known are the dozens of demeaning and grotesque caricatures of the Irish and Chinese in publications such as Harper’s Weekly, Wasp, Puck, and Thistleton’s Jolly Giant. Although these images provide insights into how the Irish and Chinese were viewed by their detractors, they shed little light on Irish and Chinese self-perception or Irish attitudes and perceptions toward the Chinese and vice versa. Historians have yet to fully explore Irish and Chinese representations of one another in a variety of popular culture mediums such as cartoons, songs, and plays. Although there is scant surviving evidence on the Chinese side for historians to work with and no depictions of the Irish by the Chinese, the Irish left to posterity a treasure trove of materials. Rather than present familiar illustrations of the Irish and Chinese that were created by famous cartoonists such as Thomas Nast and Joseph Keppler, this dissertation examines popular culture materials generated by the Irish themselves to help better understand Irish attitudes and perceptions toward the Chinese. The overwhelming body of primary sources presented in this dissertation focus on what the Irish and Chinese had to say about each other, not what others in their host society said about either group or relations between both groups.

At the heart of the discourse on the nature of Irish relations with other minority ethnic groups is “whiteness studies” scholarship, which emerged as a field of study after the publication of seminal works by Alexander Saxton and David Roediger. The Irish in antebellum America, many whiteness scholars maintain, were considered less than fully “white” by their host society but over time “became white” (and thereby paved the way for upward social and economic mobility) by defining themselves in opposition to African Americans and through acts of white supremacy including violence against people of color.15 While historians generally agree with

whiteness scholars that the Irish in the United States were “racialized” as an inferior group by many Anglo-Saxton Protestants, some point out that this reveals little about how the Irish viewed themselves. The research findings in this dissertation relative to relations between the Irish and Chinese align with the observations of scholars who maintain that Irish immigrants were not striving to be included as white but rather were “white on arrival” to the extent that it was possible for them to obtain American citizenship under the Naturalization Act of 1790 whereas this was denied to the Chinese and other groups deemed non-white. Irish immigrants, despite experiencing anti-immigrant sentiment, were privileged “insiders” relative to the Chinese whereas the latter were a racially subordinate group confined to the political, economic, and social margins of society. The Irish were eager to maintain boundaries between themselves and the Chinese and they sought to maximize the benefits of their right to citizenship, vote, serve on juries, hold political office, and immigrate while simultaneously denying these privileges to the Chinese. As part of the process of confining the Chinese to a racially subordinate status, many Irish represented the Chinese as slave-like “coolies,” racially inferior, and unassimilable in mediums ranging from cartoons and newspapers to plays and songs while others deployed more aggressive tactics such as violence and the boycott.

A major debate between immigration historians is the extent to which relations between the Irish and other minority ethnic groups were defined by conflict and violence on the one hand.


and peaceful coexistence and cooperation on the other. Works that mention or examine aspects of Irish involvement in anti-Chinese movements typically treat the Irish as a monolith whereas this dissertation demonstrates that Irish attitudes, perceptions, and actions toward the Chinese were not uniform. The late Dennis Clark, who was a prominent historian of the Irish in the United States, opined that Irish Americans were so diverse that “almost anything you can say about them is both true and false.” This observation applies to the nature of relations between the Irish and Chinese in the United States and also Australia and Canada. “The Global Irish and Chinese” demonstrates that although the Irish frequently spearheaded anti-Chinese movements and they were often the foremost enemies and competitors of the Chinese, a few were among the greatest champions of racial equality, civil rights, and justice for Chinese immigrants.

No study of relations between the global Irish and Chinese would be complete without analyzing immigrants from Ireland’s non-Catholic cultures such as the Irish-born Anglicans and Presbyterians who resided in the British Empire in Australia and Canada. This study explores the neglected Protestant Irish dimension to relations between the Irish and Chinese and shows that the Protestant Irish in places ranging from Ontario and British Columbia to New South Wales and Victoria shared a level of hostility toward the Chinese equivalent to that of the most ardent Catholic Irish Sinophobes. While tension and animosity between the Catholic and Protestant Irish ran deep in Australia and North America, the “Chinese question” at times attenuated this division by unifying both groups in shared opposition toward Chinese immigrants.

The stance of Irish women on the “Chinese question,” which is explored in this dissertation, is also essential to comprehending the Irish and Chinese interethnic and interracial

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20. For more on Irish Protestants, see Kerby A. Miller, *Ireland and Irish America: Culture, Class, and Transatlantic Migration* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008), chs. 6-7.
dynamic given approximately half of those who left Ireland in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were women. In far-flung places such as New York and the Australian colonies Irish women crossed racial lines to marry and form families with Chinese men, the ultimate form of interracial solidarity.\textsuperscript{21} Generally speaking, marriages between Irish women and Chinese men resulted in ostracism from the Irish community for the former and exacerbated Irish male hostility toward the latter. Irish women were also at times the most vociferous opponents of Chinese immigrants including calls to expel Chinese men from their communities by force.

Overall, this dissertation argues that the dominant pattern of relations between the Irish and Chinese in North America and Australia was one of racial conflict and economic competition but by uncovering rare cases of marriages between Irish women and Chinese men, workplace solidarity between the Irish and Chinese, and Irish advocacy of a civic pluralism broad enough to encompass Chinese immigrants, it provides a nuanced account of Sino-Irish relations. The chapters that follow explore this complicated history. Chapter 1 provides an overview of where, why, and under what circumstances the global Irish and Chinese interacted with one another to help better contextualize and understand the research questions addressed in this dissertation. Chapter 2 centers on California, which was the epicenter of the anti-Chinese movement in the United States, and argues that the California Irish were a significant force behind nationalizing the anti-Chinese movement in the United States, which resulted in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and caused major friction in US-China relations. Chapter 3 examines the extent of labor

solidarity between the Irish and Chinese in the United States and demonstrates that although there were a few instances of cooperation in the workplace and one case of genuine interracial unionism, many Irish workers and labor leaders east and west of the Rocky Mountains supported Chinese exclusion and immigration restriction. Chapter 4 focuses on New York City, where the largest Chinese enclave east of the Rockies emerged after the 1870s. This chapter maintains that the New York Irish were in the vanguard of the Chinese exclusion movement on the East Coast and as producers of a variety of popular culture mediums they disseminated anti-Chinese stereotypes and imagery that widened the racial divide between the Irish and Chinese. New York was not totally devoid of solidarity between the Irish and Chinese but racial conflict largely defined relations between both groups. Chapter 5 argues that Irish-born politicians in British Columbia were at the forefront of efforts aimed at nationalizing the “Chinese question” in Canada and expressed anti-Chinese solidarity with Sinophobes in other white settler societies such as California and the Australian colonies. Their actions strained relations between British Columbia and the Canadian Parliament as well as Ottawa and London and elicited strong protests from Chinese settlers in British Columbia and Chinese diplomats based in the United States and Britain. Moreover, east of the Canadian Rockies, Irish immigrants were at the forefront of the labor movement’s efforts to restrict Chinese immigration into Canada and along with their Irish American counterparts they helped create a transnational labor alliance aimed at stemming Chinese immigration to North America. Finally, chapter 6 asserts that Irish immigrants frequently spearheaded the anti-Chinese movement in Australia’s goldfields and cities. Although a few Irish were among the greatest champions of Chinese racial equality, the Irish by and large upheld white supremacy and helped construct a national identity that was officially white by 1901. Irish involvement in Australia’s politics of Chinese exclusion, which involved placing limits on the rights and mobility of Chinese immigrants, also complicated the triangular relationship between Britain, China, and the Australian colonies.
CHAPTER 1

A BIRD’S-EYE VIEW OF GLOBAL IRISH AND CHINESE INTERACTIONS

Interactions between the people of Ireland and China began in earnest at the close of the eighteenth century and gathered steam in the nineteenth century when numerous Irish-born ship captains, merchants, missionaries, soldiers, and diplomats, to name but a few, made their way to China under the flags of the United States and the British Empire.¹ After the mid-nineteenth century gold rushes in California, New South Wales, Victoria, and British Columbia, North America and Australia superseded southern China as the main “contact zones” between the Irish and Chinese.² While many Irish were integral to the process of British and US imperial incursions into China, which helped spur large-scale Chinese migration to North America and Australia, Irish immigrants in the United States, Canada, and Australia were at the forefront of anti-Chinese movements that engendered unprecedented race-based immigration restriction legislation aimed at the Chinese and caused major friction in imperial China’s foreign relations with Britain and the United States. Chapter 1, which is divided into two distinct but related parts, provides a bird’s-eye view of where, why, and under what circumstances the Irish and Chinese encountered one another to help better contextualize and understand the research questions addressed in this dissertation. The first part concerns the Irish who traveled to China under the American and British flags and the second part examines patterns of Irish and Chinese migration to the United States and the British Empire in Australia and Canada.


². The concept of “contact zones,” defined as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination,” is borrowed from comparative literature scholar Mary Louise Pratt. See Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 7.
Irish Imperial Involvement in China under the American and British Flags

At the heart of the first official contact between the British Empire and the Chinese Empire was Irish-born George Macartney, 1st Earl Macartney. Born at Lissanoure, County Antrim, and educated at Trinity College, Dublin, Macartney was appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to China in 1792 and the following year he became the first official representative of Britain to secure an audience with a Chinese emperor. The main purpose of the Macartney Embassy (1792-94) was to expand trade opportunities with China beyond the confines of the Canton system, which limited trade and all other forms of contact to the port of Canton. Additionally, Britain sought Western-style diplomatic relations with the Qing dynasty including the establishment of an embassy in the capital, Beijing. Although Macartney was an imperial servant of the British Empire he had a strong Irish identity and was proud of his Irish roots. “If I have merited the approbation of my countrymen,” Macartney proclaimed in a speech while serving as Chief Secretary for Ireland, “I shall rejoice not only as a servant of government, not as a secretary to a lord-lieutenant, but as an Irishman, as a man who thinks it an honor to have been born among you, who esteems it a peculiar happiness to possess his property in this kingdom, and who has a heart that feels warmly for the interests and liberties of his country.”

When the Qianlong emperor received Macartney in a tent at the Chengde imperial summer retreat on September 14, 1793, Irish-born George Leonard Staunton, in addition to his twelve-year old son George Thomas who conversed in Chinese with Qianlong, were the only other Westerners from the embassy in attendance. Born in County Galway and created a Baronet of Ireland after he helped the British East India Company negotiate the Treaty of Mangalore with


Tipu Sultan, Staunton Sr. was second-in-command to Macartney as embassy Secretary and Minister Plenipotentiary while his son served as Macartney’s page. The first official encounter between Britain and China also marked their first major clash, most notably when Macartney refused to perform the traditional kowtow ceremony expected of envoys who bore “tribute” to the emperor’s court, and his embassy was forced to return home without its key objectives in hand. Less than half a century later, George T. Staunton, considered a China expert in the House of Commons, helped convince his fellow MPs that it was “absolutely just and necessary under existing conditions” to use military force against China in what was later known as the First Opium War, which allowed London to acquire concessions that had earlier eluded the Macartney Embassy. Victorious in war, Britain secured the first in a series of “unequal treaties” that opened China to greater external influence and imperialist exploitation.

At the forefront of British imperial expansion in China in the aftermath of the First Opium War was a stream of Irish who made their way there under the British flag in a variety of capacities including consular officials and diplomats, colonial administrators and governors, police magistrates and attorney generals, sailors and shipmasters, engineers, doctors, merchants, missionaries, and military personnel. “China appears to be the paradise of place-hunting Irishmen,” the London and China Telegraph noted in 1874, “and it is odd to notice how many have attained posts of honour and high pay in the Celestial Empire.” Prominent Irish-born figures mentioned included governors of Hong Kong (Arthur Edward Kennedy and Richard Graves MacDonnell), a Post-Captain of the Royal Navy during the First Opium War and then a Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Navy’s China Station (Henry Kellett), a Police Magistrate in

5. Peyrefitte, The Immobile Empire, xxix-xxx. The other member of the Macartney Embassy present was a Chinese Catholic priest named Jacobus Li (李自標 Li Zibiao), who served as an official interpreter and helped George Thomas Staunton learn the Chinese language.

6. Ibid., xxxi.

Hong Kong and afterwards a Chief Justice of Hong Kong (James Russell), and an Assistant Chinese Secretary to the Superintendent of Trade and later a Consul at Tianjin and Beijing (James Mongan). These men represented but a small fraction of the Irish who were agents of British imperialism in China. The British Empire provided Irish men and women from both Catholic and Protestant backgrounds with an outlet for economic advancement and upward social mobility that were lacking in Ireland. While many Irish, as natives of a colony situated in close proximity to the heart of the British Empire, faced oppression in their homeland, the broader edifice of empire provided them with avenues for adventure, careers, greater wealth and status, and myriad other opportunities. “For Ireland,” as historian Alvin Jackson points out, “the Empire was simultaneously a chain and a key: it was a source both of constraint and of liberation.” A history of Britain’s influence in China and the degree to which it influenced the history of the late Qing and modern China is incomplete without consideration of the Irish.

An example of the prominent role Irishmen played in China’s affairs is Robert Hart, who was perhaps the most influential Western person in China while serving as Inspector-General (1863-1908) of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service. This institution was, as Hans van de Ven aptly sums up, “one of the most, if not the most, powerful bureaucracies operating in China between the Taiping Rebellion and the Communist Revolution” and the Inspector-Generals


invariably administered it with an iron-fist.11 Born in County Armagh, Ireland, and educated at Queens College, Belfast, Hart was similar to Earl Macartney in that he served the British Empire and had a strong Irish identity. During Hart’s first year in China with the British Consular Service he wrote in his dairy on October 5, 1854, that “I’m an Irishman—a Paddy in heart & soul” and throughout his time in China he remained in contact with family, friends, and acquaintances in Ireland.12 In 1909, the year following Hart’s departure from China, his affection for Ireland had not waned when he wrote of his experience as Inspector General in a letter to the Association of Ulster-men-in-London that “I had Irishmen from various districts and several Ulster-men who always satisfied their chief and did credit for the land they came from—the Ireland we all love.”13 That Hart paved the way for Robert Bredon, his Irish-born brother-in-law and a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, to succeed him as Inspector General of the Maritime Customs Service underscores another facet of the Irish experience in China.14 Once the Irish established themselves in positions of power they provided family and other Irish with preferential career opportunities. The Maritime Customs Service is a prime example of this. “The proportion of Irishmen in the Customs Service is unusually large,” the London and China Telegraph wrote, “and it is sometimes said by disappointed juniors that to be born in Ireland is a far more certain passport to speedy promotion in China than long service, business capacity, or acquaintance with the Chinese language.”15

While a history of the British Empire in China is incomplete without reference to the Irish, the same is true of the United States given the long and rich, albeit underappreciated,
history of Irish involvement in China under the American flag. Less than six months after the
Treaty of Paris formally ended the American Revolutionary War, Irish-born John Green (1736-
96) captained the first American vessel to journey from the United States to China. 16 The ship he
commanded, the Empress of China, set sail from the port of New York on February 22, 1784, and
six months later inaugurated direct contacts between what Ralph Waldo Emerson once fittingly
termed “the oldest Empire in the world” and “the youngest Republic.” 17 Trade and profits were
the foremost objectives of the voyage although there was an element of diplomacy involved given
that Captain Green was in possession of a sea letter bearing the official seal of the Confederation
Congress, which he was empowered to present to Chinese authorities. 18 Green, who recognized
the significance of the mission, noted in his journal after he traversed the South China Sea and
arrived at the port of Canton on August 28, 1784, that the Empress of China “had the honor of
hoisting the first Continental Flagg Ever Seen or maid Euse of in those Seas.” 19 Green was one of
numerous Irish-born sea captains who were instrumental in forging trade connections between the
United States and China, laying the groundwork for a burgeoning American commercial
community at Canton, and kindling American visions of tapping into the riches of the fabled
China market and building an American empire in the Pacific.

American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of the American China Policy, 1784-1844
(1997; repr., Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014); Jonathan Goldstein, Philadelphia and the
China Trade, 1682-1846: Commercial, Cultural, and Attitudinal Effects (University Park, PA:
Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978); Philip Chadwick Foster Smith, The Empress of China

17. Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: With a Biographical
Introduction and Notes by Edward Waldo Emerson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903-04), 11:471.

18. John R. Haddad, America’s First Adventure in China: Trade, Treaties, Opium, and Salvation
Revolutionary American Became a Postcolonial Nation (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 120-
22.

On August 9, 1785, less than three months after Green navigated the Empress of China into the port of New York, Irish-born John O’Donnell sailed into Baltimore’s waterfront as owner and captain of the ship Pallas, the second vessel to dock at a United States port with goods from China. Born near the city of Limerick, O’Donnell spent the early years of his life in Asia as a merchant and ship captain for the British East India Company and was inspired to set sail for the United States with a ship full of goods after he encountered crew members from the Empress of China at Canton. On board the Pallas was a precious cargo of tea, porcelain, silk, and various other wares, in addition to a diverse crew that included three Chinese named Ashing, Achun, and Accun. They are the first documented Chinese to have landed on United States soil. After the Pallas docked at the port of Baltimore, the local Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser newspaper noted that it was “no unpleasing Sight to see the Crew of this Ship, Chinese, Malays, Japanese, and Moors, with a few Europeans, all habited according to the different Countries to which they belong, and employed together as Brethren; it is thus Commerce binds and unites all the Nations of the Globe with a golden Chain.” Although relations between the ship’s multicultural “Brethren” may have been cordial this was not the case with their Irish captain, who left the crew stranded at the port of Baltimore with no means of returning to their native lands. After O’Donnell earned a substantial profit from the sale of his cargo he married into a prominent local family and purchased a large tract of land along the Baltimore waterfront, which he named after the Chinese port that helped him amass a fortune. Canton, a neighborhood that survives to


this day in Baltimore, became O’Donnell’s new home following sixteen years of residence in Asia, although he maintained lifelong connections with Ireland.23

The fate of the stranded Chinese sailors is unknown although records indicate that they and other crew proceeded from Maryland to Pennsylvania, where they hoped to board a ship en route to Asia from Philadelphia, but instead spent close to a year there as public charges.24 The Chinese and their fellow crew, in a memorial written to members of the Continental Congress and the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania four months after arriving in Philadelphia, pleaded for relief, protection, and assistance in securing return passage to their homelands. Identifying themselves as natives of China and Bengal, they claimed that on their voyage to the United States O’Donnell subjected them to “very hard Treatment, and had not a reasonable sustenance, being only allowed one Biscuit per day” and that he threatened to kill them if they returned to Baltimore.25 O’Donnell, in a letter written to the President of Pennsylvania’s Executive Council, John Dickinson, dismissed reports that he ill-treated the sailors.26 Whatever the details of the voyage, the memorial (fig. 1.1) signed by Ashing, Achun, and Accun is the earliest piece of evidence and first example to underscore a key finding of this dissertation, namely that the Chinese in the United States challenged maltreatment and injustice and they utilized a variety of mechanisms, in this case a memorial to higher powers, to advance their interests and attempt to protect their rights in the face of discord with the Irish.


There was a strong connection between British imperialism in Ireland, Irish immigration to the United States, American independence, and Irish travel to China. Many of the Irish-born sea captains who were critical to the success of the first commercial ventures between the United States and China also played a pivotal role in the American War of Independence. While scores of Irish advanced British imperialism around the globe as part of their desire for economic gain and upward social mobility, many joined other political entities for much the same reasons, albeit in direct opposition to Britain’s imperial enterprise. John Green, whose daily toast during the American Revolutionary War was, according to one person who met him in France, “Success to Washington and downfall of the British Arms,” served as a captain in the Continental Navy prior to helping inaugurate direct contacts between the United States and China. 27 Irish-born John  

Barry (fig. 1.2), who earned the appellation “Father of the American Navy” for his naval heroics during the American War for Independence, was also involved in the China trade. Barry maintained life-long connections with Rosslare in County Wexford, where he spent much of his youth and fled largely because of British misrule in Ireland. When Green was held captive as a prisoner of war in Britain’s Mill Prison after his capture by the British frigate La Prudente off France’s Brittany coast, Barry tried to secure his release and afterwards they together engaged in the Continental Navy’s last major naval battle of the American Revolutionary War. After the war Barry captained a pioneer vessel in the Old China Trade, the ship Asia, which sailed to Canton after receiving its clearance papers from the Philadelphia Customs House in December 1787. In June 1789 he returned to Philadelphia after a successful voyage.

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29. McGrath, John Barry, 5-6.


underscores the importance of the Irish for major developments in American history and in his
case the revolutionary war effort, independence from Britain, and helping forge foundational
links between the United States and China.

While John Green and John O’Donnell captained the first ships loaded with riches from
China to sail into the harbors of New York and Philadelphia, respectively, Irishman James Magee
was a pioneer in Boston’s trade with China. Similar to Green and Barry, Magee figured large in
the naval war against the British Empire in addition to the expansion of American trade with
China. Born in County Down, Ireland, Magee immigrated to Boston prior to the outbreak of the
American Revolutionary War and during the war he commanded privateers that wreaked havoc
on British ships.32 When Captain Green returned to Canton on the Empress of China for a second
time during the 1786-87 trading season he was joined by four other pioneering American vessels
including the ship Hope, which was commanded by Magee. As the first Boston-based captain to
visit Canton and become wealthy, Magee inspired the merchant community there to invest in the
China trade including Boston Brahmin Thomas H. Perkins, whose company became the largest
trading house in China until it merged with Russell and Company in 1830. Perkins, who was
friends with Magee and described him as a “convivial, noble-hearted Irishman,” was one of the
first Boston merchants to get rich from trade with the Chinese and a member of the Magee family
typically commanded the ships that Perkins sent to China.33 James Magee and the ship Hope also
facilitated another historic encounter in Sino-American relations by transporting Samuel Shaw on
his second voyage to China, this time as the first US consul to China (Canton).34

Massachusetts Historical Society 81, 3rd ser. (1969): 104-19; Dane A. Morrison, True Yankees: The South


of Major Samuel Shaw, 219.
The Irish played a significant part in early US-China relations and their influence in China continued and deepened through the nineteenth century while expanding into other spheres beyond commerce such as diplomacy, the armed forces, and missionary activity. For example, in the field of foreign affairs, Irish-born John Ross Browne and Irish-born John Russell Young each held the position of United States Minister to China (respectively, 1868-69 and 1882-85), the highest ranked American diplomatic post. During the Boxer Uprising several Irish Americans were awarded the Medal of Honor for their contribution to an international expeditionary force of eight nations that marched on Beijing and suppressed the Boxers in the summer of 1900. Among them was Sergeant Major Daniel Joseph “Dan” Daly, one of nineteen service members to win the Congressional Medal of Honor twice and one of two marines to win it for two separate military operations. Numerous Irish-born missionaries also traveled to China under the American flag. One prominent example is William Gamble, who was appointed by the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions to head the American Presbyterian Mission Press in China, serving there between 1858-69. Gamble applied the technology of electrotyping to Chinese characters, a process that revolutionized Chinese typography and the modern publishing industry in China. One of Gamble’s successors, Gilbert McIntosh, in a history of the American Presbyterian Mission Press, acknowledged Gamble’s accomplishments when he wrote that “he succeeded in so developing the Mission Press that it speedily grew from infantile proportions into a mighty agency for achieving great results for Christ in China.”


The Irish were central to the process of opening China’s doors to American and British imperial penetration in the nineteenth century, which was one major force that stimulated unprecedented Chinese migration to North America and Australia. However, Irish immigrants were simultaneously among the most vocal advocates of closing the gates on Chinese immigration to the United States, Canada, and Australia, which threatened to derail British and US imperial interests in China and the broader Pacific world. Examining the major patterns of Irish and Chinese emigration helps better understand their interethnic and interracial dynamic and reveals the other major events, besides imperialism, that drew large numbers of Irish and Chinese into contact in North America and Australia during the second half of the nineteenth century.

**Patterns of Irish and Chinese Migration to North America and Australia**

The Irish and Chinese were part of the most extensive wave of human migration in world history, which spanned roughly the mid-nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. Between 1840 and 1940 there were three major systems of long-distance migration. Specifically, 55-58 million people migrated from Europe, 48-52 million from southern China and India, and 46-51 million from Northeastern Asia and Russia. In this timeframe between 19 and 23 million Chinese emigrated overseas and of these roughly 90 percent made their way to Southeast Asia, 1.5 million went to the Americas, and 0.75 million traveled to the Indian Ocean Rim and South Pacific. Between the 1840s and 1940s at least 670,000 Chinese arrived in the United States and Canada, roughly 340,000 arrived in Latin America, and between the 1840s and 1901 more than 100,000 Chinese arrived in Australia. Between the years 1856 and 1929, some 5 million Irish

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38. These figures are based on long-distance migration. See Adam McKeown, “Global Migration, 1846-1940,” *Journal of World History* 15, no. 2 (June 2004): 156. “Northeastern Asia” includes China, Japan, and Korea.

emigrated from Ireland, of which roughly 4 million went to the United States, and since the early
seventeenth century approximately 10 million Irish have left the island of Ireland.40 Partly as a
result of these mass migrations, the Irish and Chinese diasporas are among the largest in the
world today, with more than 70 million people worldwide who claim Irish descent and an
estimated 40 to 45 million people of Chinese descent who live outside of China.41

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Irish in North America and Australia
emigrated from all of Ireland’s four provinces and thirty-two counties whereas the vast majority
of Chinese hailed from one province in southern China, namely Guangdong and especially the
Pearl River Delta, which stretched roughly 70 miles from north to south and 50 miles from east to
west.42 Official statistics on the ratio of emigration from Ireland’s provinces for the years 1856 to
1920 report the following: Munster (33.4 percent or 1,163,000), Ulster (29.9 percent or
1,073,000), Connaught (17.8 percent or 637,000), and Leinster (16.1 percent or 577,000).43 More
than 70 percent of the more than 300,000 Chinese who entered California and the majority of the
roughly 50,000 Chinese who entered Canada came from four districts in the Pearl River Delta,


40. Kerby A. Miller, Ireland and Irish America: Culture, Class, and Transatlantic Migration
(Dublin: Field Day Publications, 2008), 79; Miller, Emigrants and Exiles, 3; Kevin Kenny, ed., New

41. On the Irish, see Tim Pat Coogan, Wherever Green is Worn: The Story of the Irish Diaspora
(London: Arrow Books, 2012), ix; Akenson, The Irish Diaspora, 15. Mary Robinson stated in her inaugural
speech as President of Ireland on December 3, 1990, that “[t]here are over 70 million people living on this
globe who claim Irish descent.” This seems plausible given that in the United States alone, according to the
1990 census, almost 39 million Americans claimed Irish descent. For the 1990 census data, see Miller,
Ireland and Irish America, 141. On the Chinese, see Tan Chee-Beng, ed., Routledge Handbook of the
Chinese Diaspora (New York: Routledge, 2013), 3-4; Zheng Yongnian and Phua Kok Khoo, eds., Wang

42. Elizabeth Sinn, Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of
Hong Kong (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 47-49; Lynn Pan, Sons of the Yellow
Emperor: A History of the Chinese Diaspora (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990), 17-18, 53; Hunt,
The Making of a Special Relationship, 61-62; Chan, This Bittersweet Soil, 16-19; Harry Con, et al., From
China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada, ed. Edgar Wickberg (Toronto:
McClelland and Stewart, 1982), 7-9.

specifically Taishan, Enping, Xinhui, and Kaiping. Moreover, more than 90 percent of the approximately 38,000 Chinese who arrived in the Australian colonies in the decade after the onset of the gold rush in 1851 also originated from Guangdong and the Pearl River Delta in particular.  

Ireland’s rate of emigration during this wave of global migration was typically higher than that of other European countries but on average it was similar to China’s Guangdong province, which was the place of origin for the vast majority of Chinese in North America and Australia. Ireland’s post-famine migration wave (1855-1921) was the largest in its history and between 1850 and 1913 the average annual overseas emigration rate was 12 per 1,000 population. During Guangdong’s peak years of emigration in the 1920s, the annual overseas migration was at least 9.6 per 1,000 population, which was similar to Ireland’s 9.7 per 1,000 population during the 1890s and higher than Ireland’s 7.9 per 1,000 population in the decade before the First World War. Scholars continue to debate the extent to which Ireland’s rate of emigration was unique by European standards. When juxtaposed with parts of the world beyond Europe with strong traditions of overseas migration such as China’s Guangdong province, Ireland’s rate of emigration was by no means exceptional in this era of mass global migration.

What makes Irish emigration unique in the post-famine era is that Irish men and women traveled to North America and Australia in roughly equal numbers and most female Irish


48. For more, see Kenny, *The American Irish*, 133.
emigrants were young and single.\textsuperscript{49} Chinese emigration, on the other hand, was overwhelmingly male from the mid-nineteenth century through the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{50} The Annual Returns of the Registrar General for Ireland for the years 1852-1921 report that 1,914,388 males and 1,778,053 females emigrated from Ireland.\textsuperscript{51} In contrast, between the mid-nineteenth century and 1910 the Chinese community in the United States was never more than 8 percent female.\textsuperscript{52} When the Chinese population in Australia reached its peak in the year 1881, the census reported women as 0.7 percent of the Chinese community (38,273 males and 259 females), in 1901 as 1.6 percent (29,153 males and 474 females), and in 1911 as 3.9 percent (21,856 males and 897 females).\textsuperscript{53} A similar situation existed in Canada. British Columbia’s 1871 census reported that the Chinese population was 1,548 men and 53 women. In September 1884, 10,550 Chinese men, women, and children were reported in British Columbia and of these only 154 were women. By 1911, out of a total Chinese population of 27,831, the Canadian census reported 100 females for every 2,790 males.\textsuperscript{54} The existence of Chinese “bachelor communities,” critics argued, signaled that the Chinese were sojourners who had little intention of settling permanently or contributing to the long-term development of society and given their transient nature were unassimilable and unfit for citizenship.

\textsuperscript{49} Miller, \textit{Emigrants and Exiles}, 352; Diner, \textit{Erin’s Daughters in America}, 30-33; Nolan, \textit{Ourselves Alone}, ch. 3.

\textsuperscript{50} Roger Daniels, \textit{Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850} (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 16-17.


\textsuperscript{52} Hunt, \textit{The Making of a Special Relationship}, 70-71.


The Chinese tradition of sojourning, however, was by no means exceptional judging from data on other migrant groups’ rates of return from the United States to their homelands during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Chinese had a significantly higher rate of return migration vis-à-vis the Irish but when compared with others this was not the case. Between 1848 and 1882 the Chinese rate of return from the United States was approximately 47 percent. Between the years 1908 and 1923, the rate of return from the United States was 89 percent for Bulgarian, Serbian, and Montenegrins, 86 percent for Turks, 66 percent for Rumanians, 60 percent for Southern Italians, 52 percent for Russians, 46 percent for Greeks, 40 percent for Polish, and the Irish rate of return, which was the second lowest for Europe after “Hebrew,” was 11 percent. The Chinese rate of return in this same timeframe was exceptionally high at 130 percent or 36,693 arrivals and 47,607 departures but this stemmed largely from the passage of stringent immigration laws that did not apply to the bulk of Chinese who came to the United States before 1882. Until the early twentieth century Chinese immigrants were almost all adult males and many had families in China. While many of these men returned to their families in China, some entered into cross-race relationships and marriages with women in North America and Australia, which invariably intensified anti-Chinese opposition, especially between Chinese and Irish men.

The Irish and Chinese in North America and Australia were not monolithic groups. There were significant lines of division among the people in each group besides class and gender. Many of these divisions originated in China (for the Chinese) and Ireland (for the Irish), which


conditioned both in-group and out-group relations. Even though most of the Chinese in Australia, Canada, and the United States originated from districts in the Pearl River Delta, they were divided along native-place, linguistic (different dialects) and ethnic (most notably, Punti-Hakka conflict) lines.\(^5^9\) Irish emigrants were divided by religion (Catholic and Protestant) and county or region (which often resulted in internecine faction-fights). Moreover, while as many as one-fourth to one-third of the post-famine era Irish emigrants spoke the Irish language, most of these were bilingual in English and Irish.\(^6^0\) That the Irish in North America and Australia had no problem communicating with each other or with the dominant group in their host society gave them a distinct advantage over non-Anglophone groups such as the Chinese. Although the Chinese were capable of surmounting in-group linguistic barriers and they had intermediaries who could communicate to the host society on their behalf, their lack of proficiency in the English language undermined their ability to compete with the Irish for jobs, power, and respectability and provided exclusionists with more grist for the mill in terms of casting the Chinese as an unassimilable and alien race. When the Irish were faced with competition from the Chinese and vice versa, in-group divisions were often temporarily cast aside or attenuated to deal with perceived threats from the out-group.

Anti-Chinese polemicists in North America and Australia, as part of their arguments and justifications for Chinese exclusion and immigration restriction, described the Chinese as involuntary immigrants. Similarly, numerous historians have described the Chinese in Australia, Canada, and the United States as “unfree.”\(^6^1\) However, recent research by Adam McKeown on the nature of Chinese migration demonstrates that the vast majority of the approximately 19 to 23


\(^{61}\) For a prominent example, see Barth, *Bitter Strength*.  

29
million Chinese who emigrated overseas between the 1840s and 1930s did so on a voluntary basis. Of these migrants, less than 4 percent or approximately 750,000 were indentured to European employers.⁶² The bulk of Chinese who immigrated to North America and Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century did so through a method known as “credit-ticket,” whereby they borrowed a sum of money from a lender such as a Chinese merchant to cover the cost of their passage.⁶³ In other words, most Chinese were voluntary and assisted immigrants, which is little different to how a large proportion of Irish emigrated from Ireland. For example, by 1840 more than half of the Irish emigrants who departed from Ulster and Liverpool received their passage money from sources in the United States.⁶⁴ The key point is that the vast majority of Chinese who migrated to Australia, Canada, and the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century did so voluntarily and in this respect they were not unlike other migrant groups, including the Irish.⁶⁵

The abolition of slavery in the western hemisphere, the global expansion of capitalism, and imperial incursions into China were some of the major forces that drew large numbers of Irish and Chinese into contact. Many of the factors that prompted the Irish to depart Ireland for North America and Australia also influenced the Chinese decision to emigrate from China. Famine, British imperialism, poverty, political unrest, cultural conflict, and unemployment were some of the common “push” factors that induced many Irish and Chinese to leave their ancestral lands.⁶⁶ Another prominent influence was the shortage of land. In 1841, when Ireland’s population reached an all-time peak of more than 8 million, the average population density was

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64. Miller, Emigrants and Exiles, 271.

65. Miller, Ireland and Irish America, 79-80.

66. Ibid., 12, 79-80; Hsu, Dreaming of Gold, 18-27; Chan, This Bittersweet Soil, chap. 1.
335 persons per square mile of arable land and for the most densely populated county, Armagh, it was 511 persons. In the mid-nineteenth century the population density for Guangdong province was on average 284 persons per square mile of land whereas the Pearl River Delta had a population density of 2,000 or more persons per square mile of land in the nineteenth century. The shortage of land was driven or exacerbated by a small landowning elite intent on consolidating their landholdings. The main “push” factor was the desire for wealth and opportunity and for many Irish and Chinese the resource-rich and rapidly expanding economies of North America and Australia held the greatest promise. The mid-nineteenth century gold rushes in California, New South Wales, Victoria, and British Columbia gave rise to the first major wave of Chinese immigration to Australia, Canada, and the United States, and there the Chinese encountered numerous Irish also seeking fortune and upward social mobility.

Overall, the Irish and Chinese in North America and Australia shared similar hopes and aspirations and the circumstances that prompted their emigration from Ireland and southern China, respectively, were in many ways comparable. A medley of Irish such as captains, merchants, missionaries, soldiers, and diplomats were major advocates of opening China’s door to British and US imperial interests, which helped engender mass Chinese migration to Australia, Canada, and the United States, where numerous Irish ranging from politicians, labor leaders, Catholic priests, and newspaper editors to washerwomen, gang members, gold miners, and navvies were vocal supporters of a closed gate to Chinese immigration. However, not all Irish in North America and Australia opposed the Chinese. The Irish were at times the most outspoken champions of Chinese racial equality and the ethnic group most likely to intermarry with the Chinese. The chapters that follow make sense of the complicated history of relations between the


68. Hunt, The Making of a Special Relationship, 63; Chan, This Bittersweet Soil, 19.
Irish and Chinese in Australia, Canada, and the United States and examine the nature, extent, and significance of Irish involvement in anti-Chinese movements in North America and Australia.
CHAPTER 2

“THE CHINESE MUST GO!":
THE CALIFORNIA IRISH, CHINESE IMMIGRATION RESTRICTION, AND US-CHINA RELATIONS

The discovery of gold in California in 1848 is what first drew large numbers of Irish and Chinese into contact on what was then a relatively remote, albeit multinational, multiethnic, and multiracial, frontier outpost. Most Irish immigrants in nineteenth-century California were what the Irish in the United States called “two-boat Irish,” namely those who journeyed to destinations beyond their first temporary settlement along the Atlantic Seaboard.¹ In contrast, the bulk of Chinese who arrived in San Francisco, or what they called “Gold Mountain” (金山 Jinshan), set out from Guangdong’s Pearl River Delta across the Pacific Ocean, with Hong Kong serving as their primary port of departure and return.² Only a fraction of Irish arrived directly from Ireland or points of origin outside of the United States. The majority of “two-boat Irish” traveled to California via the Panama route until the transcontinental railroad was built in 1869. Soon thereafter, railroads supplanted sea transport as the preferred mode of transport for the overwhelming majority of Irish traveling to California from the East Coast.³

The Irish and Chinese emerged as the two largest foreign-born immigrant groups in California soon after the gold rush and remained so for much of the rest of the nineteenth century. In San Francisco in 1852 there were more than 4,200 Irish-born and between three and four thousand Chinese-born.⁴ By 1860 the Chinese and Irish comprised almost half (46.4 percent) of

¹. On the “two-boat Irish,” see Emmons, Beyond the American Pale, 1.

². Yung, Chang, and Lai, eds., Chinese American Voices, 1; Sinn, Pacific Crossing, 47-50. After the discovery of gold in Australia, San Francisco became known as “Old Gold Mountain” (舊金山 Jiujinshan) and Australia as “New Gold Mountain” (新金山 Xinjinshan).


the foreign-born population in California (at 23.8 percent and 22.6 percent, respectively) and 9.2 percent and 8.7 percent of the total state population, respectively. The Chinese (34,933) were the largest foreign-born group followed by Irish (33,147), German (20,919), and English (12,227). By 1870, the Irish (54,421) had surpassed the Chinese (49,277) as the dominant foreign-born group, while two years prior to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 the latter (75,132) outnumbered the former (62,962). 5 San Francisco’s status as the most populated and affluent city west of the Rocky Mountains between the gold rush and World War I and its emergence as the preeminent gateway to the US empire in the Pacific owes much to Irish and Chinese immigrants. 6 Both groups helped develop California’s natural resources and agriculture, build and people its towns and cities, expand US transpacific commerce, and construct major infrastructure projects including the bulk of the transcontinental railroad that united West with East and paved the way for America’s rise to great-power status.

Although California emerged as the primary conduit through which the United States extended its imperial interests in China and the broader Pacific world in the wake of the California Gold Rush, it was also the epicenter of a transnational anti-Chinese movement aimed at restricting Chinese migration to Pacific Rim white settler societies. Chapter 2 argues that the California Irish played a decisive role in nationalizing the anti-Chinese movement, which gave rise to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and caused major friction in US-China relations. In the 1870s Irish-born Senator Eugene Casserly (D-CA) led California’s campaign in Congress to deny Chinese immigrants suffrage and citizenship rights and Californians sent two missions east of the Rockies to lobby for an abrogation of the Burlingame Treaty signed between the United States and China in 1868, which guaranteed the Chinese “free migration and emigration” to the United


States. Both missions were led by men from County Cork, Ireland, namely Philip A. Roach and Denis Kearney. In the four presidential elections between 1876 and 1888 the number of popular votes separating the presidential candidates nominated by the Democratic and Republican parties averaged only one percent. Thus, in the late nineteenth century political success at the national level was dependent on the support of California and other states west of the Rockies and to win these states required an anti-Chinese platform. In the wake of Roach and Kearney’s eastern tours a significantly greater proportion of the populace living east of the Rockies favored and actively lobbied for Chinese immigration restriction including one of America’s most powerful voting blocs during the Gilded Age, Irish Americans (see chapter 3). This similar political environment west and east of the Rockies helps explain why Roach was able to persuade the Democratic and Republican parties to insert, for the first time, an anti-Chinese plank in their national political platforms. During Kearney’s eastern tour in 1878, hundreds of thousands flocked to hear him speak and millions more learned about him through the newspapers that followed and reported on his every move. Kearney nationalized and internationalized the “Chinese question” more than any other individual and soon after his eastern mission Congress passed the Fifteen Passenger Bill, which limited to fifteen per vessel the number of Chinese passengers permitted to land on American soil. When President Rutherford B. Hayes vetoed the Fifteen Passenger Bill on the grounds that it violated treaties between the United States and China, Congress took steps to abrogate the Burlingame Treaty, which opened the way for passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

Since the appearance of the first academic work on the anti-Chinese movement in the United States, Mary Coolidge’s Chinese Immigration (1909), scholars have reached divergent

Table 2.1. Irish and Chinese Population of California, 1860-1900

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<th>1860</th>
<th>1870</th>
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<th>1890</th>
<th>1900</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Irish-born</td>
<td>33,147</td>
<td>54,421</td>
<td>62,962</td>
<td>63,138</td>
<td>44,476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Chinese-born</td>
<td>34,933</td>
<td>49,277</td>
<td>75,132</td>
<td>72,472</td>
<td>45,753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish in foreign-born population (%)</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese in foreign-born population (%)</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish-born in total population (%)</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese-born in total population (%)</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


conclusions over the main force that resulted in the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Three major explanations have emerged, specifically the “California thesis,” “the national racist consensus thesis,” and the opportunistic national politicians thesis. The “California thesis,” first articulated by Coolidge, views workers and politicians as primarily responsible for the anti-Chinese movement. Singling out Kearney and Catholic Irish immigrants, Coolidge argued that the main force behind the Chinese Exclusion Act was the “clamor of an alien class in a single State—taken up by politicians for their own ends—[which] was sufficient to change the policy of a nation and to commit the United States to a race discrimination at variance with our professed theories of government.” The “national racist consensus thesis” owes its origins to Stuart Creighton Miller’s The Unwelcome Immigrant (1969), which maintains that anti-Chinese racism was a nationwide phenomenon fueled by negative images of the Chinese that were prevalent in the United States long before the Chinese arrived in significant numbers beginning with the California Gold Rush. Andrew Gyory advanced the opportunistic national politicians thesis in his
Closing the Gate (1998), which asserts that the “motive force behind the Chinese Exclusion Act was national politicians who seized and manipulated the issue in an effort to gain votes.”

Numerous scholars have repeated Coolidge’s assertion that the Irish led the campaign for Chinese exclusion but no work has subjected these claims to close historical scrutiny and presented the diverse views of Irish Americans toward Chinese immigrants. Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer and Alexander Saxton revised Coolidge’s thesis and provide a more nuanced account of the anti-Chinese movement but similar to Coolidge their research and analysis focuses almost exclusively on California. Saxton is correct to point out that the anti-Chinese movement in California was not an exclusively Irish movement but rather a mass movement that cut across lines of class, ethnicity, and national origin. Saxton provides one of the best accounts of the rise to power of Denis Kearney and the Workingmen’s Party of California and he persuasively shows that the Chinese were an “indispensable enemy” against which a nascent labor movement in postbellum California was able to solidify by uniting a divided white working-class. This chapter, which agrees with the “California thesis” that Irish immigrants were a major force behind the anti-Chinese movement in the United States, provides a more detailed and nuanced understanding of relations between the Irish and Chinese beyond California and the familiar narrative of Kearney and the Workingmen’s Party. The California Irish were not a homogenous bloc vis-à-vis their attitudes and actions toward the Chinese. The majority of Irish in California championed non-violent measures to solve the “Chinese question” whereas Kearney and a minority advocated all means including violence. Moreover, not all Irish were anti-Chinese and one of the most ardent champions of Chinese racial equality was an Irish-born California


shoemaker named Patrick Joseph Healy. Stuart Miller persuasively demonstrates that anti-Chinese imagery was prevalent in the United States during the nineteenth century but he sheds little light on Irish involvement in this process. This dissertation explains how and why Irish Americans generated negative images of the Chinese and the resultant ramifications for the anti-Chinese movement in the United States. Gyory is correct to point out that the ultimate decision to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 lay with national politicians but, as this dissertation argues, these politicians were responding to significant bottom-up pressures that began in California. The evidence presented in chapters 2, 3, and 4 are at odds with Gyory’s claim that most workers “welcomed” Chinese immigrants to the United States.12 In North America and Australia Irish politicians agitated the “Chinese question” for political gain but so too did Irish workers, labor leaders, newspaper editors, and Catholic clergy.

From “China Boys” to an “Inferior and Servile” Race:  
Philip Roach and the Origins of the “Chinese Question” in California

On a summer afternoon in August 1850 Norman Asing (袁生Yuan Sheng), a prominent leader of the Chinese community in San Francisco, headed a procession of “China boys” from Kearney Street to Washington Street, whereupon they assembled on a platform in Portsmouth Square. “Dressed in their native holiday suits, with their pigtails nicely braided,” observed a local reporter, crowds of people assembled to witness the first public event to honor the Chinese community in the United States. Distinguished citizens such as Albert Williams, founder and pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in San Francisco, and John W. Geary, the first Mayor of San Francisco, attended the festivities and presented the “China boys” with gifts that included Bibles, tracts, and almanacs printed in Chinese. Perhaps hoping to win souls or expand the pool of workers in labor-starved California, several speakers greeted the “China boys” on behalf of the people of San Francisco and expressed enthusiasm to see more Chinese migrate to California.

12. Gyory, Closing the Gate, 1, 256.
Invited to participate in a ceremony the following day in honor of the late President Zachary Taylor, the “China boys brought up the rear of the procession,” wrote the Daily Alta California, “dressed in their richest attire, and attracted the attention of all who had gathered along the route to view the display.”

Letters penned by Chinese in California and reports circulated by Chinese gold miners who returned to China indicate that many of California’s Chinese pioneers felt welcome and praised the endless possibilities in “Gold Mountain.” Norman Asing wrote a letter to Mayor Geary stating that the “China Boys feel proud of the distinction you have shown them, and will always endeavor to merit your good opinion and the good opinion of the citizens of their adopted country…. Strangers as they are among you, they kindly appreciate the many kindnesses received at your hands.” King and Co., a major American trading house in China, reported that the flow of letters and gold miners from California to southern China extolling the virtues of the “Gold Hills” across the Pacific generated considerable excitement and stimulated further Chinese migration to California. The report surmised that “unless some unforeseen calamity should befall them, it is probable that success will continue to attend the Chinese in California, and so long as the rates of wages there continue high … we see nothing to check or deter the movement in that direction.”

As news of gold, opportunity, and a hospitable climate in California became more widespread in China, Chinese migration to California exploded from less than 3,500 arrivals


between 1848-51 to more than 20,000 by 1852.\textsuperscript{16} Eager to solve California’s labor shortages and develop its rich natural resources, Governor John McDougall likewise greeted the flow of Chinese to California. In his annual message to the California State Legislature in January 1852, he expressed the desire to “induce a further immigration and settlement of the Chinese—one of the most worthy classes of our newly adopted citizens.”\textsuperscript{17}

Despite optimism about the future prospects of the Chinese in California, major anti-Chinese opposition emerged in the State Legislature and mining districts in the spring of 1852. As was the case with other migrant groups that arrived in California during the gold rush, the Chinese hastened toward the gold mines in the Sierra Nevada foothills in search of instant wealth, which resulted in manpower shortages in other industries and disrupted the hopes of a nascent capitalist class that envisioned an influx of cheap and reliable labor since before the admission of California into the Union on September 9, 1850.\textsuperscript{18} In an attempt to alter this situation, George B. Tingley, a Whig member of the state senate, introduced a bill to render labor contracts legally enforceable and thereby pave the wave for capitalists to effectively exploit a ready supply of indentured Chinese laborers.\textsuperscript{19} A bipartisan investigative committee favored passage of Tingley’s bill except for Democratic Senator Philip Roach, who presented a minority report arguing

\textsuperscript{16} Data on the Chinese population in California during the gold rush is incomplete and unreliable and should therefore be considered only as rough estimates. The San Francisco Customs House reported Chinese arrivals for the years 1848, 1849, 1850, 1851, and 1852 as, respectively, 3; 325; 450; 2,716; 20,026. An informal state census for 1852 estimated that the number of Chinese in California was 25,000. See Coolidge, \textit{Chinese Immigration}, 498. Demographic data compiled by the Chinese suggests that officials underestimated the Chinese population in California. See Yong Chen, \textit{Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 51-54.

\textsuperscript{17} Yin, \textit{Chinese American Literature since the 1850s}, 16; “Governor’s Message,” \textit{Sacramento Daily Union}, January 9, 1852, p. 2, col. 3-6.

\textsuperscript{18} “For the Californian: The Slave Question as Applied to California,” \textit{Californian}, November 4, 1848, p. 3, col. 1.

\textsuperscript{19} “An Act to enforce contracts and obligations to perform work and labor,” \textit{Journal of the Third Session of the Legislature of the State of California. Begun on the 5th Day of January, 1852, and Ended on the 4th Day of May, 1852, at the Cities of Vallejo and Sacramento} (San Francisco: G. K. Fitch and V. E. Geiger, 1852), March 6, 1852, 168.
vociferously against the bill on March 20, 1852. Roach, a Catholic immigrant from County Cork and an ardent Irish nationalist, was the first politician in California history to publicly excoriate the Chinese and his anti-Chinese report, besides swiftly killing Tingley’s bill, set in motion an abrupt sea change in the reception afforded to Chinese immigrants in California.

Known to contemporaries as “the first man to raise a warning voice against the unrestricted immigration of servile coolie labor,” an “anti-Chinese missionary,” and the “father of the opposition to the immigration of the Chinese,” Roach was one of the most prominent leaders of the Chinese exclusion movement in the United States and his minority report helped set a major precedent for anti-Chinese arguments repeated ad nauseam over the next half-century and beyond. “For more than twenty five years he has been foremost in raising his voice against the Chinese evil,” the American political economist Henry George asserted in 1879, “and many years ago he was the means of defeating the passage of the Coolie Contract bill, by which, if it had become a law, hundreds and thousands of hired slaves could have been imported to this State under written contracts.” Moon-Ho Jung demonstrates in his Coolies and Cane that coolies as “a people or a legal category” did not exist in the United States or anywhere else but rather “were a conglomeration of racial imaginings that emerged worldwide in the era of slave emancipation, a product of the imaginers rather than the imagined.” Numerous other groups were subjected to


labor exploitation or systems of indenture yet they were not labeled as coolies. Roach’s report, however, projected an image of the Chinese as coolies, which linked the Chinese with slavery and was used by Sinophobes to justify their arguments for Chinese exclusion.

Roach’s report and his more than three decades of anti-Chinese activism reveal that he was intent on forging a white man’s state by restricting Chinese immigration and confining those Chinese who remained in California to a subordinate status. “We must have a population of our own race,” Roach maintained, “rather than an inferior and servile one.” If the Tingley bill were passed, he argued, it would dump in California “the surplus and inferior population of Asia,” which would then compete “with the labor of our own people.” The bill would make “one white man the serf or bondsman of another,” Roach elaborated, and give capitalists “the hand and heart of labor.” Mindful of the acute labor shortages in California during the early 1850s, Roach was willing to tolerate a small Chinese presence “provided they are excluded from citizenship” and confined solely to do work apparently eschewed by white-settlers such as draining swamplands, raising silk, and cultivating rice. “I do not want to see Chinese or Kanaka carpenters, masons, or blacksmiths, brought here in swarms under contracts,” Roach asserted, “to compete with our own mechanics.” Citizenship was the preserve of “freemen,” he argued, not a “swarm of Helots” such as the Chinese. “Could any native of Ireland, whose hunger has been appeased by the supplies sent in national ships, when famine was devastating their unhappy home,” Roach asked, “suppose


25. For a detailed account of the construction of Chinese immigrants as coolies and anti-coolie agitation in California in the 1850s, see Stacey L. Smith, Freedom’s Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), ch. 3.
that vessels, bearing the same flag as those which brought them food, could revisit their land, to carry them, under the provisions of a bill like this, into exile and bondage?" 26

The rhetoric expressed in Roach’s report reflects the “yellow peril” discourse prevalent in the United States and elsewhere during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. “Asiatic labor shall take its march to our State,” Roach warned if the Tingley bill were to pass, and the “cheap labor of Asia and the Pacific” and “swarms of its starving population” would have a detrimental effect if permitted to “overrun our land.” 27 Roach also invoked “yellow peril” disease metaphors to underscore the dangers of amalgamation between whites settlers and the Chinese. “Some hybrid races are very short lived—others are subject to diseases of the blood—and others still to diseases of the mind,” Roach warned, and the “commingling” of different races had the potential to introduce “a pestilence as foul as the leprosy or the plague, with the howlings of insanity, to devastate the land.” Roach’s linking the Chinese with various diseases was a forerunner to the mass anti-Chinese agitation that erupted in California in the 1870s over claims that Chinese immigrants imported leprosy into the United States. 28

After the circulation of Roach’s minority report the relatively benign appellation and image of the Chinese as “China boys” rapidly gave way to the more racially sinister designations and symbols expressed in his report such as “servile labor,” “bondsmen,” and “ruinous competition.” 29 Roach provoked widespread debate over the merits and demerits of Chinese immigration and pushed many who once welcomed or at least tolerated the Chinese into a growing anti-Chinese camp intent on restricting Chinese immigration to California. Numerous sectors of California’s population, including those previously supportive of the Chinese, publicly

27. Ibid., 669-71.
proclaimed their opposition to Chinese immigration on the heels of Roach’s anti-Chinese xenophobic outbursts. Governor John Bigler conveyed no anti-Chinese opposition in public either before or immediately after his inauguration in January 1852 but reversed course in the wake of Roach’s report. In a special message before the state legislature, Bigler called for measures to “check this tide of Asiatic immigration.” Immigration historian Roger Daniels maintains that “Bigler’s message marks the formal political beginning of the anti-Chinese movement,” but Roach’s minority report set a powerful precedent. Bigler’s message mirrored that of Roach’s report, essentially that the Chinese were unassimilable and a degraded class of “coolies.” A few weeks after Roach issued his report white miners drafted anti-Chinese resolutions at a mass meeting held in Columbia, a Tuolumne County gold rush boomtown, describing the Chinese with terms not unlike those conveyed in Roach’s report such as “ruinous” competition, “peons,” and “degraded coolies.” Similarly, the California Assembly Committee on Mines and Mining Interests described “Asiatic races” as “absolute slaves” and “hired serfs.”

Although negative images of the Chinese were prevalent in the United States since the late eighteenth century and there were occasional outbursts of anti-Chinese violence and protests by white miners prior to March 1852, opposition toward the Chinese crystallized into a concerted anti-Chinese movement only after Roach presented his minority report. As Irish American


journalist James O’Meara noted with hindsight in 1884, Roach’s report was “the initial movement of the anti-Chinese legislation and anti-Chinese agitation that has since, at intervals, been prosecuted in California.”

One month after Roach issued his minority report, merchants Hab Wa and Long Achick wrote a letter to Governor Bigler on behalf of the Chinese community in California dismissing accusations that they came to the United States as “coolies.” The Chinese in California contested demeaning stereotypes and negative racial imagery by presenting themselves as equal or superior to other immigrant groups and the Irish in particular. They argued that if the Chinese in California were to be classified as coolies, this should also apply to the Irish. “The Irishmen who are engaged in digging down your hills,” they reasoned, “would, if they were in China, be considered ‘Coolies.’” This was one of the first of many attempts by the Chinese in the United States to campaign for racial equality by juxtaposing themselves alongside the Irish, whose culture and fitness for citizenship were also questioned by the host society. Norman Asing, who wrote a letter to Mayor Geary in 1850 praising the convivial reception extended to the “China boys” in San Francisco, echoed the concerns of Hab Wa and Long Achick. “We are not the degraded race you would make us,” Asing wrote in a letter to Governor Bigler, but rather “we come amongst you as mechanics or traders, and following every honorable business of life.” While Bigler, Roach, and other prominent Sinophobes advocated Chinese exclusion from American citizenship based on alleged racial inferiority, Asing countered that this was unjust given that “as far as the aristocracy of skin is concerned, ours might compare with many of the European races.”


The Chinese in San Francisco, despite efforts by community leaders such as Norman Asing, Hab Wa, and Long Achick, were unable to stem the growing tide of anti-Chinese sentiment. The California State Legislature introduced a foreign miner’s tax aimed at Chinese immigrants, which became law on May 4, 1852. Almost all of the $5,000,000 in taxes collected between 1852 and when the law was nullified in 1870 came from Chinese miners. In the years and decades after 1852 the Chinese faced numerous other discriminatory laws in California including limits placed on their right to vote, obtain citizenship through naturalization, and testify in a court of law. The Irish, on the other hand, prospered and at times dominated the political scene in California. Yet the historical trajectory of Irish and Chinese migration to Gold Rush California and eventual success for the former and exclusion for the latter was not preordained or inevitable. The Daily Alta California noted in May 1851 that “it may not be many years before the Halls of Congress are graced by the presence of a long queued Mandarin sitting, voting, and speaking…. The China Boys will yet vote at the same polls, study at the same schools and bow at the same Altar as our own countrymen.” This vision of a racially inclusive democratic society diminished after Roach delivered his anti-Chinese minority report, which is when the anti-Chinese movement in California began in earnest.

“Keep the Inferior Races out of the Workingmen’s Fields of Labor”:
Irish and Chinese on the California Mining Frontier

As Philip Roach waged a war of words against Chinese immigrants in California’s halls of political power, in the state’s mining districts Irish and Chinese gold miners physically clashed. Most of the mining districts had populations that were between 10 and 20 percent Irish-born between the 1850s and 1870s. When the number of Chinese miners in California peaked at more


than 25,000 around 1860, they represented roughly 30 percent of the total mining population. Encounters between Irish and Chinese miners often descended into violence but the incidence of such confrontations was not extraordinary. Jean Pfaelzer’s *Driven Out* documents more than two hundred roundups of the Chinese in California between 1849 and 1906, many of which transpired on the mining frontier in the two decades after the discovery of gold at Sutter’s Mill. However, the campaign to expel Chinese miners from their diggings and camps was a Euro-American undertaking, not an exclusively Irish one. Alexander Saxton’s research demonstrates that opposition to the Chinese presence in California united white workers otherwise divided along the lines of national origin and ethnicity. A similar logic played out in California’s goldfields.

The Irish often joined Euro-Americans to declare “California for Americans!” and in other instances groups of exclusively Irish gold miners raided Chinese mining camps or ejected Chinese from the goldfields. In October 1854 a group of Irishmen drove Chinese miners off their claims, ruined their dwellings, and plundered their property at the Kentucky House nearby the San Andreas mining camp. In January 1859 a group of approximately fifty Euro-American miners, which included the Irish, expelled Chinese miners from their camp at Diamond Springs in El Dorado County. The perpetrators destroyed sluice boxes, ruined cabins, and violently assaulted the Chinese. Some Chinese, however, resisted the rioters overrunning their camps. In the case of Diamond Springs, one Irishman was shot dead as he entered a cabin occupied by Chinese miners. In Amador County in the Sierra Nevada, Irish miners competed with other European immigrants for work in the quartz mining industry but the specter of local mining companies

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41. Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*.

42. Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*.


hiring a substantial number of Chinese miners in their stead engendered an anti-Chinese alliance composed of mostly Irish and other immigrant miners from Europe. In the summer of 1871 they formed the Amador County Laborers’ Association, later known as the Amador County Miners’ League, and the stated goal of this multiethnic organization of white workers was “for mutual protection, charity and to keep the inferior races out of the workingmen’s fields of labor.” The Miners’ League staged a prolonged strike and demanded higher wages in addition to the exclusion of Chinese labor from the mines. Known as the “Amador War,” large mining companies were brought to a standstill and the governor of California, Henry H. Haight, deployed the state militia on their behalf in an attempt to break the strike. The miners and mining companies eventually reached a compromise although the latter continued to hire Chinese miners years after the strike was brought to a conclusion.45

Although the Chinese faced hostility and violence on the California mining frontier, San Francisco was the nucleus of anti-Chinese agitation in California for most of the second half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, opposition toward the Chinese in antebellum California was intermittent whereas between the late 1860s and when the Chinese Exclusion Act was made permanent in 1904, the “Chinese question” occupied center stage in state politics. 1867 was a pivotal year in the intensification of the anti-Chinese movement, when a politically revived Democratic Party and a more cohesive labor movement waged a vigorous campaign for Chinese exclusion.46 These events coincided with one of the high points of Irish influence in California politics and the emergence of the Irish as the largest immigrant group in the state. In 1867 Frank McCoppin became the first Irish-born mayor of San Francisco, long before New York and Boston elected their first Irish-born Roman Catholic mayors in 1880 and 1884, respectively. That same


year Eugene Casserly became US Senator from California and the San Francisco Board of
Supervisors contained three Irish-born members, which increased to six Irish American members
by 1869-70. In 1867 Irish-born immigrants formed 25.5 percent of San Francisco’s population
and 23 percent of the city’s registered electorate. The Chinese, on the other hand, were denied
the right to vote and between 1867 and 1882 many California Irish workers, anti-coolie club
members, politicians, and labor leaders, who were at the forefront of the Chinese exclusion
movement in California, were determined to keep it that way.

“Clean Out the Chinese”:
Irish Workers and the February Riots in San Francisco

The completion of the transcontinental railroad facilitated mass Irish migration to
California from the East Coast. By 1880 Irish Americans constituted one-third of San Francisco’s
total population, which was the largest ethnic group in the city, and more than sixty percent of the
Irish-born workforce were engaged in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. When Chinese workers
were hired as strikebreakers and to lower wages, Irish workers adopted various strategies to
counter this economic competition. In February 1867 San Francisco’s first major anti-Chinese
riots broke out when a mob of mostly Irish workers attacked roughly thirty Chinese laborers at
work on Townsend Street in the South Beach area. According to the San Francisco Bulletin,
when contractors Weed and Anderson hired these Chinese laborers at a rate of $1.12½ per day as
opposed to white workers who ordinarily received $1.75 per day, “this aroused the ire of the Irish
laborers, and they determined that the Chinamen should not work.” The Chinese were pelted with

47. Burchell, The San Francisco Irish, 7, 136, 137, 141; “Board of Supervisors of the City and
County of San Francisco, 1869-1870,” San Francisco Municipal Reports for the Fiscal Year 1869-70,
Ending June 30, 1870 (San Francisco: Cosmopolitan Printing Company, 1870), 669. For more on Casserly,
see Winifred Mary White, “Eugene Casserly: His Political and Legal Career” (master’s thesis, Catholic
University of America, 1952).


49. Sandmeyer, The Anti-Chinese Movement in California, 45-46; Burchell, The San Francisco
Irish, 3-4, 54.
stones, brutally assaulted, driven from their worksite, and their lodging quarters burned. The riot escalated and spread to other locations where the Chinese worked or resided. A contingent of Irish workers vowed to “clean out the Chinese” at the Mission Woolen Mills and the ropewalk on Potrero Hill. Many Chinese managed to escape the ire of the mob but those left behind were beaten, the buildings that housed them were set on fire, and their property was destroyed. One contractor who hired Chinese sustained serious injuries. After chasing down and attacking a foreman who supervised the Chinese, the mob shouted “Here is the son of a — who hires Chinamen instead of white men! Hang him! Rip him open!” Upon learning that the foreman was not directly involved in hiring Chinese workers, the mob allowed him to escape with his life intact after swearing under duress never to oversee Chinese workers again.50

An editorial in the London and China Telegraph asserted that white Americans in San Francisco tolerated and valued the services of Chinese immigrants whereas “the Irish of that city have characteristically inaugurated a war upon them. As in New York the Irish men are jealous of the negroes, so in San Francisco the Irish strive to thin the ranks of the Celestials by bloody riots and ferocious raids.”51 However, court records indicate that although a majority convicted for the February riots were Irish, a few British were also found guilty.52 The San Francisco Examiner, edited and partly owned by Philip Roach, defended the actions of the rioters. One editorial wrote that the judiciary should “deal lightly” with those arrested and maintained that it was “not


surprising that the hordes of coolies from China, which are fast monopolizing all the channels of labor and industry in our State, and which, if not checked, will drive from us all white labor, should excite the apprehensions and anxieties of our own laboring classes.” The editorial furthermore asserted that it was “not human to stand listlessly by and see these creatures—the purchased paupers of Asia—take the bread from the mouths and the clothes from the backs of white men and their families.” The Sacramento Daily Union censured the stance taken by the Examiner on the February riots by comparing it with the Copperhead newspapers that incited the New York City Draft Riots in 1863, when many Irish ran riot in the city, lynched African Americans, and burned the Colored Orphan Asylum.53 Besides Roach and the San Francisco Examiner, the rioters also received sympathy from Mayor McCoppin, who introduced a resolution at a meeting of the Board of Supervisors petitioning Governor Frederick Low to grant clemency to the rioters. The resolution was passed by a vote of 6-3 and the rioters were released two months later, having served only part of their sentences.54 Other Irish established or joined anti-Coolie clubs, which further inflamed anti-Chinese sentiment and elicited protests and resistance from the Chinese community in San Francisco.

“The Richest Prize of the Caucasian Family”:
Thomas Mooney, the Anti-Coolie Association, and a White Man’s Pacific Coast

In March 1867 an “immense gathering” of workers assembled at the American Theater in San Francisco “to adopt some plan against the growing encroachment of Chinese labor upon white labor.” They formed an Anti-Coolie and Anti-Monopoly Association and elected Thomas Mooney as president.55 Born in Ireland, Mooney fled to Australia after his involvement in the


failed Young Irelander Rebellion of 1848.\textsuperscript{56} He eventually relocated to California and became a prominent figure within the Irish American community in San Francisco, where he was involved in the Fenian movement and was bestowed the honor of delivering San Francisco’s St. Patrick’s Day oration in 1868.\textsuperscript{57} Mooney expressed a desire to restrict Chinese immigration to California and called on every white man on the Pacific Coast to enroll in the Anti-Coolie Association to more effectively “resist with all his might any public or private officer who shall endeavor, openly or covertly, to surrender this vast, fertile land—the richest prize of the Caucasian family—to a race of serfs, whose presence is a nuisance, a pestilence, a calamity, and a curse.” He also advocated a boycott of Chinese-made goods and businesses that employed Chinese workers, a tactic the Irish repeatedly used against the Chinese in San Francisco. “Let us all unite—every white man of every creed and every political hue on the Pacific coast. Let the ladies also unite in ladies’ clubs against coolie slavery,” Mooney declared, and he recommended sending a “deputation from this meeting to the Chinese merchants, intimating our warning against them bringing over any more of their countrymen.”\textsuperscript{58} Mooney served as vice president of the Industrial and Immigration Association of California, which was designed to protect and care for newly arrived immigrants and thereby attract more white settlers to California. He believed that California’s rich supply of natural resources and agricultural products could not be fully exploited without “a large influx of industrious people, and the application of their labor.” The Chinese were industrious and willing to immigrate to California in large numbers but Mooney and his supporters wanted to preserve the state’s opportunities, wealth, and power for Euro-Americans.\textsuperscript{59}

Mooney waged an anti-Chinese campaign at the local and federal levels as part of his


57. \textit{Irish Citizen} (New York), March 21, 1868, p. 7, col. 5; Burchell, \textit{The San Francisco Irish}, 179.


desire to preserve the “racial purity” of California. In an attempt to eliminate federal subsidies to the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, which carried the largest number of Chinese passengers to California, he sent a memorial to Congress dated December 18, 1869, “remonstrating against granting a subsidy to the Pacific Steamship Company.” At the local level, he tried to introduce legislation designed to drive the Chinese out of San Francisco and dissuade other Chinese from coming to the city. Claiming that the Chinese living quarters were overcrowded and liable to trigger an outbreak of “Asian cholera,” Mooney petitioned the Board of Supervisors to implement strict quarantine regulations for Chinese immigrants arriving by sea, relocate the Chinese beyond city limits, and pass a variety of anti-Chinese ordinances. The Board of Supervisors, in response to Mooney’s lobbying efforts, passed a Sidewalk Ordinance prohibiting the use of poles to carry loads on sidewalks and a Cubic Air Ordinance that required at least 500 cubic feet of air for each inhabitant in a dwelling. The former ordinance was aimed at the many Chinese who relied on baskets attached to poles to transport laundry or merchandise around the city and the latter ordinance was enforced almost exclusively against the Chinese.

The Chinese in San Francisco resisted Mooney’s attempts to drive them out of the city and adopted measures designed to eliminate the race-based discriminatory ordinances. As a form of civil resistance many Chinese refused to pay fines for violating the Cubic Air Ordinance, which resulted in their incarceration and overcrowding in the county jail. To eliminate the financial burden of overcrowded jails, the Board of Supervisors passed a Queue Ordinance requiring the hair of all prisoners cut to within one inch of their scalp. This law was aimed at the Chinese because almost all Chinese men in the United States wore a queue as a sign of loyalty to


the Qing dynasty and it was designed to prod the Chinese into paying fines as opposed to choosing jail. When Matthew Nunan, the Irish-born Sheriff of San Francisco, enforced (fig 2.1) the Queue Ordinance, the Chinese mounted a legal battle against him in the Circuit Court for the District of California. Ho Ah Kow, one of the Chinese men who had their queue cut off in the county jail, sued Nunan for damages. Justice Stephen J. Field ruled that Nunan’s actions violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, awarded Ho Ah Kow $10,000 in damages, and struck down the Queue Ordinance. Ho Ah Kow v. Nunan was a significant victory for the Chinese and a case of historical import because it was the first federal ruling to state that the “equal protection” clause of the Fourteenth Amendment applied to citizens and noncitizens including the Chinese. The competition and struggles between Irish and Chinese immigrants on US soil, which sometimes gave rise to legal battles and forced interpretations of America’s constitution and statues, shaped US constitutional jurisprudence and legal history.62

Figure 2.1. “Out of the Frying Pan into the Fire,” San Francisco Illustrated Wasp, March 2, 1878. Courtesy Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

“The Greatest Question, the Most Momentous Problem of the Time”: Eugene Casserly, Chinese Immigrants, and the “Pale of Citizenship”

One of the most politically explosive issues in the wake of the Civil War was whether or not the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, in particular naturalization and suffrage rights, should apply to the Chinese. After Irish-born Senator John Conness (R-CA) voiced support for extending the Citizenship Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to US-born children of Chinese immigrants, he lost support from many of his constituents and his chances for re-election were greatly diminished. Conness’ statement on the floor of the US Senate that California was “entirely ready to accept the provision proposed in the constitutional amendment, that the children born here of Mongolian parents shall be declared by the Constitution of the United States to be entitled to civil rights and to equal protection before the law with others” was unpopular with many Irish in California. The San Francisco Irish, a powerful voting bloc in California, distanced themselves from Conness and threw their political weight behind his successor, Eugene Casserly. The latter’s belief that the Democratic Party “always held that our institutions contemplated only the white race” resonated with a growing body of exclusionists and after his swearing into office on March 4, 1869, he led California’s fight in Congress against Chinese suffrage, naturalization, and immigration to the United States.

In July 1869 Casserly laid out his views on the “Chinese question” before a packed audience at San Francisco’s Mercantile Library Hall. Chaired by Philip Roach and attended by mostly Irish workers, Casserly proclaimed that the “subject of Chinese labor to the exclusion of white labor in California” and nationwide was “the greatest question, the most momentous problem of the time.” Describing the Chinese as “coolies” who were “imported in the mass like a herd of cattle,” Casserly warned that if this continued the people of California “would be buried under an Asiatic avalanche…. [and] the novelty will be, in some parts of your State, to see a


white face.” In response to pro-Chinese immigration advocates who described the Chinese as “free labor,” Casserly asserted that “I do not see how they can be claimed as free laborers, as compared with the workingmen of the country. We know that Chinese laborers will not be free as you all around me are free…. If it should be the misfortune of this country that he has the suffrage, ready to vote as he is bid. Those who employ him will rule the land.” Chinese suffrage, Casserly elaborated, meant that the prospect of a “Chinaman as American Minister to Pekin [Beijing], is not nearly so great an impossibility to-day as would have been, five years ago, a negro to represent us at Hayti [Haiti]. What, then, is to delay Chinese social equality? With political and social equality for the negro and the Chinaman … the radical advance guard may well look to see realized their revolting idea of what they call ‘a fusion of races.’” Besides warning about the dangers of racial amalgamation, Casserly maintained that the Chinese, unlike immigrants from Ireland, England, France, or Germany, were unfit for American citizenship. “The Chinese know as much about our institutions as the great bulk of our people know of the Chinese language,” he explained, “and that is just as near to nothing as it is possible. (Laughter and cheers.)” While Chinese labor was key to major national developments such as the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad (CPRR), Casserly maintained that a racially exclusive workforce trumped any benefits the Chinese might bring to California when he stated that “if the Pacific Railroad was to be the cause of inflicting on this coast and the country, Chinese labor to the exclusion of white labor, as a fixed element in our social organization, it were far better that the railroad had not yet been built; but had been left for another and wiser generation to build.”65

Many Chinese were disquieted at mounting calls for Chinese exclusion from California. Choy Chew, a prominent San Francisco merchant and member of Lun Wo and Company, censured politicians for fanning the flames of anti-Chinese sentiment among Irish workers and

presented an alternative perspective and vision for the Chinese community in the United States. In an interview with a *New York Herald* reporter a few weeks after Casserly’s speech at the Mercantile Library Hall, Choy Chew repudiated allegations that the Chinese came to the United States as slaves or coolies. Acknowledging that many Chinese landed in California poor and penniless, he maintained that this was not unlike how many Irish and German immigrants arrived in the United States except the journey was longer and more expensive for the Chinese. “In one shipload of Chinese that comes into the bay of San Francisco you will find more variety of manual skill than among any other equal crowd of emigrants,” Choy Chew told the reporter, but because of prejudice many skilled Chinese workers were forced to work in menial jobs. Casserly insisted that the Chinese were unfit for American citizenship whereas Choy Chew opined that if his fellow Chinese were “within the pale of citizenship, acquainted with the language of the country and resolved upon coming here to stay, America would not have any more orderly and industrious class of citizens.” Moreover, he argued that if they were given the opportunity to take part in the political process “it may yet come to pass that a gentleman with a Chinese name may fill the office of President of the republic.” Standing in the way of success, Choy Chew believed, were politicians who provoked Irish racial hostility toward the Chinese. “The Irishmen would not treat the Chinaman as he does,” he informed the reporter, “if it were not for the mischievous politicians that mislead him.” With Casserly likely on his mind, Choy Chew explained that “these demagogues—they call them democratic leaders—appeal in the worst possible terms to the passions of an Irish crowd, saying that Chinamen will run them out of the country; that if they get the rights of citizens there will be no rights left for the Irishman.” Due to “the poor Chinaman having no voice either in the press or on the rostrum,” Choy Chew bemoaned, demagoguery was able to thrive and the Chinese were thus “unmercifully misjudged, and treated like a very inferior kind of animal.”

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The national debate over whether the Chinese belonged inside or outside “the pale of citizenship” ramped up in July 1870 when Senator Charles Sumner (R-MA) proposed to strike the word “white” from America’s naturalization laws. The Naturalization Act of 1790 restricted naturalization to “any alien, being a free white person” and exclusionists feared that Sumner’s attempt to omit all references to “white” would open the way for Chinese naturalization.67 Casserly and other Pacific Coast senators helped kill Sumner’s proposed bill. Congress ultimately extended the privilege of naturalization to “aliens of African nativity and to persons of African descent” and made no mention of the Chinese.68

Besides vigorous opposition toward Chinese suffrage and naturalization in the Senate, Casserly tried to win support for federal Chinese immigration restriction legislation. In the midst of the naturalization debates in the Senate, Casserly was invited to deliver a July 4th oration at the headquarters of Tamman Hall, New York’s Democratic political machine, where he spoke about “the question of the introduction into the country of the debased and degraded Asiatics as laborers, to the exclusion of the white labor of the country.” Capitalizing on the recent arrival of seventy-five Chinese in Massachusetts to break a strike by white workers at a shoe factory, Casserly told his audience that they had “seen only the first ripple of the mighty sea which is coming upon you.” Having “met the evil face to face” in California, Casserly proposed that Tamman Hall join California in the campaign for Chinese immigration restriction. “In the face of the outcry of labor, in the face of Christianity, in the face of civilization,” Casserly proclaimed, the capitalists “propose to pour upon this land a horde of Pagan, vicious, degraded Asiatics, to take the bread out of the mouths of the laborers of this country, and send them to the poor-houses, or perhaps to the penitentiaries, and their families to a life of degradation and shame (Applause).


68. Congressional Globe, 41st Cong., 2d sess. (July 14, 1870), appendix, 701.
It shall not be (Great applause). Casserly’s anti-Chinese agitation on the East Coast was the beginning of an effort by Californians to nationalize the “Chinese question” in order to bring about more stringent and effective Chinese exclusion and immigration restriction legislation. Ultimately, the denial of suffrage and citizenship to Chinese immigrants limited their ability to compete with other immigrant groups such as the Irish and stave-off, defeat, or repeal subsequent exclusion laws.


As Eugene Casserly was agitating the “Chinese question” on the East Coast, Irish workers and labor leaders staged a major anti-Chinese immigration rally in San Francisco. On July 8, 1870, Irish workers assembled at Irish-American Hall in preparation for a parade through the streets of San Francisco toward the more spacious Platt’s Hall, where the first mass anti-Chinese meeting in US history was held. Arranged under the auspices of the Order of the Knights of St. Crispin (KOSC), a boot and shoe union with hundreds of lodges scattered across North America, the parade was escorted by an Irish militia company called the Emmet Guard. The workers displayed a range of anti-Chinese placards such as “Woman’s Rights and no more Chinese chambermaids,” “Our women are degraded by Coolie labor,” “No servile labor shall pollute our land,” “The Coolies have declared war on industry,” “American trade needs no Coolie labor,” “The Coolie labor system leaves us no alternative-starvation or disgrace,” “Mark the men who would crush us to the level of Mongolian slave-we all vote.” When the parade reached its destination more than 3,000 people crammed into Platt’s Hall. Chaired by Maurice Carey, the Irish American President of the KOSC, he told the audience that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss “a question of such magnitude and moment to the laboring classes of this continent”

and adopt resolutions aimed at ridding California of “Mongolian slavery.” 70 This gathering was also the first mass meeting in US history to call for a modification of the Burlingame Treaty. Accompanying Carey on stage were Philip Roach and Thomas Mooney. Prominent non-Irish Americans in attendance included Henry George and the President of the Mechanics’ State Council of California (the first federated labor organization in California), General A. M. Winn. Roach demanded an abrogation of the Burlingame Treaty, Mooney encouraged the formation of more anti-coolie clubs, and all agreed that anyone sympathetic toward the Chinese were “public enemies to the American Republic.” 71 Over the next decade the California Irish were at the forefront of efforts aimed at nationalizing the “Chinese question” in order to persuade Congress to repeal the Burlingame Treaty, which paved the way for the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

One week later a larger anti-Chinese meeting was held at the Mechanics’ Pavilion, which the KOSC helped organize. Once again, Irish workers assembled at Irish-American Hall in preparation for a parade through the streets of San Francisco. The procession was escorted by the St. Crispin’s Guard, an Irish militia whose members held muskets and sported red caps and white shirts, and was joined by other labor organizations such as the Blind and Sash Makers and the Plumbers and Gasfitters and anti-coolie groups such as the Ninth Ward Anti-Coolie Club. At the Mechanics’ Pavilion, Carey told the crowd that since the last meeting at Platt’s Hall the KOSC formed anti-coolie clubs in four of San Francisco’s wards and many trade unions adopted Chinese exclusion resolutions. Carey, Winn, Roach, and Mooney proposed staging a workingmen’s anti-Chinese convention in San Francisco. A constitution was drawn up and the convention was officially called the “Anti-Chinese Convention of the State of California.” A major goal of the convention was “to oppose the immigration of Chinese laborers and cultivate public opinion to

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the abrogation of the treaty with China.”

The KOSC tried to persuade the Qing government, via Chinese community leaders in San Francisco, to halt Chinese immigration to the United States. One of the resolutions adopted at the meeting called on Carey and Winn, Temporary Secretary and Temporary President of the Anti-Chinese Convention, respectively, to send a written statement to the Chinese Six Companies informing them about the “largest meeting of the people ever assembled in this City for the purpose of protesting against the further emigration of Chinese to this Country.” The Chinese Six Companies, a conglomeration of native place associations called Sam Yup, Hop Wo, Ning Yung, Yeong Wo, Yan Wo, and Kong Chow, was the most important benevolent organization for Chinese in America during the late nineteenth century and functioned in ways similar to the numerous Irish American benevolent societies dispersed across the United States. The Irish and Chinese benevolent societies assisted fellow brethren with the immigration process, helped them secure employment, and provided them with aid during times of distress. Carey and Winn wrote in their letter that resolutions passed at the Mechanics’ Pavilion asked them to inform the Chinese Six Companies that “we do not consider it just to us, or safe to the Chinamen, to continue coming to the United States; and request them to give such notice to the public authorities of the Chinese Empire.” Contained in the letter were grievances harbored by white workers in San Francisco:

your laborers have dug our gold, carried it away and impoverished out mines; they have entered into competition with our washer-women, our mechanics, our laborers, our maidservants and our maid-servants, at such prices as to drive them to the verge of starvation; your people have comparatively no families, while ours have wives and children to support; they are not to any great extent consumers of our produce; their habits and morals are contaminating our people; every day they are becoming more and more repulsive to the freemen of our nation.


“We live up to agreement in our treaties, and abolish them when they become oppressive,” the letter also wrote, “such must be the case with the treaty we have made with China.”**74** Most of the “washer-women” and “maid-servants” in San Francisco were Irish American and they tried to resist Chinese encroachment on their industries. They enlisted the support of their fellow Irish men and adopted a strategy the Irish commonly used to fend off competition from the Chinese, namely the boycott.**75** Carey helped establish an “Anti-Coolie Co-operative Laundry Association,” whose goal according to one of its advertisements (fig 2.2) was “to give labor to the white women of our city in preference to the coolies, and to perform the work as cheap, if not cheaper than the Chinamen.”**76** In a letter to the public Carey solicited support from “citizens who may take an interest in the preservation of our industry for the benefit of the white laborers of our city…. our united efforts will rid us of Mongolian labor in this department of trade.”**77**

![Anti-Coolie Co-operative Laundry Association](San Francisco Chronicle, July 26, 1870, p. 4, col. 5)

**Figure 2.2.** “Anti-Coolie Co-operative Laundry Association.” From: *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 26, 1870, p. 4, col. 5.

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“The Most Cunning and Fierce Among the Foreigners”:
Irish Immigrants, the Politics of Chinese Immigration Restriction, and US-China Relations

Although anti-Chinese agitation was prevalent in the United States since the early days of the California Gold Rush, not until 1876 did the Chinese government take diplomatic measures to protect the Chinese in America. In response to an escalating anti-Chinese movement, Prince Gong (恭親王 Gong Qinwang; b. 奕訢 Yixin), the founder and head of the Zongli Yamen (總理各國事務衙門 Zongli geguo shiwu yamen), the office in charge of foreign affairs, sent the US government the Qing Empire’s first diplomatic note protesting the poor treatment of Chinese immigrants in the United States. Addressed to George F. Seward, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to China, Gong informed Seward that he received reports from Chinese community leaders in America that “the low Irish residing in the city of San Francisco were in the habit of molesting the Chinese…. the cause of this ill-treatment existed in the fact that this low class were envious of the Chinese because they came in such numbers and interfered with their wages.”78 Attached with Gong’s note was an extract from one of California’s Chinese-language newspapers stating that as Chinese passengers disembarked from vessels in San Francisco they were subjected to various forms of abuse from the Irish. In one case hundreds of “Irish and hoodlums” surrounded the wharf and pelted the Chinese with mud and stones and many Chinese sustained injuries.79

In reality, the Irish were not the only ethnic group agitating the “Chinese question” and not all Irish were Sinophobic or actively involved in acts of racial hostility toward the Chinese. By 1876 the anti-Chinese movement in California was a mass movement that cut across the lines of ethnicity, national origin, class, gender, and religion. However, the involvement of some Irish in the anti-Chinese movement reached a point where many Chinese began to view the California

78. George F. Seward to the Secretary of State, June 29, 1876, no. 95, enc. 1 (Prince Kung to Mr. Seward, June 29, 1876), Despatches from U.S. Ministers to China, 1843-1906.

79. George F. Seward to the Secretary of State, June 29, 1876, no. 95, enc. in enc. 1 (Extract from Chinese newspaper published at San Francisco), Despatches from U.S. Ministers to China, 1843-1906.
Irish as their nemesis. Between 1876 and the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Zongli Yamen expressed similar concerns in numerous other diplomatic notes sent to American officials, essentially that the Irish were at the forefront of the anti-Chinese movement and that this was a major sticking point in China’s foreign relations with the United States. Gong asserted in his note to Seward that “the treatment received by the Chinese in San Francisco at the hands of the low class of Irish and their purpose of interfering with Chinese emigration” contravened the Burlingame Treaty, mocked the democratic principles and values enshrined in the United States Constitution, and jeopardized “the friendship between the two nations.” Gong also remarked that “these same classes” who assailed the Chinese in San Francisco chose Philip Roach to lead a mission to the East Coast aimed at nationalizing the anti-Chinese movement and rallying public opinion in opposition to the Burlingame Treaty.80

Based on the diaries of Qing government officials, it appears that many Chinese genuinely viewed the California Irish as a major force behind the anti-Chinese movement and that singling out the Irish was not a mere rhetorical device or strategy designed to improve the situation for Chinese immigrants in the United States. One example is the diary of Li Gui (李圭), an official appointed by the Qing government to observe the American Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia and whose diary entries concerning his trip to the United States were not shared with the American government and public. Li noted in his journal that as he was traveling from China to California aboard the steamship City of Peking, Chinese laborers told him that there were reports circulating around Hong Kong that the Chinese in the United States were “victims of hostility and resentment on the part of the Irish political party” and because of this many of their fellow Chinese were reluctant to travel to California. “The Chinese in San Francisco are not tolerated by the Irish party,” Li wrote, “and are most certainly in a precarious position. Chinese in San Francisco have been maimed or killed by the locals.” He also noted that other Chinese were

80. George F. Seward to the Secretary of State, June 29, 1876, no. 95, enc. 1 (Prince Kung to Mr. Seward, June 29, 1876), Despatches from U.S. Ministers to China, 1843-1906.
dissuaded from traveling to California after hearing that the San Francisco Irish “vowed to cause trouble because the Chinese compete with them for work.” Li was cognizant that Irish immigrants were a powerful force in American politics. He wrote in his diary that the Irish were able to become American citizens after a period of continued residence in the United States and that this allowed them to “become officials in California and also form a majority in the different political parties.” Moreover, he noted that the Irish “succeeded in founding an [anti-coolie] organization whose express purpose was to interfere with Chinese laborers, and the Chinese therefore protested the support of this organization by the political parties.” This gave rise to, Li noted, “a number of incidents of bullying, humiliation, and beating.”

Li and other Chinese were keenly aware of the Irish as a distinct ethnic group, that the Irish had a long history of immigration to the United States, and that Ireland was part of the British Empire. Li wrote in his diary that the Irish were a people whose territory was administered by the British Empire (英屬愛爾蘭人 Yingshu Aierlan ren). His diary is one example of how the Chinese held stereotypes and prejudices toward the Irish. For example, while passing through San Francisco on his way to Philadelphia, Li wrote that “the most cunning and fierce among the foreigners are the so-called “Irish” [愛利士 Ailishi] who spend much of their day’s wages getting drunk and they are fond of stirring up trouble.” Li and other Chinese understood that the Irish were an immigrant group whose fitness for citizenship was likewise questioned by the host society and they often utilized this knowledge in their attempts to achieve equality. Why is it that the inferior “low class of Irish” were entitled to the fruits of citizenship, they often questioned their host society, while they were denied it and considered outside the boundaries of national belonging. Recognizing that certain sectors of American society such as big business and


Protestant missionaries were opposed to Chinese exclusion and that many within these sectors also happened to be hostile to the Irish by virtue of their Catholicism or preponderant influence in the labor movement, the Chinese allied with Protestant clergy and business leaders to more effectively challenge their Irish detractors and undermine the anti-Chinese movement.

“This Most Mischievous Treaty of Modern Times”: Philip Roach, the Burlingame Treaty, and Nationalization of the “Chinese Question”

A pivotal day in the history of American immigration policy was March 20, 1876, when the Supreme Court ruled unanimously in three cases that immigration regulation was the exclusive preserve of Congress.83 “The passage of laws which concern the admission of citizens and subjects of foreign nations to our shores belongs to Congress, and not to the States” opined the court.84 These unequivocal rulings on federal versus state power over immigration were also a watershed in California’s anti-Chinese movement, which in turn brought unprecedented national attention to the “Chinese question.” In Chy Lung v. Freeman, the court overturned a California law that granted state officials broad discretionary powers to post a bond for the landing of any “lewd or debauched woman,” a statute aimed at restricting the immigration of Chinese women.85 Chy Lung v. Freeman, one of numerous cases invalidating California’s Chinese exclusion laws, exasperated anti-Chinese advocates, but the court’s unambiguous rulings that Congress was responsible for immigration regulation convinced them that the federal government was key to securing Chinese immigration restriction legislation. Accordingly, the California Legislature chose Philip Roach to lead a deputation east of the Rockies to “solicit such action on the part of the Federal Government as shall modify the Burlingame Treaty, so as to prevent the immigration of certain classes of Chinese under its provisions, whose arrival in our midst is detrimental to the


84. Chy Lung v. Freeman et al., 92 U.S. 275 (1875).

85. Ibid.
moral and material interests of our own people.” 86 The other nominees were Eugene Casserly, Frank M. Pixley, and Mark L. McDonald. Casserly declined the appointment, McDonald did not travel east, and Pixley “did little more than visit Washington and have a good time.” Roach, on the other hand, traveled to several cities where he met with prominent politicians, labor leaders, newspaper editors, and other distinguished citizens. 87 As one of Roach’s biographers noted in 1889, “Roach accomplished far more than any one man in turning the tide of both public and Congressional opinion in the East, and thus securing the first [federal] anti-Chinese legislation.” 88

Prior to Roach’s trip east, approximately 25,000 people from all strata of society assembled at San Francisco’s Union Hall in April 1876 to demonstrate against Chinese immigration. The largest gathering hitherto in California history, Mayor Andrew Bryant and Governor William Irwin attended and other prominent citizens including Philip Roach and Eugene Casserly were invited to address the audience. 89 Although Casserly was unable to attend due to “unforeseen circumstances,” a communication he sent was read before the crowds.

Casserly stated that for almost ten years he was consistently involved in efforts at informing “our people against what I regarded, and now regard more than ever as the greatest evil to California in the present or the future.” He called for a modification of the Burlingame Treaty, which he described as the “this most mischievous treaty of modern times.” Speaking about the “perils” and “menace” of “this Chinese invasion,” Casserly called for Chinese immigration restriction on the


grounds that it was a grave danger to the United States, specifically “its education, its social and political institutions, its habits, manners, customs, law and morals—in short, every living force of this great body of American civilization.” 90 When Roach took the stage to the sound of rapturous applause he demanded repeal of the Burlingame Treaty and his assertion that this “will result in incalculable benefits” elicited more cheers from the crowd. He outlined a strategy for achieving this goal, namely sending a delegation to major cities east of the Rocky Mountains to deliver lectures informing the masses about the dangers of Chinese immigration. 91 He believed that this approach and meeting with America’s political elite would suffice to turn the tide of opinion against Chinese immigration. Five weeks later Roach left California to execute this plan and he visited major cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, Albany, Hartford, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Washington, DC. 92

Roach’s first stop was Chicago, where he delivered a lecture at Farwell Hall. He received support from Chicago’s labor establishment including Andrew C. Cameron, editor of the Chicago-based Workingman’s Advocate. Cameron presided over the meeting and introduced Roach to “a considerable audience.” 93 Roach echoed the message of his Farwell Hall lecture at all of the other venues where he spoke, essentially that the “Chinese question” was one of national importance and the federal government should therefore restrict Chinese immigration. Roach relayed this message in spite of the fact that by 1880 the Chinese amounted to only .002 percent of the total population in the United States. 94 It was in the realm of ideas, images, perceptions,


and public opinion that the fight over federal Chinese immigration restriction legislation was fought, not due to any concrete threat from the Chinese.

Roach compared Chinese workers to machines that worked for intolerable pay and long hours and asserted that they would supplant white workers east of the Rockies unless Chinese immigration was halted. He claimed that thousands of Chinese men replaced white women who worked as domestic servants in San Francisco. While the white worker was willing to raise a family, buy property or land, and settle permanently in California, Roach noted, the Chinese had no families to support and they were sojourners who repatriated all of their wealth to China. He stated that the Chinese Six Companies were importing Chinese “coolies” to enrich themselves at the expense of “honest labor.” Besides the economic threat, Roach argued that the Chinese were responsible for spreading diseases such as leprosy and vices such as prostitution and gambling. He labeled the Chinese deceitful, paupers, and criminals who were incapable of adopting the manners and customs of the American people. Very few converted to Christianity, he maintained, but rather tended to “laugh at it in their sleeves.” Roach also told his audience that there were more Chinese in California than there were Irish in Illinois, which deterred white settlers from peopling California. Roach did not object to trade relations with China although he advocated a prohibition on Chinese immigration to the United States. Roach’s lecture was “heartily applauded,” published in Chicago’s major newspapers, and forwarded to members of Congress and other influential citizens as a way of introducing them to his eastern mission.95 Roach’s Chinese immigration restriction message garnered widespread publicity. His ideas were published in two of America’s most popular daily newspapers, the New York Herald and the Sun, and an illustration (fig 2.3) of Roach appeared in the New York Daily Graphic.96


When Roach arrived in Washington, DC, he met with President Ulysses S. Grant, the president’s Cabinet, and members of Congress. Grant, Secretary of State Hamilton Fish, and all the other Cabinet members informed Roach that they were in favor of modifying the Burlingame Treaty. At a session of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Roach and Pixley delivered a memorial urging the US government to restrict Chinese immigration. The Australian colonies, they complained, were able to restrict Chinese immigration whereas California was left powerless considering the authority to regulate immigration lay with the federal government. Roach interviewed leading members of the House of Representatives including Speaker Michael C. Kerr, Samuel J. Randall, L. Q. C. Lamar, Nathaniel P. Banks, and Samuel S. Cox, who also


offered to support a modification of the Burlingame Treaty.99 To drum up more support for Chinese immigration restriction, Roach extended to a national audience California’s gendered, racial, and labor anxieties over Chinese men threatening white families in their homes and white women in their workplace. “It is bringing a race notoriously immoral in contact with the juvenile element of the family,” Roach commented on male Chinese domestic servants, “and although Catharine or Bridget may be more expensive as servants there are many moral reasons why they should be employed in preference to the Asiatic.” Contact with Chinese men, Roach maintained, was “a degradation to which no respectable white woman would submit.” Although there were only a handful of Chinese men on the East Coast, Roach warned that “the evils this Chinese influx brings among us … will soon cross the Sierras, and other cities will have a plague spot equal to that exhibited by San Francisco, Sacramento and other cities of the Pacific coast.”100 Roach held meetings with members of the Senate including Oliver P. Morton, who was instrumental in persuading Congress to establish a Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration. The Special Committee, based on the testimony of 128 witnesses who almost all favored Chinese exclusion, concluded that the Chinese were an inferior race that posed an economic and moral threat to the United States. A majority of the Special Committee advised the federal government to renegotiate the Burlingame Treaty and enact Chinese immigration restriction legislation. The House of Representatives introduced two resolutions recommending that the United States negotiate a new treaty with the Qing Empire.101

Roach’s eastern tour induced the national Democratic and Republican parties to embrace a Chinese exclusion plank. Roach interviewed the governor of New York and Democratic Party


presidential candidate Samuel J. Tilden. Roach mentioned to Tilden that if he threw his weight behind the cause of Chinese immigration restriction he would receive political support from the Pacific States. Roach also met with Manton Marble, who wrote the Democratic national platform in 1876. Both assured Roach that they and the Democratic Party would adopt an anti-Chinese immigration platform. Roach’s arrival in St Louis was timed to coincide with the Democratic National Convention. He met in private with delegates and lobbied for a Chinese immigration restriction plank. A few days later the Democratic Party announced its platform, which was resolute and unequivocal about restricting Chinese immigration. It called on the federal government to adopt measures “as shall prevent the further importation or immigration of the Mongolian race” and mentioned how treaties signed between the United States and China under a Republican-controlled Congress “exposed our brethren of the Pacific coast to the incursions of a race not sprung from the same great parent stock, and in fact now by law denied citizenship through naturalization as being unaccustomed to the traditions of a progressive civilization, one exercised in liberty under equal laws.” The Republican Party, acutely aware of the importance of securing votes from the Pacific States in the upcoming election, also adopted an anti-Chinese plank at the Republican National Convention in Cincinnati, which stated that it was “the immediate duty of Congress fully to investigate the effect of the immigration and importation of Mongolians on the moral and material interests of the country.”

102. Gyory, Closing the Gate, 76-77; Los Angeles Daily Herald, June 23, 1876, p. 2, col. 1; Barry, Biographical and Historical Sketch of Philip A. Roach, 35.


Roach’s mission did not proceed without opposition from the Chinese American community. For example, Roach complained to a *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter upon his return to San Francisco that everywhere he traveled and in all his meetings he was presented with a document circulated by the Chinese Six Companies that attempted to refute his anti-Chinese arguments.\textsuperscript{106} However, given America’s racial hierarchy and political framework in conjunction with the realities of Chinese disenfranchisement and inability to more effectively compete in the public sphere, Chinese Americans faced a Sisyphean task of preventing Roach and other exclusionists from having their way. Exacerbating conditions for the Chinese was the emergence of Denis Kearney and the Workingmen’s Party of California.

**Denis Kearney’s Eastern Tour in 1878**

Kearney and the Workingmen’s Party rose to power in the fall of 1877 by tapping into a series of events that beset California in the postbellum era, most notably an economic depression, mass unemployment, influxes of Chinese workers from the west and white workers from the east, and labor unrest from the Great Railroad Strike of 1877.\textsuperscript{107} The promise of the Workingmen’s Party to “rid the country of cheap Chinese labor as soon as possible, and by all means in our power” was an appealing but ultimately hallow panacea for discontented workers’ woes.\textsuperscript{108} Kearney, the president of the Workingmen’s Party, delivered countless speeches in the sandlots of San Francisco promising to bring down the railroads and monopolists, secure an eight-hour day, supplant the Democratic and Republican parties, and rid California of the Chinese. “We have made no secret of our intentions,” Kearney proclaimed, “[b]efore you and the world we declare that the Chinaman must leave our shores. We declared that white men, and women, and boys, and


girls, cannot live as the people of the great republic should and compete with the single Chinese coolie in the labor market…. To an American, death is preferable to life on a par with the Chinaman.” The Workingmen’s Party won one-third of the seats to the California Constitutional Convention (1878-79), which enabled them to insert anti-Chinese clauses in the new constitution. Kearney’s slogan “the Chinese must go!” reverberated around the United States and across international borders. His 1878 eastern tour generated unprecedented national attention to the “Chinese question” and had major repercussions for American immigration policy, domestic politics, race relations, the labor movement, and US-China relations. There is an immense body of historical writing on the significance of Kearney for developments in California but less well understood is Kearney’s role in expanding the anti-Chinese movement beyond California and its ramifications for US immigration policy and American foreign relations with the Qing Empire.

On July 21, 1878, Denis Kearney left California on a four-month visit to dozens of towns and cities east of the Rocky Mountains. Some of the largest audiences in American history turned out to hear Kearney speak and millions more in the United States and internationally learned about him through the innumerable newspapers that printed his name. No figure was more widely associated with the anti-Chinese movement in the United States or the catchphrase “the Chinese must go!” than the “great agitator,” Denis Kearney. When Kearney arrived in Albany on July 28 he told reporters that his “chief mission here is to secure the expulsion of


Chinese labor from California.” This involved visiting the nation’s capital to meet with President Hayes and other influential policymakers to “impress upon them the evils attending the importation of Chinese labor, and urge that remedial measures be taken by the government.”

Organized labor in Massachusetts invited Kearney to speak at Boston’s iconic Faneuil Hall, where labor leaders told Kearney that they were “proud to receive and listen to a truly representative man of thousands, if not millions of our fellow-citizens throughout the land.” Thousands crammed into every inch of Faneuil Hall to hear Kearney speak and thousands more assembled outside. The press reported that it was one of the most dense and extensive gatherings ever to assemble in and around the hall. On the main platform were prominent representatives of labor who turned out to support Kearney. These included Peter J. McGuire, an Irish American union leader and a member of the International Working Men’s Association, who welcomed Kearney on behalf of the workers of New England. McGuire helped organize the Social Democratic Workingmen’s Party of North America and he was a future Secretary of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, a founder of the New York City Central Labor Union, and one of the founders and first Secretary of the American Federation of Labor. Four years later McGuire expressed umbrage at President Arthur’s decision to veto a bill approved by Congress that called for a twenty-year suspension on the immigration of Chinese laborers to the United States. “The people who made the President,” McGuire told workers at a labor rally in Baltimore, “were as much to blame as he for the veto of the Chinese Bill.”

and Boston labor reformers E. M. Chamberlain and Charles McLean. Chamberlain presided over the mass meeting and when he introduced “the ambassador of the workingmen of California” to the workers of Massachusetts, there was a prolonged outburst of applause, cheering, and hats waving in the air. In his speech to the workers of Boston, Kearney critiqued corrupt politicians, the press, and California’s capitalist elite. The latter he scolded for supplanting “honest” white workers with “leprous Chinese” laborers who were brought to California from “the oldest despotism on earth.” For the remainder of Kearney’s eastern tour, he hoped to drive home the message that the Chinese were an inferior and unassimilable race that degraded white workers and threatened their families. “A Chinaman will live on rice and rats (laughter and applause),” Kearney asserted, “and they will sleep one hundred in a room that one white man wants for his wife and for the family (applause).” The committee of prominent labor leaders who received Kearney hoped that he could “overcome the apathy, arouse the manliness, and awaken the conscience of every class of our fellow-citizens.”

Kearney’s speech at America’s oldest city park, Boston Common, elicited greater attention and a more impressive audience. The Boston Daily Globe reported that ten thousand people attended and described it as “a scene which has rarely been equaled in interest and enthusiasm at any gathering on that historic ground.” This address by Kearney is worth exploring in greater detail because much of it he repeated during most of the other speeches he gave during his eastern tour. Kearney informed his audience that “forging the connecting link between the workingmen of the Atlantic and Pacific States” was one of his primary goals,

essentially a national white man’s alliance against Chinese immigration to the United States.\textsuperscript{121} With mostly workers in attendance, Kearney asked them in dramatic fashion to embrace the slogan “[b]y the heavens above and the stars that are in it; by the moon, that pale empress of the night; by the sun that shines by day; by the earth and all its inhabitants, and by hell beneath us, the Chinese must go.” They responded with “tremendous applause” and shouts of “we will.” When Kearney asked them “are the Chinamen to occupy this country or the white man?” they responded with “cries of ‘No!’” and “shouts of ‘we alone.’” When he asked “will you assist us in ridding this country of the moonlight lepers?” they applauded with approval. When the workers were asked those “in favor of the Chinamen” to raise their hands the response was “hisses and no hands” and those “in favor of the white man” elicited “applause and all hands up.”\textsuperscript{122}

Kearney’s eastern tour coincided with the arrival of Chen Lanbin (陳蘭彬) in the United States. Chen, the first Chinese Minister to the United States, Spain, and Peru, was tasked with establishing a Chinese embassy in Washington, DC.\textsuperscript{123} The Qing government hoped that a diplomatic presence would help better protect Chinese immigrants in the United States and attenuate the worst excesses of the anti-Chinese movement. “There need be little doubt that the unsatisfactory position of Chinese emigrants in California,” observed the Hong Kong-based \textit{China Mail}, “has been the main cause of the departure of the mission for Washington.”\textsuperscript{124} When a reporter asked Chen whether “Kearney’s anti-Chinese agitation accomplished much in San Francisco,” he commented that a Chinese diplomatic presence “will have a quieting effect” on

\textsuperscript{121} “Boston Common Speech,” \textit{New York Herald}, August 9, 1878, p. 5, col. 3-4.


\textsuperscript{123} Chen and his retinue arrived in San Francisco on July 26 before traveling east on August 3. They arrived in Hartford on August 10 and at the end of September made their way to Washington, DC. For more on Chen’s trip, see Charles A. Desnoyers, “Self-Strengthening in the New World: A Chinese Envoy’s Travels in America,” \textit{Pacific Historical Review} 60, no. 2 (May 1991): 195-219.

Kearney including his attempts to “banish the Chinese.” One of Chen’s embassy staff also remarked that “these consuls are going to grandly diminish ‘brother Kearney’s’ stock in trade.”

When Chun Shen Yin, the Vice Consul assigned to Cuba, was asked by a reporter if he had heard about Kearney, he replied: “Yes; he makes a great ado, and his temporary success is on account of his uniting two elements—the Communists and the foes of cheap work. He would not only kill the Chinamen, but would also kill the rich men and divide their property.” Chun also believed that the Kearney agitation had a negative impact on US-China relations. “I think it pitiable that anything should arise to interfere with the friendly relations of these two great countries,” Chun opined, and “I do not and cannot for a moment think that this Kearney movement is supported by any but the lowest elements of society, whether East or West.”

In terms of the reception back in China, Chun maintained that the outrages perpetrated against the Chinese in California “are looked upon with feelings of bitter enmity. We feel that our common people are greatly outraged by your ignorant, lazy classes. The hoodlum does not wish to work and maltreats those who are willing to do so.”

The “great agitator” claimed during his Boston Common speech that representatives of the Qing Empire had arrived because “they want to spread the Chinese throughout the United States,” which elicited “hisses and derisive and slanderous epithets” from the crowd. Kearney maintained that 450 million “leprous creatures await the opportunity to deluge this country as bad as the cursed lepers in California.” He alleged that people in China were “starving by the millions,” and accused them of “emitting the most foul odors and breeding pestilence everywhere,” specifically transmitting diseases such as leprosy through their washing of clothes.

As a remedy, Kearney recommended a boycott on Boston’s incipient Chinese laundry industry.

and a ban on the employment of Chinese labor. “Shun them for your own sake, and for the sake of your families,” Kearney advised his audience, “[d]iscourage these lepers, and when you do that you deprive them of making a living.” Following Kearney’s address the “workingmen of Boston” adopted numerous resolutions. “We learn with alarm,” the workers affirmed, “that there has arrived on the western shore of this republic the forerunner of untold millions of a slavish heathen.” More worrisome was not that “this Chinese horde, which for years has been gradually undermining the workingmen of the West,” but that it “seems now about to become more deeply seated” in other parts of America. Echoing Kearney’s concerns, they declared that “the planting in the very heart of the nation at Washington an embassy from this heathen land, with branches in various States and countries on this continent” was an alarming development. Overall, Kearney’s message helped solidify anti-Chinese solidarity among white workers east and west of the Rockies. “In order to show our sympathy and love for our brethren of the West,” resolved the workers and labor leaders, “we earnestly entreat our brethren of the Atlantic Slope to join in the strain that comes over the Sierras from California that watchword, ‘the Chinese must go.’”

When Kearney met with President Hayes at the White House on August 28, where he complained about Chinese immigration to California, Hayes informed him that the issue extended beyond California and was “too great a question for any one State to grapple with.” Significantly, Hayes told Kearney that “I think Congress next winter will come to a definite conclusion favorable to your people on this vexed question.” Moreover, Hayes offered support to Kearney but insisted that the “Chinese question” had to be resolved without unilateral action and in a way that did not cause a major rupture in US-China relations. Accordingly, he commissioned a delegation headed by James B. Angell to proceed to China to revise the Burlingame Treaty, which ultimately opened the way for the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Even


though Kearney attained a promise from the President of the United States to solve the “Chinese question,” the “great agitator” continued to deliver countless anti-Chinese speeches. From the east portico of the Capitol building, the Irish World estimated that Kearney addressed an audience of ten thousand people.\footnote{131} By September, Kearney was boasting before the masses that since leaving San Francisco he had addressed at least one million people.\footnote{132}

Despite Kearney’s repetitive speeches, an immense gathering assembled to hear him speak in New York City’s Union Square. According to the New York Times as many as twenty thousand were present while Kearney and the Irish World estimated forty thousand. Some “old residents” of New York interviewed by a reporter for Chicago’s Daily Inter Ocean claimed that they had not seen such an immense crowd gathered in and around Union Square since the Civil War.\footnote{133} There were “cheers” from the crowd when Kearney told them that workers had “captured the State [of California], and they are going to take care of the Asiatic lepers.”\footnote{134} Resolutions were adopted that included support for California’s workers and their battle-cry that “the Chinese must go.”\footnote{135} Kearney frequently advocated using the bullet over the ballot in California but in his New York speech he stressed the “simple ballot” over the “bullet or the dagger.” Specifically, he informed the crowd that the “Mongolian leper” is “used as a weapon by the grinding, grasping

\footnote{131} “Kearney at the Capitol,” Sun (Baltimore), August 30, 1878, p. 1, col. 5-6; “At the Capitol,” Irish World, September 7, 1878, p. 1.


\footnote{135} “Whoa, Kearney!” Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago), September 7, 1878, p. 3, col. 3-4.
capitalists of California to oppress the poor laboring men of that glorious State” and that workers in the East could “emancipate labor” via the ballot-box.\textsuperscript{136}

Although Kearney’s critics described him as “a laughing stock,” he delivered speeches before thousands of supporters until his departure for California in November.\textsuperscript{137} When Kearney arrived at Independence Square in South Boston on October 6, four thousand people assembled to hear him speak and he was “interrupted only by frequent hearty applause.” Kearney was invited to address the workers of South Boston every Sunday, which he did until he returned to California and all of his resolutions were unanimously adopted.\textsuperscript{138} A \textit{New York Times} editorial pointed out in August 1878 that the “arrival of Mr. Kearney, the distinguished anti-Mongolian agitator, for a tour of proselytism in the East, and the coming of the Chinese Embassy for establishment at Washington, will inevitably bring the Chinese question before this part of the country as it never has been brought before.”\textsuperscript{139} Not long following Kearney’s departure from the East Coast, Congress and the President of the United States took measures that paved the way for the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

\textbf{Defending the “ Stranger Within Our Gates”:}
\textbf{An Irish Shoemakers and the Chinese Struggle for Equality and Civil Rights}

The California Irish were not a monolith in terms of their attitudes, perceptions, and actions toward the Chinese nor were they unified in their stance on how to solve the “Chinese question.” What differentiated Kearney from Roach and most Irish workers, labor leaders, politicians, newspaper editors, and Catholic clergy in California was the means by which they hoped to achieve Chinese exclusion and immigration restriction. Roach and the majority of


\textsuperscript{137} Gyory, \textit{Closing the Gate}, 110 and 290, n. 2.


California Irish championed non-violent measures, whereas Kearney and a minority advocated all means, including violence. While the California Irish were at times the foremost enemies of the Chinese, not all Irish immigrants in California were anti-Chinese. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Patrick Healy was one of the most vocal advocates of Chinese racial equality. Healy worked alongside the Chinese community in California to stave-off or repeal Chinese exclusion. In doing so Healy censured his fellow Irish Americans who, he argued, “as one of the persecuted races, should be found among the last of the peoples of the earth to injure their ‘weaker fellow-worker,’ or to deny them the right of access to this country upon the same conditions that they desire for their own countrymen.”

During a congressional committee investigation held in San Francisco in 1879 on the causes of the Depression of 1873-79 and the effects of Chinese immigration, Healy spoke favorably of the Chinese when asked about probably two of the most controversial aspects of the “Chinese question,” namely suffrage rights and racial amalgamation. When asked about his stance on a hypothetical situation whereby the Chinese were given a vote and political power in California, Healy responded that “I would be willing to treat them the same as any other human beings, and to compete with them on the same conditions. I would be willing to grant them the same privileges as I enjoy myself on the same conditions. I would be willing to grant them the ballot, the safety which was granted to the negro.” After Healy was asked about his position on “a cross between Irish and Mongolians,” his quipped that if this were “their volition I would have nothing to put in the way of it; it would be an admirable cross…. It would produce a race of human beings that would be the terror of the world.”

Healy teamed up with Ng Poon Chew (伍盤照 Wu Panzhao), a prominent Chinese American civil rights activist, community leader,


Presbyterian minister, and editor of the San Francisco daily Chung Sai Yat Po or China West Daily newspaper (中西日報 Zhongxi ribao), to more effectively campaign against Chinese exclusion. Together they published a book titled “a statement for non-exclusion,” which tried to refute several common critiques of Chinese immigrants in the United States.142

Besides advocating civil and political rights for the Chinese, Healy censured his “own country men” for participating in the anti-Chinese movement, “who of all peoples under the sun ought to be the last to join in the persecution of a downtrodden people.” He noted that the Irish faced a nativist backlash on the East Coast during the Know-Nothing movement in the 1850s and now they faced an American Protective Association bent on restricting the immigration of Catholics to the United States. While mid-nineteenth-century nativists warned about “the danger of taking Irish servant girls into their households,” Healy observed, today it was “descendants of those same Irish who were persecuted during the Know-Nothing period” that were advancing similar arguments against the Chinese.143 “Indeed, the Irish, as one of the persecuted races,” Healy remarked, “should not be found among the last of the peoples of the earth to injure their ‘weaker fellow-worker,’ or to deny them the right of access to this country upon the same conditions that they desire for their own countrymen.”144 However, Healy maintained that it was “a notorious fact that the modern crusade against the Chinese is led by men of Irish name if not of Irish birth.” Most culpable in Healy’s view were politicians who fanned anti-Chinese agitation for political gain. For politicians, argued Healy, “the Chinese are a political necessity, they want the


Chinese question to remain in a state of agitation while they are seeking a position in public life. They want to use the Chinese as they have used them for the past 25 years as a stepping stone to public office.” Healy believed that politicians spoke with impunity against the Chinese, the “stranger within our gates,” because of the major “difference between the native of Cork and the native of Canton,” namely the former could naturalize and vote whereas the latter could not. As far as Healy was concerned, anti-Chinese demagogues were not representative of the Irish American community although “they have a following and are to a great extent responsible for the Geary Act” of 1892, which extended the Chinese Exclusion Act for another ten years and required all Chinese in the United States to obtain residential certificates or else face deportation. Li Hongzhang (李鴻章), China’s preeminent late nineteenth-century statesman, echoed the views of Healy when he opined:

We know that the Geary act is due to the influence of the Irish and laboring classes, who wish to monopolize the labor market. The Chinese are their strong rivals and competitors, and they wish to exclude them…. By excluding the Chinese and taking the Irish you get inferior labor and pay superior prices for it. A Chinaman lives a more simple life than an Irishman, and the Irish hate the Chinese because they are possessors of high virtues.

Healy called on politicians to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act and thereby extend justice and equality to all Chinese. “We bar our social and political gates to the Chinese; we exclude them from taking part in our civil life; we deny them their right to education; and then taunt them for being exclusive, and lacking in sympathy for our institutions,” Healy wrote, and described this as “an outrage with only one historical parallel—that of England’s making education a crime in Ireland, and then branding the Irish people as being ignorant, shiftless, and superstitious.”

Appealing to his fellow Irishmen, Healy asked that they give the Chinese “fair


play … if you challenged one of them to a prize fight, you would not ask that he be prevented from training…. Let us place him upon the pedestal of human rights, and admit him to all the privileges and duties of American citizenship.” Racial exclusivism and white supremacy against “a fellow toiler” such as the Chinese, Healy argued, weakened the position of the Irish American workers in their struggle against their Anglo-Saxon and capitalist enemies. Specifically, Healy asserted that “we may be sure that if the Chinaman is now thrust out without protest, the toiler who takes his place will enjoy but little better conditions than those that were enjoyed by the Asiatic…. I would earnestly warn my fellow-countrymen that the trend of what may be called ethnical analysis is to compare and differentiate the qualities of the races that have contributed to the formation of the American nation, to the disadvantage of the Celtic blood.” Moreover, divisions between the Irish and Chinese undermined the Irish nationalist struggle against the British Empire. Healy asked his fellow Irish Americans to unite with the Chinese “in demanding that England resign her claims to Chinese territory and her surveillance of Chinese commerce. Do this, my countrymen, and let me assure you that Fontenoy repeated on Chinese soil would be a greater victory for Home Rule than an explosion in the Tower [of London], or a speech in the House of Commons.”

Judging from a cartoon (fig. 2.4) published in one of Healy’s books, which depicts Healy and a Chinese “coolie” excluded from the United States by a wall with the message “Chinese coolies and anarchists must be kept out,” his decision to defend the Chinese American community and calls for interracial solidarity were unpopular. Even though the Chinese were faced with scaling an insurmountable wall to reach the path of inclusion in the body politic of the United States, Healy continued to advocate on behalf of the Chinese American community and remained one of the few outspoken advocates among the Euro-American populace for Chinese racial equality.

“Ireland is the Only Country the Irishman Does Not Rule”: Irish Americans, the Politics of Chinese Exclusion, and the US-China Relationship

As anti-Chinese agitation progressed from bad to worse in the late 1870s, the Chinese Six Companies, Chinese diplomats, and officials at the upper echelons of the Zongli Yamen challenged the California Irish and complained repeatedly to American government officials that the involvement of Irish immigrants in anti-Chinese phenomena on US soil was detrimental to US-China relations. Denis Kearney, during his eastern tour in 1878, repeatedly claimed that the Chinese Six Companies imported Chinese coolies into the United States on a mass scale. To counter the negative coolie image presented in Kearney’s speeches, which the press circulated nationwide, the Chinese Six Companies decided to take action by issuing a proclamation “to the American people.” Widely disseminated in English-language newspapers, the proclamation asserted that the Chinese Six Companies “are only benevolent associations; that their functions are exactly those of scores of like organizations throughout this free country.” Singling out for
rebuttal the anti-Chinese speeches that Kearney delivered in Boston, the Chinese Six Companies asserted that “we have never, directly or indirectly, as charged at the public meetings recently held in the city of Boston, brought or caused to be brought one of our countrymen to this country under or by any contract in written, oral or otherwise, as slave, coolie, laborer or any capacity, under bond, contract or advance of money.”

148 Prince Gong, in a note to George Seward, stated that he heard “the respectable, educated, and mercantile classes in [California] are kindly disposed towards our people, but that low class Irish and persons of that sort persistently abuse them.” Gong included in his note a list of accusations against the Irish. These included claims that the Irish beat and insulted the Chinese, plundered and burned Chinese dwellings, sent death threats to the Chinese Consul in San Francisco, boycotted Chinese businesses, and threatened capitalists who employed or dared to employ Chinese labor. All of this, Prince Gong maintained, “provoked the gravest fear from myself and the Ministers.”

149

When President Hayes commissioned a delegation to proceed to China to revise the Burlingame Treaty and secure what became known as the Angell Treaty, which opened the way for the eventual passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 by granting the US government the right to “regulate, limit, or suspend,” but not “absolutely prohibit” the immigration of Chinese laborers, the Chinese once again singled out the Irish as culpable. 150 Li Hongzao (李鴻藻) and


149. George F. Seward to the Secretary of State, August 1, 1879, no. 467, enc. 2 (Prince Kung to Mr. Seward, July 31, 1879], Despatches from U.S. Ministers to China, 1843-1906.

Bao Yun (寶鋆), the leading Chinese negotiators, told their American counterparts that “if now because of temporary competition between the Irish and stranger guests a decision is lightly taken to change the policy of the government, contradiction with the Constitution of the United States and existing treaties cannot be avoided.” Li and Bao asserted that there was once a demand for Chinese labor in the United States but because of the Irish, who they described as a powerful and influential race (強族勢盛 Qiang zu shi cheng), there was now a desire that Chinese workers not come to the United States. Li and Bao, in a report summarizing their negotiations, stated that they acquiesced to the Angell Treaty because California Irish partisans (金山埃里士黨人 Jinshan Ailishi dangren) initiated boycotts against the Chinese and fomented anti-Chinese incidents. Li and Bao compared the Irish and Chinese to “water and charcoal” (水炭 shui tan) and that it was this incompatibility that was the main driving force behind the Chinese exclusion movement.

The private diaries of Chinese diplomats suggest that they were genuinely concerned about the threat Irish Americans posed to the interests of Chinese immigrants in the United States and that this necessitated action on the part of the Qing government. Chen Lanbin’s diary, which was shared only with Chinese government officials in China, notes that although there was “no disharmony” between the Chinese and immigrants of various nationalities who differed from the Chinese in language and habits, the same could not be said for the Irish. For example, one of his diary entries from August 1878 reads that “[o]nly the Irish Workingmen’s Party deliberately insults the Chinese…[and their] aim is to rally the support of the entire nation to expel all the Chinese.”

151. The Commissioners to the Secretary of State, October, 11, 1880, no. 6, enc. 2 (Their Excellencies Pao and Li to the Commissioners, October 7, 1880), Despatches from U.S. Ministers to China, 1843-1906.

152. Zongtong and Fenghan, Li Hongzao xiansheng nianpu 李鴻藻先生年譜, 276, 295.

dealing with Irish anti-Chinese opposition that a joke widely circulating among them was that
“Ireland is the only country the Irishman does not rule.”\textsuperscript{154} When Wu Tingfang (伍廷芳), China’s
top diplomat in the United States (1896-1902 and 1907-09), was asked by reporters which
country he would most like to live in, he responded that he would live in Ireland “because Ireland
is the only country in the world where the Irish have no influence.”\textsuperscript{155}

\textbf{Conclusion}

Irish immigrants, in the three decades prior to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act
of 1882, were a major force behind the Chinese exclusion movement in California and they
played a decisive role in nationalizing the anti-Chinese movement in the 1870s. Eugene Casserly
spearheaded California’s successful efforts to deny Chinese immigrants naturalization and
suffrage rights in 1870. The resultant Chinese disenfranchisement hampered their ability to halt
and overturn Chinese exclusion and immigration restriction legislation. Tours east of the Rocky
Mountains by Philip Roach and Denis Kearney in 1876 and 1878, respectively, brought
unprecedented national attention to the “Chinese question,” forced both the Democratic and
Republican parties to adopt anti-Chinese planks in their national political platforms, and resulted
in an abrogation of the Burlingame Treaty. These phenomena paved the way for the passage of
the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and Irish involvement in the anti-Chinese movement directly
caused considerable friction in US-China relations. In the late nineteenth century Irish anti-
Chinese opposition was not confined to California. The East Coast Irish, explored in chapters 3
and 4, proclaimed anti-Chinese solidarity with their West Coast brethren and many Irish workers
and labor leaders were at the forefront of a transnational labor alliance aimed at restricting
Chinese immigration to North America.

\textsuperscript{154} Yan Yongjing, “A Chinaman on our Treatment of China,” \textit{Forum} 14 (September 1892): 85. See also \textquote{A Probable Veto}, \textit{Milwaukee Catholic Citizen}, February 22, 1879, p. 1, col. 4; \textit{Catholic Union
(Buffalo)}, February 19, 1879, p. 4, col. 4-5.

\textsuperscript{155} Elbert Hubbard and Bert Hubbard, \textit{Selected Writings of Elbert Hubbard: His Mintage of
 CHAPTER 3

INTERRACIAL COOPERATION AND RACIAL DIVISION IN THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT DURING THE GILDED AGE: THE IRISH AND CHINESE AS A CASE STUDY

The ink was barely dry on President Chester A. Arthur’s signature approving the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 when Terence V. Powderly, a Catholic Irish American and Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor, denounced the president in a lecture to workers in the city of Wheeling, West Virginia. Powderly maintained that the Chinese Exclusion Act was “as bad as the other” more stringent bill approved by Congress but vetoed by Arthur the month prior, which proposed a twenty-year suspension on the immigration of Chinese laborers to the United States. For Powderly, anything short of permanent Chinese exclusion was a defeat for the labor movement and he told his audience that any politician who countenanced the landing of Chinese on United States soil “says slavery is and should be a part of our government.” West of the Rocky Mountains labor was “trod upon” because of the Chinese, Powderly asserted, “and we feel it in the east” also. The labor leaders and workers assembled agreed. The local newspaper, the Wheeling Register, reported that Powderly “sat down in the midst of the greatest applause” after he concluded his speech and “those who attended were very well pleased and satisfied.”¹

This was not the first or last occasion that Powderly advocated Chinese exclusion in his capacity as leader of the largest organization of workers in nineteenth-century North America.² In 1879, the year Powderly assumed the position of Grand Master Workman, he advised workers in a letter printed in The Trades, a Philadelphia-based labor journal, to discuss and organize around six primary issues including “Chinese labor.” This letter, at the “urgent request” of workers and

¹. The Chinese Exclusion Act was approved on May 6. Powderly delivered his Wheeling lecture on May 8. See “Organized Labor,” Wheeling Register (West Virginia), May 9, 1882, p. 4, col. 3.
labor leaders, was reprinted in the Journal of United Labor, the official organ of the Knights of Labor. The following year, at the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor held in Pittsburgh, delegates approved the following resolution:

**Resolved,** That all members of the Order oppose Chinese coolie importation of whatever form, and it shall be their duty to withdraw all patronage from said class and the employers of them. It shall also be the duty of all brothers to exact a pledge from their representatives to Congress that they will do all that lies in their power to secure the abrogation of the Burlingame Treaty.

All of the Knights of Labor District Assembly (DA) delegates and all but one of the Local Assembly (LA) delegates who endorsed this resolution resided in states east of the Rockies. The sole delegate from the west was Peter Bell, who represented Sacramento’s LA 855 and San Francisco’s LA 1390. The Chinese exclusion resolution, introduced by Bell and approved by delegates from the east, called for not only a halt to “Chinese coolie importation” and a boycott of Chinese workers and their employers but also a cessation of Chinese immigration since article five of the Burlingame Treaty granted the Chinese “free migration and emigration” to the United States. After the Knights of Labor lobbied members of Congress to modify the Burlingame Treaty and pass the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, it campaigned for more stringent Chinese immigration restriction legislation until the Chinese Exclusion Act was made permanent in 1904.

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5. Ibid., 166-67.


7. For more on efforts by the Knights of Labor to lobby Congress for Chinese exclusion legislation, see Nicholas A. Somma, “The Knights of Labor and Chinese Immigration” (master’s thesis, Catholic University of America, 1952), 32-37. Other examples of Powderly and “the Knights of Labor of the whole country” agitating for more stringent Chinese immigration restriction legislation include “To the Knights of Labor,” *New Haven Evening Register* (Connecticut), December 29, 1885, p. 1, col. 6.
Despite evidence that organized labor east and west of the Rockies championed Chinese exclusion in addition to a long-standing consensus among labor historians that most trade union leaders and workers nationwide favored Chinese exclusion, recent scholarship by Andrew Gyory and Robert Weir argues otherwise. Gyory maintains that “most workers evinced little interest in Chinese exclusion” and the national labor movement as a force behind the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act was “nonexistent.” Furthermore, he asserts that “the great majority of workers” east of the Rockies “welcomed Chinese immigrants to America.” Similarly, Weir, in his analysis of the relationship between the Knights of Labor and Chinese exclusion, writes that “[t]he further east one traveled from the Rocky Mountains, the less anti-Chinese campaigns mattered to Knights as more than a mere rhetorical ploy.”

The contrasting interpretations over organized labor’s role in the anti-Chinese movement are part of a broader debate on the degree of interracial unionism in the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Scholars such as Herbert Hill, Gwendolyn Mink, David Roediger, and Alexander Saxton underscore the prevalence of white working-class racism as an obstacle to a united and effective labor movement whereas others such as Herbert Gutman, Eric Arnesen, Alex Lichtenstein, and Daniel Letwin, whose work is more in tune with that of Gyory and Weir, emphasize worker solidarity across racial lines.


Chapter 3 contributes to this debate by examining the nature and extent of Irish labor solidarity with the Chinese. In contrast to the findings of Gyory and Weir, this chapter argues that many Irish workers and labor leaders east of the Rockies did not welcome Chinese immigrants to the United States, they lobbied for Chinese exclusion between the 1870s and the early twentieth century, and expressed anti-Chinese solidarity with white workers and labor leaders who resided west of the Rocky Mountains. The relationship between organized labor and the anti-Chinese movement in the United States cannot be understood without the Irish, who dominated the leadership of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century national labor movement. A few examples underscore the powerful influence Irish Americans exerted on the labor movement from the 1870s through the early twentieth century. They held key leadership positions and were overrepresented in the rank-and-file membership of the KOSC, a union of boot and shoe workers that was one of the largest labor organizations in nineteenth-century North America.

Approximately one-third of the employees who participated in the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, the first nationwide strike in US history, were Irish. After Terence Powderly assumed the position of Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor, its leadership was mostly in the hands of Irish Americans and by 1884 approximately half of the Knight’s membership was


Catholic, most of who were likely Irish American.\textsuperscript{13} By 1900 Irish Americans presided over more than 50 of the 110 unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, which was the largest organization of workers in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{14}

Given Irish involvement in the Chinese exclusion movement and their centrality to the study of unionism and the working-class in the United States, assertions that the national labor movement was devoid of involvement in the campaign for Chinese immigration restriction, that the majority of workers were disinterested in Chinese exclusion, or that opposition toward the Chinese from the East Coast Knights of Labor was mere rhetoric are in need of reexamination. In saying this, claims that Irish American workers and union leaders were irreconcilably racist toward the Chinese also require modification. Competition and racial conflict largely defined Irish and Chinese relations but on rare occasions there was labor cooperation between both groups, which suggests that greater interracial unionism was a possibility in the United States during the Gilded Age.

**Irish Americans and the “Chinese Question” in North Adams**

In June 1870, debate over the “Chinese question” was thrust into the national spotlight when Calvin T. Sampson, a shoe manufacturer in North Adams, Massachusetts, brought seventy-five Chinese from California to break a strike at his factory led by members of a local KOSC lodge.\textsuperscript{15} Described by one East Coast newspaper as “a historical event of much importance,” it was the first time in US history that the Chinese served as strikebreakers for an industrialist


\textsuperscript{14} Blessing, “Irish,” 538; Montgomery, “The Irish and the American Labor Movement,” 206.

located in the Northeast.\textsuperscript{16} “The question which yesterday was the question of California and the West” wrote the \textit{New York World}, “is to-day the question of Massachusetts and the East.”\textsuperscript{17} In New England and surrounding regions, it caused a sensation among workers and union leaders and for some prominent champions of labor such as journalist John Swinton, it became “the living question of the hour.”\textsuperscript{18}

At the heart of these events were Irish workers and labor leaders. That the first large group of Chinese to arrive at a worksite in the industrial heartland of the United States did so as strikebreakers did not bode well for future relations between the Chinese and their primary competitor in the Gilded Age labor market, namely, Irish Americans. Alexander Saxton’s research shows that the Chinese were an “indispensable enemy” for the labor movement in California because anti-Chinese racial sentiment unified white workers and labor leaders divided along the lines of nationality, skill, and religion.\textsuperscript{19} The arrival of Chinese in Massachusetts engendered a similar set of circumstances whereby the Irish aligned themselves with other white ethnic groups in opposition to the Chinese and industrial capitalism. Irish Americans dominated the rank-and-file membership of the KOSC but the workers who went on strike at Sampson’s shoe factory were of Irish, French Canadian, and American-born background.\textsuperscript{20} In an interview with a \textit{New York World} correspondent, Sampson stated that most of the strikers were French Canadian in addition to “some five or six Irish, and two or three Americans.”\textsuperscript{21} Whatever the proportions in terms of nationality, this group of multi-ethnic white workers aligned themselves

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} “John Chinaman,” \textit{Sentinel of Freedom} (Newark, NJ), June 28, 1870, p. 1, col. 2.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Saxton, \textit{The Indispensable Enemy}.
\item \textsuperscript{20} By 1870, the KOSC was an international organization with lodges in the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec.
\item \textsuperscript{21} “Interviews with the Pioneer Importer of the Chinese,” \textit{New York World}, June 21, 1870, p. 7, col. 3-5.
\end{itemize}
in opposition to Chinese strikebreakers and as a further act of racial exclusivism and defiance against capital, thirty-one of them formed their own shoe factory just “a few rods beyond Mr. Sampon’s factory.” Formally known as the “North Adams Cooperative Shoe Company. Manufacturers of Women’s, Misses’ and Children’s Shoes,” it was one of hundreds of cooperatives established by the KOSC in North America as a strategy for dealing with rapid industrialization in the wake of the Civil War.

Although the anti-Catholic press in Massachusetts such as the *Boston Daily Advertiser* claimed that New Englanders extended a “hearty welcome” to the newly arrived Chinese in North Adams whereas “emigrants from the other side of the world, Frenchmen and Irish men and women, regarded the spectacle with bitter anger and disgust, and breathe horrible threats which they do not dare to execute,” many American-born workers were equally indignant. The North Adams Shoe Company’s Irish, French Canadian, and New Englander membership is further evidence that the strikers at Sampson’s factory were of a diverse ethnic and national makeup and that they forged a white worker alliance in opposition to Chinese strikebreakers. One among five of the “directors” listed on the cooperative’s business card in 1870 was an Irishman named Timothy Riordan, who became a shoe dealer in North Adams after the cooperative disbanded in the early 1870s, and the other surnames indicate its diverse ethnic makeup, namely Wood, Gregson, Tyler, and Legro. Conflict and tension between Irish and French Canadian immigrants was common in nineteenth-century America and both groups experienced nativist attacks. However, when Chinese workers appeared in North Adams the Catholic Irish and French


23. Ibid. The Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor reports that the company was organized on June 21, 1870, and chartered on July 13, 1870. See the *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor*, March 1886 (Boston: Wright and Porter, 1886), 192-93.


Canadian immigrants along with American-born workers put aside their differences and united in opposition to Chinese strikebreakers. Hostility toward the Chinese scabs was both racially and economically motivated. Ethnically diverse, albeit racially exclusive, it is possible that this anti-Chinese alliance also cut across gender lines. Shares for the North Adams Shoe Company were listed under the names of male shoe workers but many had families and their female spouses or relatives worked at this cooperative.  

Some scholars claim that the Crispins or Irish workers strove to organize the Chinese strikebreakers into their union but they provide scant evidence of a genuine and concerted attempt to mobilize across racial lines. Organizing the Chinese into the KOSC was a possibility, however, since Chinese workers were not averse to going on strike and they shared many of the same goals advanced by labor unions dominated by white workers. For example, in June 1867 thousands of Chinese working on the CPRR engaged in one of the largest strikes in nineteenth-century US history when they walked off the job demanding higher wages, better work conditions, and basically comparable labor standards and rights as those granted to white railroad workers. Other factors such as the language-barrier could have been surmounted given that there were numerous instances when, for example, Irish and German-speaking immigrant workers were affiliated with the same trade unions or cooperated with each other in the workplace to further their goals. Ultimately, however, an interracial worker alliance never


materialized. A list of lodges and addresses for the KOSC dated December 1, 1870, indicate that there were no Chinese members in North Adams or anywhere else.29

Soon after the Chinese arrived at Sampson’s factory, anti-Chinese rallies organized and attended by Irish workers and labor leaders broke out in numerous towns and cities on the East Coast. Irish Americans nationwide, especially those affiliated with the KOSC, rallied behind the striking workers in North Adams and expressed hostility toward the Chinese with racially charged rhetoric. In Marlborough, “one of the great shoe-towns of Central Massachusetts” and where Irish Americans dominated the local KOSC lodge, Patrick O’Brien expressed “much bitterness” at the Chinese presence in North Adams. O’Brien, one of many Irish shoemakers on a concurrent strike at Lewis A. Howe’s local shoe factory, characterized the Chinese as “ignorant slaves” and expressed confidence that votes cast by his fellow KOSC workers at the next election would “see the end of the iniquity.”30

Irish American labor leaders echoed the Sinophobic albeit non-violent stance of Irish workers such as O’Brien. The vast majority of Irish on the East Coast favored non-violent measures to solve the “Chinese question” whereas only a small minority endorsed or perpetrated violence. At a meeting held under the auspices of the Massachusetts Grand Lodge of the KOSC at the Tremont Temple in Boston, Irish American William J. McLaughlin, the International Grand Sir Knight, clarified the Knight’s principles amid circulating reports that the Crispins advocated or engaged in acts of violence. He asserted that the official stance of the organization was to do everything in its power to deal with the situation in a peaceful manner. McLaughlin and the other roughly two hundred KOSC members in attendance endorsed several anti-Chinese resolutions including a call to all workers to lobby their state government and Congress to support “the side of labor as against attempts of capital to degrade and impoverish it.” Labeling Chinese workers


“ignorant tools in the hands of oppressive capitalists,” McLaughlin maintained that the KOSC objected to the Chinese because, unlike Irish and German immigrants, they came to the United States “for the express purpose of degrading labor and enriching capital.” Although the Crispins resolved that their union “knows no distinction of race and color,” these color-blind and egalitarian principles did not apply to the Chinese because they were considered racially inferior and outside the boundaries of national belonging. For example, one resolution opposed the “attempt to crush the Crispin Order by introducing for that purpose a class of servile laborers from Asia who cannot become permanent citizens of this country, and who do not aid by their labor and such intelligence as they may possess in developing its permanent resources.”

Gyory maintains that workers and labor leaders distinguished between voluntary Chinese immigration and the importation of Chinese contract labor, welcoming the former and opposing the latter. However, the resolutions adopted at anti-Chinese demonstrations in the early 1870s reveal a more complicated picture. At the KOSC meeting held in Tremont Temple, the resolutions were explicitly hostile to Chinese laborers who voluntarily immigrated to the United States and consented to work in conditions deemed unacceptable to white workers and labor leaders. For example, one resolution read that the Chinese, “ignorant of the value of labor, accept conditions unjust alike to them and to us.”

Chinese “coolies” and Chinese labor were terms used synonymously by numerous Irish in the United States. “In China the third or lowest class of society is composed of chair bearers and earth diggers. These are called ‘coolies,’ or ‘low laborers,’” Powderly wrote in his autobiography, and “only that class of Chinamen are imported


32. Gyory, Closing the Gate, passim.


34. John Tchen also notes that for capitalists “the terms coolie and Chinese labor were interchangeable.” See Tchen, New York Before Chinatown, 173.
or come into competition with American workmen.”

On the rare occasions when Irish Americans invoked clear-cut distinctions between voluntary immigration and imported contract labor, the Chinese were nonetheless cast as an inferior race, which diminished the prospects of interracial unionism.

The presence of Chinese immigrants on the East Coast or the specter of additional Chinese migration to towns and cities east of the Rockies helped unify and arouse a divided white working-class. One reporter for the Boston Press and Post noted that the appearance of many posters on the streets of Boston including one “bearing a rude caricature of a Chinaman with a pigtail dragging on the ground, and a bamboo slung across his shoulder” with rats attached to it, signaled that an anti-Chinese meeting was due to take place at the Tremont Temple. At the meeting McLaughlin observed that the “introduction of Coolies was of immense advantage and unified all the workmen” and another speaker, S. B. Ramsdell, noted that workers on the East Coast were apathetic toward the labor movement and what they needed was “to be tickled on the nose by the Chinese pig-tail to wake them up.” Images of the “pigtail” and “coolie” were to the Chinese what representations of the shillelagh and bottle of whiskey were to the Irish, essentially derogatory connotations, markers of difference, and symbols of inferiority.

One of the largest anti-Chinese rallies on the East Coast was held in New York’s Tompkins Square Park on June 30, 1870. Workers and labor leaders affiliated with many of New York’s trade unions attended and they were far from apathetic about the “Chinese question” based on the resolutions they adopted. The campaign for Chinese immigration restriction was at least as much of a bottom-up movement as it was a top-down one orchestrated by politicians.

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judging from the thousands of workers who turned out to demonstrate in several towns and cities scattered along the East Coast. Prior to the Tompkins Square Park demonstration, New York’s labor unions sent a petition to Congress requesting legislation “protecting American labor against this threatened fearful competition from China.” After the rally at Tompkins Square Park these unions sent additional petitions to the nation’s capital calling on the federal government to introduce Chinese immigration restriction laws.38

The anti-Chinese demonstration in New York is further evidence that the “Chinese question” united white workers divided along the lines of skill and ethnicity. There were three platforms erected, one for German speakers and the other two for English speakers including Irish immigrants. James O’Brien, the Irish-born Sheriff of the city and county of New York and a former New York City alderman, provided the president of the Workingmen’s Union, Nelson W. Young, with funds necessary to hold the anti-Chinese demonstration.39 On the main rostrum with O’Brien, Young, and New York Mayor A. Oakey Hall stood the Irish-born Fenian shoemaker Thomas Masterson, who was recording secretary for both the Workingmen’s Union and a local lodge of the KOSC.40 Masterson read numerous resolutions that were “adapted without opposition” by the workers and labor leaders at the rally. They denounced the “arbitrary and forced importation of the lowest and most degraded of the Chinese barbaric race.” Furthermore, they fulminated against “the degraded labor of Asia, and by such association and competition debase our manhood, destroy our morals, and prostitute our virtues by witnessing the horrors of servility, sodomy, and social degradation, the natural result of labor without remuneration and


licentiousness without limit.” Mayor Hall endorsed John Swinton’s *New York Tribune* editorial calling on Congress to restrict Chinese immigration, otherwise “this would become a question of *roast rat against roast beef*.” Hall also noted that

> Mr. Swinton went on to indicate, as I think logically—and conclusively—because it was logical—by reasons of considerations growing out of race, growing out of industry, growing out of politics, growing out of morality...what was the duty of the American government—his proposition being not to prohibit immigration, but to regulate it. (Applause.) And it is to-day in the power of the United States government to regulate these kinds of beginning of Chinese slave labor immigration. (Applause.)

This is one example of support for race-based Chinese immigration restriction legislation and the tendency to equate Chinese “slave labor” with Chinese workers who voluntarily immigrated to the United States. The negative images of the Chinese as servile “coolies” and rat eaters reinforced the idea that the Chinese were racially inferior and threats to the moral, social, and economic well being of white workers and partially explains why many Irish workers on the East Coast opposed Chinese immigration to the United States. The anti-Chinese resolutions, which were signed on behalf of the workers of New York City, were afterwards forwarded to members of Congress and the President of the United States.

On the other English-speaking rostrum, which was presided over by James Connolly of the Practical Painters’ Union of New York City, similar resolutions were adopted including warnings to members of Congress that they would lose the workingman’s vote at the next election if they did not resolve the “Chinese question.” John R. Hennessy, the Irish-born Democratic member of the New York State Assembly, who represented the 14th District, remarked that “I have not come here to agitate you to violence, but the time has come when all, be they plasterers, painters, printers, tailors, or otherwise, must organize into one body and

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oppose these pigtails.” While some of the speakers on the German-speaking rostrum made
distinctions between “voluntary immigration” and the “importation of coolies,” the Chinese were
nonetheless portrayed as a racial “other” and assigned essentialized negative cultural traits. Labor
leader Adolph Douai, editor of New York’s German-language working-class newspaper, the
Arbeiter-Union, proclaimed that the Chinese people “were accustomed for thousands of years to
work the lowest possible wages.” It was European workers who built the United States, Douai
furthermore argued, and “the civilization created by the white race in this country was
endangered” because of “the importation of these coolies.”

Most Irish who immigrated to the United States in the aftermath of the Great Famine of
the 1840s had functional literacy in the English language and the Irish American press was an
important source of information including knowledge of the “New World” racial hierarchy that
they were forced to grapple with. Largely ignorant about other racial groups, the information
generated in these newspapers therefore helped shape Irish immigrants’ stance toward the
Chinese. Irish American newspapers repeatedly misrepresented the Chinese in the United States
as “coolie” and “slave” labor, in other words “unfree” laborers not unlike African American
slaves. As previously mentioned, however, the majority of Chinese who came to the United
States did so under the credit-ticket system, which was a form of voluntary immigration. Many
Chinese self-funded or had family and friends assist with the cost of passage to the United States,
which was not unlike the process whereby millions of Irish immigrants were able to fund their
transatlantic journeys in the second half of the nineteenth century. The propensity of the Irish
American press to mischaracterize Chinese workers as equivalent to slave labor and claim that

44. “The Voice of Free Labor,” Sun (NY), July 1, 1870, p. 1, col. 1-3. For more on Hennessy, see
H. H. Boone and Theodore P. Cook, Life Sketches of Executive Officers, and Members of the Legislature of

that provides an in-depth analysis of the German American position on the “Chinese question.”

without immigration restriction they would overrun urban areas east of the Rockies, undermine wages and standards of living, or supplant white workers in the labor market, undermined the prospect of solidarity between Irish and Chinese workers.

An early example of misrepresentations of the Chinese appeared in one of the most widely read Irish American newspapers, the *Irish-American*, which condemned Sampson’s use of Chinese strikebreakers in North Adams. It proclaimed that the goal of New England industrialists was “not the elevation of labor, but its degradation” by introducing a race that originated from “the teeming population of a country that has never added an iota to the advancement of humanity.” Describing the situation as “hordes of Asiatic heathen slaves” being pitted by capitalists “against the free white workmen of American,” the *Irish-American* warned its readers that they would struggle to receive fair wages and maintain a family in the face of competition from Chinese “slave labor.”

Given the importance of the Irish American press as a source of information to many of the newly arrived Irish immigrants to the United States, those who read this editorial likely learned or drew confirmation from it that the Chinese were unfree and a racially inferior “other,” which attenuated the prospects for greater interracial class cooperation and intercultural understanding.

Newspapers helped shape the East Coast Irish position on the “Chinese question” but so too did one of the most influential institutions in the life of Irish Americans, the Catholic Church. There is a considerable body of scholarship on the stance of the Catholic Church and wider Irish American community toward African Americans and the issue of abolitionism but less so for Chinese immigrants and the “Chinese question.” Diocesan newspapers are one important window into the Catholic Church’s position on the anti-Chinese movement in the United States. The *New York Freeman’s Journal and Catholic Register*, an official organ of the Catholic Church


in New York City that championed Ireland’s independence struggles against the British Empire and was widely read by pro-Tammany Hall Catholic Irish Americans, sided with the striking Crispins and underscored the dangers of another East Coast “Chinese invasion.” James McMaster, the proprietor and editor of the *New York Freeman’s Journal and Catholic Register*, wrote in one editorial that a further influx of Chinese migration to the East Coast would “crush the white laboring people down to the level of the meanest of the brute creation.” In order to avert this scenario, McMaster enjoined his readers to “hurl the allies of the Pagan Chinese against the European Christians” out of power by supporting the Democratic Party. Otherwise, he warned, the “outraged white laboring classes” would settle the matter via “armed resistance.” Many within the Irish American community labeled the Chinese as “coolies” or compared them with black slaves whereas McMaster went so far as to argue that “coolie” labor was “slavery in its most repulsive form.”

Equating Chinese immigrants with a new and more iniquitous form of slavery only served to reinforce the racial divide between Irish and Chinese workers and undermined the potential for genuine working-class solidarity.

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century some Anglo-Americans drew parallels between the Irish and Chinese including suggestions that the latter were no less desirable than the former as immigrants to the United States. Comparisons between both groups appeared in a variety of mediums such as newspaper editorials, political cartoons, sermons, and lectures, which elicited remonstrations from Irish Americans. A prominent example was Henry Ward Beecher, probably the most famous Protestant clergyman in the United States between the 1850s and the 1880s. In the wake of the arrival of Chinese strikebreakers in North Adams, Beecher delivered an address at the annual meeting of the American Missionary Association in Lawrence, Massachusetts, where he stated that when “on the western side the soft knock of the timid and quiet Oriental was heard. Immediately all Ireland on the east protests against emigration on the

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west…. if the country could stand the Irish, it could stand the Chinese.”50 He expressed similar sentiments throughout the 1870s and 1880s. In a sermon delivered at Plymouth Church in Brooklyn three days after Congress passed a bill that suspended Chinese immigration for twenty years, Beecher told his assembled congregation that “it is just because the Chinese are industrious and know how to live on less than their mortal enemies, the Irish, that they have brought against themselves this Irish tirade—this abuse which has been poured upon them in our Fool Congress.”51 Another example was the anti-Catholic press in Massachusetts. “In point of all those fruits which are the best and all-sufficient proof of social elevation or degradation,” wrote the Congregationalist and Boston Recorder, “surely the Chinese who come here will nobly stand comparison with the Irish.”52

Characteristic of widespread attempts by the Catholic Church and the wider Irish American community to reject these comparisons was an editorial in the Catholic, the official newspaper of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Established by Michael O’Connor, who was born in Cobh, County Cork, Ireland, and served as the first bishop of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, the Catholic circulated among a predominantly Catholic Irish American readership. “The parallel so commonly drawn between the Chinese and other immigrants,” wrote one editorial, “is hardly a fair one.” Trumpeting the common “sojourner” complaint aimed at the Chinese, the editorial stated that although most Irish or other European immigrants came to the United States with the intention of becoming permanent residents and acquiring citizenship, the goal of Chinese immigrants was to acquire wealth and return to China. While European immigrants “have an interest in the country; its prosperity is their prosperity; its peril their peril. Not so the Chinese.” Claiming that the Chinese were “willing to work for little more than one-fourth of what white operatives expect and consider necessary for the support of their families,”

the editorialist asked readers to consider “how is white labor to compete with theirs?” Interracial unionism was unlikely, the editorial furthermore maintained, because “the Celestial operatives keep apart, and will not be readily, if at all, drawn into any of our trades unions.” Although the editorial described the Chinese as “vastly superior to the negro” and viewed the United States as “an asylum for oppressed people from all races and nations,” these ideals did not apply to the Chinese. “If there be any people under the sun that we could … forbid to take up their abode amongst us,” proclaimed the editorialist, “they are the Chinese.” Additionally, the editorial maintained that the Chinese posed a moral and social threat, specifically that their “sojourn among us cannot contribute much to the morality of our people. They are Pagans and bring with them their idols and superstitions.”

The Boston Pilot, the official newspaper of the Archdiocese of Boston and described as “the Irish Bible” because of its popularity among Irish Americans in the nineteenth century including over 100,000 subscribers in the early 1870s, offered a more ambivalent assessment of the Chinese. One editorial maintained that it was the right of people all over the world to immigrate to the United States including “the Mongol, the Tartar, the Hindoo, or any other pagan” but drew a line between voluntary and involuntary immigration when it stated that “the rightful object for hostility is, not the Chinese immigration, but Chinese importation under the Coolie and contract systems.” However, the Chinese were presented as racially inferior and characterized in a way hardly conducive to labor solidarity or more harmonious interracial relations. The editorial described the Chinese as “immigrants from a pagan country” who do “not evince that interest in our laws and institutions which should characterize a good citizen.” In contrast to the New York Freeman’s Journal and Catholic Register, however, the Pilot ranked

53. “Chinese Immigration,” Catholic (Pittsburgh), July 30, 1870, p. 188, col. 4-5.

Chinese immigrants as racially superior to African Americans. “Degraded and ignorant the Chinaman may be, and doubtless is in China,” continued the editorial, he “cannot remain to the end a ‘degraded pagan.’ His intelligent observation of our civilization will elevate him and probably Christianize him.” Although the Pilot may have tolerated voluntary Chinese immigration in the immediate aftermath of the arrival of Chinese workers in North Adams, over the course of the 1870s it emerged as one of the most anti-Chinese newspapers on the East Coast and campaigned vigorously for Chinese immigration restriction.

**Gender, Conflict, and Cooperation: Irish and Chinese Workers in New Jersey**

Calvin Sampson’s experiment with Chinese labor emboldened other industrialists on the East Coast to do likewise. James B. Hervey brought sixty-eight Chinese from California to work at his Passaic Steam Laundry factory in Belleville, New Jersey, where he employed a predominantly Irish female immigrant workforce. Located roughly three miles north of Newark, Hervey’s factory was situated on the banks of the Passaic River opposite the town of Belleville. In an attempt to avert a North Adams-style disturbance, the Chinese arrived during nighttime on September 20, 1870. While Irish men in Belleville and surrounding environs expressed hostility toward the Chinese, the events that unfolded inside Hervey’s factory suggest that alternative paths were possible for Irish and Chinese workers beyond the racial hostility that largely defined their relations in the United States during the Gilded Age.

Soon after the Chinese arrived at Belleville, forty out of the eighty-six Irish women employed in Hervey’s factory walked off the job in protest. However, according to Hervey and newspaper reports, many returned to work within a week and it was not long before the Irish women and Chinese men established a cooperative work relationship. Although the Irish and Chinese living quarters at Hervey’s factory compound were segregated, in the workplace there


was close contact between both groups. Journalists who visited Hervey’s factory reported that Irish women, in the capacity of “instructress” and “matrons,” worked side by side with the Chinese and taught them the art of ironing. In a description of one Irish woman’s interactions with the Chinese in the ironing room, the journalist noticed that “she went from one to the other of her pupils, pointing out failures, encouraging one and correcting another.” An illustration (fig. 3.1) that appeared in the women’s magazine *Hearth and Home* captures this “ironing lesson.” Another reporter, who also saw Irish women instruct Chinese men on how to use a flat iron, remarked that they “observed a few smiles and pleasant nods exchanges, which would indicate a certain companionability in spite of the obstacles of race.” 57 More intimate encounters between

![Figure 3.1. “An Ironing Lesson.” “John Chinaman in the Laundry,” *Hearth and Home* 2, no. 47 (November 12, 1870): 745.](image)

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the Irish women and Chinese men may have transpired. When one Irish woman employed at Hervey’s factory departed by train for a new job in New York she was followed by Nimba-Shang, one of the Chinese workers at the factory. She is reported to have said that he “fell desperately in love with her.” However, because he “would not let her alone” and “persisted in his attentions to her” on the train to New York, she had him arrested by the police.58

Given the widespread opposition of East Coast Irish American workers, labor leaders, newspapers, and Catholic clergy toward the Chinese, this begs the question of why there was cooperation between the Irish and Chinese at Hervey’s factory and perhaps more intimate encounters. It is a difficult question to answer in this instance because the workers left little surviving evidence for posterity. Hervey informed reporters who visited his factory that he traveled to New York to recruit newly arrived Irish female immigrants, most of whom were young and single. Considering that many came of age in the wake of the Great Famine and were likely destitute, material security and survival may have trumped whatever racial prejudices they may have harbored toward the Chinese. In saying this, because many were recent arrivals and relatively isolated at Hervey’s factory compound, they may not have had the opportunity to become fully attuned with America’s racial hierarchy. Furthermore, unlike the Irish shoe workers in New England, the Irish women at Hervey’s factory were not affiliated with a labor union when the Chinese first arrived at Belleville, which may have otherwise hindered collaboration across racial lines. Given the case of Nimba-Shang, the desire for love or affection may also have been a factor. Another significant detail is that the Irish women and Chinese men at Hervey’s factory received equal compensation for their work and the former were elevated to leadership and authority roles over the latter. Additionally, as one Irish worker was reported to have said, they

were able to instruct the Chinese on how “to wash and iron in a Christian way.”

Although the Chinese at Hervey’s factory were not coolie labor and worked for payment equal to that of the Irish women, what followed in the aftermath of their arrival in Belleville were protests, indignation meetings, and racial violence. In the nineteenth century instances of Chinese men and Irish women crossing racial boundaries generated Irish male hostility. As the New York Evening Post reported, “Irish laborers in the neighborhood regard the innovation with anything but friendly eyes.” One of Hervey’s workers informed a reporter that she and her fellow female Irish workers “need not care for the Belleville boys; they could get along without them,” which suggests that the decision to remain as workers at a factory staffed with Chinese workers meant disassociating themselves from certain Irish men in the community. This was particularly the case with a contingent of Irish navvies working on the nearby Midland Railway, who threatened the Chinese with violence and to burn down Hervey’s factory. “It is probable that if the girls had been uninfluenced by their male relatives outside the laundry,” observed the Congregationalist and Boston Recorder, “very few, if any, would have left their places.”

A letter to Captain Hervey, which was dated September 21, 1870, stated that a committee of five was appointed to ensure that “if those Chinamen are not off your premises [by October 1] we will murder you or hosoever [sic] superintend them.” Although one Belleville local


informed a New Jersey Evening Journal reporter that “the Irish don’t like it, and threaten vengeance, but the other people don’t seem to be much worried” and an editorial in the Evening Journal remarked that the Democratic Party hoped to make “political capital by exciting the prejudices of the Irish laboring classes,” the animosity directed toward the Chinese was not exclusively Irish. A multi-ethnic group of locals staged an anti-Chinese rally outside the Mansion House in Belleville, where a “large crowd” assembled and a number of speakers were invited to speak. Michael Kinney, Counsel for the Board of Aldermen of Newark, and Colonel Philip Rafferty, a Democratic candidate for Congress from the Fourth District of New Jersey, strongly denounced the use of “cheap” Chinese labor and endorsed Chinese exclusion. Voting for the Democratic Party at the next election, they maintained, would resolve the “Chinese question.” Dr. M. H. C. Vail, a speaker from Newark, also championed Chinese exclusion. While immigrants from Europe came to the United States voluntarily and assimilated, Vail argued, “these Chinese are not freemen, but come here as quasi slaves. They don’t come here as the Irish and others do, to strike from the shoulder in their own behalf.”

The anti-Chinese agitation eventually abated and the relative protection afforded the Chinese in Hervey’s factory quarters, which was heavily guarded and surrounded by a wall and newly installed protective fence, meant that the threats of violence never came to pass. However, when the Chinese left the factory grounds to attend Sunday school and worship, which was organized for them by “some benevolent citizens and Christian men in Belleville,” they left


themselves open to attack. As the Chinese were returning to Hervey’s factory from school one Sunday evening, according to newspapers, a “big battle” erupted between them and Irish navvies. Described as a “War of the Races,” a journalist reported that “a volley of missiles was hurled” in the direction of the Chinese. Although one Chinese worker sustained a serious injury, the others were able to repulse their attackers with the aid of revolvers and ammunition that were bought on a recent trip to New Jersey. This is a further example of how the Chinese were not mere victims in the face of violence directed at them by Irish workers but rather were willing and able to use force in self-defense. A cartoon (fig. 3.2) that appeared in the Canadian Illustrated News vividly captures the sinister and violent side to the anti-Chinese movement in the United States. A stereotypical Irish male is depicted grasping the queue of, and striking with a stick, a Chinese shoemaker while Uncle Sam and a stereotypical German male also brandish sticks. Sarcastically titled “Free Labour in the United States,” the cartoon reinforces the idea that the “Chinese question” unified a diverse Euro-American white working-class in opposition to Chinese labor.

![Figure 3.2. “Free Labour in the United States.” From: Canadian Illustrated News, October 15, 1870, p. 260. Courtesy Library and Archives Canada.](image)


Beginning with the arrival of Chinese strikebreakers at a shoe factory in North Adams, many Irish workers and labor leaders affiliated with the KOSC called for Chinese exclusion. When the General Council of the KOSC held a meeting at the Cooper Union in New York City on April 26, 1871, which was attended by delegates from Canada and throughout the United States including Irish American labor leaders Michael J. Sheehan and William J. McLaughlin, they called for an abrogation of the Burlingame Treaty. The meeting at Cooper Union is additional evidence that the national labor movement was a significant force behind efforts aimed at restricting Chinese immigration to the United States. Sheehan, who was based in San Francisco, expressed dissatisfaction that the multiple petitions the KOSC sent to Congress calling for an end to “coolie slavery” fell on deaf ears. He and other Crispins, however, remained undeterred and adopted resolutions pledging “to fight against a continuance of the Burlingame treaty by every legal means” and “to oppose every party in power which will not guarantee its prohibition.” The resolutions also reinforce the tendency of the labor movement to conflate voluntary Chinese immigration with “coolie” labor or at the very least to call for the elimination of both. For instance, a resolution “called upon all trades unions to unite against the introduction of coolie labor” while other resolutions simultaneously called for a nullification of the Burlingame Treaty, which guaranteed voluntary Chinese immigration to the United States.70

Sheehan was merely one out of many Irish American labor leaders who crisscrossed the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to lobby for Chinese exclusion. After Sheehan returned to San Francisco in June, he presided over an anti-Chinese meeting held by the KOSC in Irish-American Hall.71 The meeting was not open to the public but an advertisement (fig. 3.3) published in the San Francisco Chronicle indicates the nature of the discussion and is further testimony that Irish Americans viewed themselves as white and the


Chinese as something other than white. “All white men, workers on boots and shoes,” wrote the advertisement, were invited to attend the KOSC meeting “for the purpose of taking a final and decided action on the Chinese Question.” While interactions between Irish and Chinese laborers in the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century were typically fraught with animosity or violence, on rare occasions both groups overcame their ethnic and racial divisions by cooperating in the workplace. One of the most celebrated examples of this transpired during the final stages of the race to build North America’s first transcontinental railroad.

**Ten Miles in One Day:**
**Eight Irishmen, an Army of Chinese, and a Track Laying World Record**

The transcontinental railroad, constructed between 1863 and 1869 and one of America’s greatest feats of engineering, was a momentous development in United States and world history. Without the vantage point of historical hindsight and before the last spike that connected the CPRR and the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) was driven on May 10 at Promontory Summit, Utah Territory, contemporaries foretold the significance of this accomplishment for the emergence of the United States as a world power. “The resources of the country will be greatly developed, the trade with China and the other countries across the Pacific Ocean will be vastly stimulated,” wrote the New York Herald when commenting on the impending “iron horse [that] will speed its way from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean,” and concluded that “this iron way will

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do much to make the United States the commercial and civilizing centre of the world."\textsuperscript{73} It is debatable whether or not the United States became the world’s “civilizing centre,” although beyond dispute is that it emerged as the leading global economic power by the turn of the century and thanks in no small part to the transcontinental railroad.

Central to the successful completion of this monumental infrastructure project was the sweat and toil of thousands of Irish and Chinese immigrant railroad workers. The vast majority of workers employed to build the CPRR eastward from Sacramento were Chinese while most of those hired to construct the UPRR westward from Omaha were Irish.\textsuperscript{74} As the two railroads approached Promontory Summit in 1869, crews from the CPRR and UPRR worked in close proximity. Dispatches from reporters stationed at the construction camps suggest that there was a mixture of conflict and cooperation between CPRR and UPRR workers. Grenville M. Dodge, the chief engineer of the UPRR (1866-1870), wrote in his memoir that there was much hostility between the Irish and Chinese including blasting each other with nitroglycerin.\textsuperscript{75} Dodge’s memoir should be read with caution considering that he wrote it forty years after the transcontinental railroad was complete. However, supplementing Dodge’s recollections are reports from newspaper reporters who witnessed the final stages of railroad construction.\textsuperscript{76} A New York *Sun* correspondent based at Promontory Point reported that the CPRR and UPRR constructed their

\textsuperscript{73} “The Pacific Railroad,” *New York Herald*, April 28, 1869, p. 8, col. 5.


respective railroads parallel to one another for fifty three miles, “often … in sight of each other, sometimes only a few yards apart, and once they crossed,” but because both camps “don’t love each other … the idea of meeting wasn’t agreeable.” After the CPRR breached a UPRR embankment and the latter reciprocated, a war of words broke out, which escalated to “fists and clubs” and after “some glorious scrimmages” they started blasting each other with nitroglycerin. “One side would touch off a young earthquake without giving notice to the other,” the reporter explained, “and a shower of stones among them would be the first sign of it. The other party, in acknowledgement of the salute, at once blasted out a mine with nitro glycerin, aiming it at the other camp, killing several mules, but fortunately no men.” Following these incidents, the reporter elaborated, “war was declared. Both parties armed for the fray. The Central clique sent to San Francisco for revolvers, and the Union to St. Louis. Fists, blasts, were getting tame, and the combatants called for powder and blood.” Ultimately, however, managers of the CPRR and UPRR were able to work out a compromise in Washington, DC, and potential bloodshed was averted.77

Counterbalancing reports of friction between the CPRR Chinese and UPRR Irish are dispatches from correspondents stationed at Promontory Point detailing instances whereby Irish and Chinese railroad laborers crossed racial lines in pursuit of common workplace objectives. A prime example of this was when eight Irish tracklayers hired by the CPRR, with the assistance of an “army” of mostly Chinese workers, manually laid a world record-breaking ten miles and fifty-six feet of railroad track in a single day, an exploit that remains unsurpassed. “The rate of laying track has been one mile an hour,” wrote one Evening Bulletin reporter’s dispatch, “the first time it has ever been done, and it may be the last, for it is not probable that such an army will be organized again.”78 It was not uncommon for bets to be placed on Irish and Chinese workers engaged in railroad construction contests but in the race to finish the CPRR, immigrants from

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78. “From the End of the Track,” Evening Bulletin (San Francisco), April 29, 1869, p. 2, col. 3.
Ireland and China found themselves on the same team. A San Francisco Evening Bulletin reporter stationed in the CPRR construction camp described this joint Irish and Chinese track laying enterprise as follows:

Each of four front men ran 30 feet with 126 tons, besides carrying his end of the iron tongs, which is heavy. Each of the other four men lifted and placed 120 tons at their end of the rails…. When cleared, the train runs back and small iron hand cars are loaded by Chinamen under White direction. Men with iron forks seize the end of the rail, and a row of Chinamen, close as they can stand, seize the rail and walk it up to the car opposite, slip back, take up another, until 16 rails have been thrown…. Alongside of the moving force are teams hauling tools and water-wagons, and Chinamen with pails strung over their shoulders moving among the men with water and tea…. From the first pioneer to the last tamper, perhaps two miles, there is a thin line of 1,000 men advancing a mile an hour.

Although roughly one thousand workers accompanied the eight Irish tracklayers, the reporter also noted that there was “an army of 10,000 persons” stationed at the CPRR construction camp who fulfilled a variety of tasks associated with this railroad construction endeavor. Most were Chinese although other groups were involved in the transcontinental railroad’s advance through Utah Territory, most notably Mormons. Besides reporter dispatches “from the end of the track,” a Harper’s Weekly illustration (fig. 3.4) by Alfred R. Waud captures “a medley of Irishmen and Chinamen” working side by side on the last mile of the transcontinental railroad. The image of a laborer pulling the queue of a Chinese worker suggests that, in Waud’s view at least, the race to the finish was not without friction but the general impression presented is that some Irish and Chinese workers productively collaborated with one another on the last leg of railroad construction. Other sources corroborate the general picture presented in Waud’s illustration, namely a mixture of clashes and cooperation between Irish and Chinese railroad workers.

81. For more on the Mormons, see Bain, Empire Express, passim.
The time book (fig. 3.5) of CPRR foreman George Coley recorded the names of the eight Irishmen who laid the record-setting “10 miles and 56 feet of railroad” on May 28, 1869. Their names in descending order are listed as George Elliott, Edward Killeen, Thomas Daley, Mike Shaw, Mike Sullivan, Mike Kennedy, Fred McNamara, and Patrick Joyce. The names and a photograph (fig. 3.6) of three Chinese men who worked on the final stages of the CPRR and who were part of the section gang that laid the final pair of rails have also been preserved for posterity. They were part of a Golden Spike fiftieth anniversary parade celebration in Ogden, Utah, when a Salt Lake Tribune photographer took a picture of them and identified them as Wong Fook, Lee Chao, and Ging Cui.83 Harper’s Weekly furthermore noted that “the very laborers upon the road typify its significant result, bringing Europe and Asia face to face, grasping hands across the

83. “Chinese railroad pioneers given honors—still more work to be done,” Chinese Historical Society of America Bulletin 50, no. 2 (Summer 2014), 1; “Three Chinamen, All Over 90 Years of Age, Arrive to Take Part in the Parade Saturday,” Ogden Standard (UT), May 8, 1919, p. 11; Salt Lake Tribune (UT), May 11, 1869, pp. 1, 10, 11. In the former newspaper Lee Chao was listed as “Lee Cho” and on page ten of the latter newspaper Lee Chao was listed as “Low Chai” and Ging Cui as “Ah King.”
Figure 3.5. George Coley’s Time Book for April 1869, “Central Pacific Railroad,” Henry E. Cassidy Papers, Ms2.C395, Small Rocky Mountain States Collections, Mss2, Holt-Atherton Department of Special Collections, University of the Pacific Library.

Figure 3.6. Wong Fook, Lee Chao, and Ging Cui (left to right). Courtesy Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas. DP1967.727.
American Continent.” The railroad’s completion, which facilitated greater Chinese migration east of the Rockies, intensified interactions between the Irish and Chinese, set the Chinese at cross-purposes with East Coast Irish Americans, and paved the way for a nationwide anti-Chinese movement. Soon after the final spike was driven at Promontory Summit, employers ranging from railroad contractors to factory owners tried to bring groups of Chinese workers east of the Rockies to break Irish-led strikes or replace Irish workers. Factory owners on the East Coast such as Sampson and Hervey were able to employ Chinese in their relatively secure factory grounds but this was less so the case with other industries. Two months after the Chinese assisted eight Irishmen with their record breaking track laying endeavor and both groups had the honor to lay the final rails that united America’s railroad grid, Lucius B. Boomer, a bridge builder from Chicago awarded a contract to build the Union Pacific Missouri River Bridge, attempted to replace his mostly Irish workforce with Chinese labor. Boomer struggled to finance the bridge project and his situation worsened when Irish workers went on strike demanding higher wages and better working conditions. He sent an agent to California to recruit roughly one hundred Chinese workers on a two-year contract at a monthly wage rate of thirty-five dollars as opposed to the forty-five dollars received by Irish workers. Living quarters were erected for the Chinese on the east bank of the Omaha River although there is no evidence that the Chinese worked on the bridge, which suggests that resistance from Irish workers may have derailed Boomer’s plan.

There are numerous other instances when Irish workers sabotaged the efforts of industrialists or their contractors to recruit Chinese labor. When the railroad contractor Simpson and Co. arranged to have Chinese laborers work on the Pompton (NJ) to Middletown (NY) section of the Midland Railway, this plan never materialized because of opposition from male


Irish navvies. Tension between Irish and Chinese railroad workers was not unique to the Midwest, East Coast or states west of the Rocky Mountains. When more than two hundred Chinese were hired on three year contracts to work on the Houston and Texas Central Railway, they remained on the job for no more than six months and partly due to resistance from Irish railroad workers. Moreover, Irish and Chinese workers who helped construct the Panama Railway, the world’s first transcontinental railroad, clashed. Overall, the completion of the transcontinental railroad and the forces it unleashed resulted in increased friction between Irish and Chinese workers and with the passage of time the call for Chinese immigration restriction laws among Irish workers and labor leaders nationwide grew louder and louder.

“Self Preservation the Law of Nations as Well as of Individuals”: The Irish World, Denis Kearney, and Chinese Immigration Restriction

During the Gilded Age the Irish World and American Industrial Liberator was one of New York’s most influential weekly labor newspapers and a key voice of working-class Irish Americans. Historians have examined the Irish World to illuminate a broad range of topics in Irish American history but there is no in-depth analysis of its position on the “Chinese question.” Yet for any historian who wishes to explain the stance of Irish American workers and labor leaders toward the Chinese, the Irish World is one of the most important available primary


89. Hereafter cited as the Irish World. Titled the Irish World when first published in September 1870, the newspaper was renamed the Irish World and American Industrial Liberator in December 1878. For more on the evolution of the newspaper name, see Bayor and Meagher, eds., The New York Irish, 705.
sources. Established by Irish-born Patrick Ford (fig. 3.7) in 1870, the *Irish World* soon emerged as the most widely read Irish American newspaper.\(^{90}\) Its circulation grew from roughly 35,000 in 1876 to approximately 50,000 in 1878, 60,000 in 1882, 100,000 in 1884, and peaked at 120,000 in the early 1900s. Meanwhile, the other major Irish American newspaper, the Boston *Pilot*, saw its circulation drop from more than 100,000 in the early 1870s to roughly 69,000 in the early 1880s and other rivals such as the *Irish-American* had a more modest circulation of roughly 35,000 in 1882.\(^{91}\) Headquartered in Brooklyn and edited by Ford until his death in 1913, the *Irish World* was also popular with the global Irish and copies could be found in every major area of Irish settlement such as Australia, Britain, and Canada. In Ireland it had an estimated weekly circulation of 20,000 in 1880 and between 1879 and 1882 Ford sent almost half a million free copies there in support of the Land League movement.\(^{92}\) It is impossible to ascertain the extent to which the views expressed in the *Irish World* and by Patrick Ford were shared by Irish American workers and labor leaders. However, given that significant growth in the newspaper’s readership coincided with increasing coverage of the “Chinese question,” it is plausible to suggest that many readers subscribed to the newspapers’ predominantly anti-Chinese sentiments and calls for Chinese immigration restriction. Ford and the *Irish World* played a critical role in shaping Irish immigrants’ social identity and adjustment to American society.\(^ {93}\) Accordingly, the negative stereotypes and imagery of the Chinese that appeared in the *Irish World* likely influenced the attitudes and perceptions of its readers toward the Chinese and partially accounts for why so many Irish workers on the East Coast showed up at rallies to endorse anti-Chinese resolutions.

\(^{90}\) For an obituary of Ford, see “Patrick Ford Dead,” *Irish-American* (NY), September 27, 1913, p. 1, col. 2; p. 4, col. 1.


Beginning with coverage of Denis Kearney’s eastern mission in 1878, the *Irish World* was replete with editorials, cartoons, reports, and published letters echoing the “great agitators” call for Chinese immigration restriction. While Kearney amassed numerous critics during and after his much-publicized trip east, the *Irish World* was one of his most ardent defenders. Ford believed that the “enemies of the Great Uprising among the people,” particularly the “capitalistic press,” slandered Kearney in an attempt to undermine his mission and the labor movement more broadly. “It is plain they want to make a scarecrow of Kearney,” wrote Ford, and that “this scarecrow, they hope, will keep away the people from the movement.” Ford acknowledged Kearney was a “coarse speaker” but maintained that this was also the case with notable figures throughout history including Daniel O’Connell, “the liberator,” except the latter were not ridiculed for their diction. “Kearney, despite his rudeness, is a thoroughly honest man,” Ford elaborated, “and that is what cannot honestly be said of his defamers.” Ford also commented that while Kearney was not the “prophet” of the labor movement, “we hail him nevertheless” because he “is gifted with immense force of character that fits him for a certain line of work which no
other man could do so well.”94 One area where no individual came anywhere close to matching Kearney was his ability to nationalize and internationalize the “Chinese question.” From San Francisco to New York, Vancouver to Toronto, Belfast to Dublin, London to Glasgow, Beijing to Hong Kong, and Sydney to Melbourne, Denis Kearney and his Chinese exclusion message appeared in numerous newspapers.

The *Irish World* also received numerous letters written in defense or praise of Kearney, which is evidence that many readers were supportive of the views expressed by Ford on Kearney and the “Chinese question.” A letter signed by “Trans-Atlantic” in London, which defended Kearney against attacks from the local press, remarked that the “Kearney earthquake is sensibly felt in this monster city! Strange that a poor Irish emigrant who was driven out of Ireland … should to-day set the sacred earth of England trembling under our feet!”95 Another letter signed by “Anti-Monopolist” in San Francisco wrote that “[n]ever was there a greater instance of persistency in the cause of right displayed than that shown by Denis Kearney, the champion of Labor.”96 Ford continued to sing Kearney’s praises long after he left the East Coast and returned to California. Indicative of this was a flattering portrait of Kearney (fig. 3.8) that appeared on the front page of the *Irish World* on September 13, 1879. In the same issue of the *Irish World*, Ford described Kearney as the “indomitable champion” of the labor movement and observed that although he was once the most vilified man in the United States, “if he prove as great a success in the future as he had proved to be in the past, that he will be the best praised man in the Republic. … Hurrah for Denis Kearney!”97


Not all Irish Americans east of the Rockies were as ardent a supporter of Kearney as Patrick Ford or his readers. Those critical of Kearney, however, generally took aim not at his message on Chinese exclusion but rather his incendiary rhetoric, obscene language, and the violent means he sometimes proposed as a solution to the “Chinese question.” The latter, they believed, had the potential to undermine the labor movement, the passage of Chinese immigration restriction legislation, or the image of the Irish American community. For example, the Pilot, which styled itself “a workingman’s paper” and claimed to reach “the eyes or ears of a million workingmen,” objected to Kearney’s “bullets, if ballots fail” approach because it could “hold up the cause of Labor to public derision.”

98. “Dennis Kearney, Where are the Facts?” Pilot (Boston), August 17, 1878, p. 4, col. 2-3.
echoed similar concerns. “Ours is not the mission of the bullet nor the bully,” proclaimed one Pilot reader named “O’Brien.” If Kearney desired to associate with the Irish American community on the East Coast, O’Brien furthermore noted, “let him cleanse his tongue, and purify his speech.” Another “laboring man” expressed disappointment with Kearney’s eastern tour “because of the demagogue spirit, vulgarity, and profanity that have marked his speeches.” The Pittsburgh Catholic hailed the rise of Denis Kearney and his Workingmen’s Party of California but was averse to the use of violence as a means to prohibit Chinese immigration to America. “[T]he chord struck so successfully in California,” wrote one editorial, “will vibrate until its music is heard in the home of every workingman all over the country.” It was because of Kearney, the editorial elaborated, that Congress was inundated with petitions calling for legislation to check this “overwhelming tide of immigration.” The Kearney movement also sent a strong message to “the grasping and avaricious capitalist who cares more for the Mongolian than the Caucasian.” During Kearney’s tour east another editorial in the Pittsburgh Catholic echoed his call for Chinese immigration restriction when it noted that “the grievances arising out of the vast immigration of the Chinese to California have been well established, and a remedy must at no distant day be applied.”

Based on the viewpoint of Kearney’s enemies, one is left with the impression that his mission east was a failure. However, this was not the case from the perspective of many Irish American workers. The positive image of Kearney juxtaposed with negative images of the Chinese in the preeminent Gilded Age Irish American labor newspaper, the Irish World, likely shaped East Coast Irish workers’ attitudes toward the Chinese, who showed up in the thousands at Kearney’s rallies and endorsed his countless resolutions calling on Congress to restrict Chinese


100. “Kearney’s Victory in San Francisco,” Pittsburgh Catholic, July 13, 1878, p. 4, col. 3-5.

immigration. Also, it helps account for why one struggles to find evidence of Irish workers and labor leaders organizing rallies in defense of Chinese immigration and calling for cooperation with Chinese in the workplace between the completion of the transcontinental railroad and the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Kearney’s critics portrayed a one-dimensional character prone to outbursts of demagoguery and violent rhetoric whereas Ford underscored a more complex individual with a more temperate side. For example, an illustration (fig. 3.9) of Kearney holding a ballot in one hand and gesturing toward a ballot box with his other hand appeared in the *Irish World* on September 27, 1878. Titled “the guillotine of the new revolution,” it quoted part of a speech Kearney delivered at one of his East Coast mass meetings as follows: “We don’t undertake to appeal to the bullet or the dagger. But we call upon you and ask you to use a small paper knife to cut the throats of political knaves. You are called upon to deposit a simple ballot.”\(^{102}\) Although Ford championed Kearney’s slogan “the Chinese must go,” the decision to highlight Kearney’s ballots instead of bullets speeches reflected his and most other Irish Americans’ aversion to violence as a solution to the “Chinese question.” “The *Irish World*, let us repeat it,” Ford wrote in one editorial, “has no sympathy whatever with the ruffianly demonstrations of hoodlumdom.”\(^{103}\)

One of the main areas of competition between ethnic groups in nineteenth-century America was over images and stereotypes and in this respect the Irish and Chinese were no exception.\(^{104}\) Well-known are the demeaning caricatures of the Irish and Chinese in publications such as *Harper’s Weekly*, *Wasp, Puck,* and *Thistleton’s Jolly Giant*. While these images provide


insights into how the Irish and Chinese were viewed by their detractors, they shed little light on Irish and Chinese self-perception or mutual attitudes and perceptions. Historians have yet to fully explore Irish and Chinese representations of one another in a variety of popular culture mediums such as cartoons, songs, and plays. Although there is scant surviving evidence on the Chinese side for historians to work with and no depictions of the Irish by Chinese in the United States, the Irish left to posterity a treasure trove of materials. Given that the vast majority of Irish and Chinese immigrants in the United States had no direct contact with one another, the racialized images that appeared in Irish newspapers bore heightened significance in terms of shaping Irish American workers’ attitudes, perceptions, and actions toward the Chinese. As one of the leading sources of information for Irish Americans on the “Chinese question,” the representations of Chinese workers that appeared in the *Irish World* help explain why many Irish workers and labor leaders were hostile to the Chinese and supported or lobbied for Chinese immigration restriction.

Beginning in the late 1870s the *Irish World* repeatedly called for a halt to Chinese immigration and trumpeted Denis Kearney’s “the Chinese must go!” slogan. After the House of
Representatives passed the Fifteen Passenger Bill on January 28, 1879, which limited to fifteen per vessel the number of Chinese passengers permitted to land within the jurisdiction of the United States, the *Irish World* published editorials and cartoons in protest. As far as Ford was concerned the Fifteen Passenger Bill did not go far enough. He argued that the entry of “fifteen Celestial pig-tails” was insufferable. “Perish such a bill!” Ford wrote, and “politically perish the insolent men who dare to propose it.” Ford framed Chinese immigration as “a question of life or death to our people” and warned his working-class readership that a decline in their wages and standard of living was inevitable without Chinese immigration restriction legislation. “Let the two or three hundred millions of 50 or 25 cent chopsticks swamp in upon us,” Ford elaborated, “and down come wages all round to a proportionate or approaching figure.” The only solution, as far as Ford was concerned, was the abolishment of treaties between the United States and China that granted Chinese laborers the right to immigrate to the United States. “The treaty with China ought to be set aside as fast as the necessary forms can be gone through,” Ford maintained, even if this meant breaching diplomatic protocol and came at the cost of undermining US-China relations.

While Sinophiles “urged that we have a pig-tail ambassador living with us in Washington,” Ford wrote, it was more fitting to “[s]end him across the Pacific as quick as steam can carry him.”

As a justification for Chinese exclusion, *Irish World* editorials and cartoons invoked the words and ideas of renowned English jurist Robert Phillimore. In his *Commentaries Upon International Law*, Phillimore wrote that “The Right of Self-Preservation is the first law of nations, as it is of individuals.” This principle, Ford told his readership, was the “external axiom” to abide by in terms of how to deal with the issue of Chinese immigration to the United States. Ford interpreted this axiom to mean that it was in the best interests of workers, and


therefore the duty of the federal government, to ban Chinese immigration to the United States, a sentiment an *Irish World* cartoon (fig. 3.10) also expressed in the aftermath of President’s Hayes’ decision to veto the Fifteen Passenger Bill. The cartoon depicts one white worker fending off a group of Chinese workers who have disembarked a ship at a port in the United States. Inscribed on a wall above the white worker are the words “self preservation the law of nations as well as of individuals” whereas a “cheap labor” placard accompanies the workers from China. Although the white worker bears in one hand a sword and in the other a shield with the words “an act of Congress” engraved on it, the image of menacing, sinewy, and alienesque sword-wielding Chinese arriving in the United States, even if “only fifteen at a time” as indicated by the cartoon title, suggests that the Fifteen Passenger Bill offered insufficient protection to white workers.

**Figure 3.10.** “Only Fifteen at a Time.” From: *Irish World and American Industrial Liberator*, March 8, 1879, p. 1.
On the topic of Chinese labor and immigration, the *Irish World* occasionally professed a class-conscious egalitarian ideology. “Let the Chinaman come hither to aid us to elevate labor and to build up a free industrial fabric founded upon man’s natural right to the soil,” Ford wrote in one editorial, “and we shall welcome him as a brother worker.” Yet the sincerity of these sentiments are difficult to reconcile with the numerous editorials and cartoons that projected negative racial imagery and stereotypes of the Chinese. For example, another cartoon (fig. 3.11) that appeared in the *Irish World* after the veto of the Fifteen Passenger Bill depicts an endless stream of masculine and menacing Chinese workers mounted on the backs of rats swarming across the Pacific Ocean from China to America. As Ford warned his *Irish World* readership weeks before the veto, without immigration control “two or three hundred millions of Celestials who fill up and overflow the Chinese Empire should pour to overflow across the Pacific and out upon us in this Republic.” Additionally, Ford cautioned, it was naïve to think that the “Chinese question” would remain primarily a California phenomenon since it was only a matter of time before Chinese workers migrated east and undermined wages nationwide. “[B]eginning with California, and thence moving and spreading into and across the interior,” wrote Ford, “they could fix a standard of wages as low as mine thief, or land thief, or railroad thief could desire.” The “yellow peril” imagery conjured by the *Irish World* added grist to the mill for exclusionists who argued that the people of China had the potential to invade America in untold numbers and threaten the livelihoods of white workers. “The invasion would stride rapidly in upon and swamp the whole nation,” argued Ford, and “[u]pon all the highways would stand emphasized the words, ‘the Mongolian is and the Caucasian is not.’” Based on the title of the cartoon, “the new invasion,” this process was already underway, but in reality this was not the case given that the number of Chinese residing east of the Rockies in the late nineteenth century was miniscule.  


Linkage between Chinese workers and “cheap labor” was reinforced by the “ten centers” slogan attached to the tail of the rat in the foreground, which suggests that Chinese workers were willing to work for ten cents per day, a pay check intolerable to white workers. For example, in 1880 the daily wage rate in the United States for a laborer according to one estimate was $1.32 and the mean daily wage spread across five skilled occupations was $2.26. The Chinese “can wield a pair of chopsticks and live on a pound of rice in the day,” Ford wrote, and “they could lay up a little fortune out of what would starve the American laborer.” Representations of the Chinese as a threat to the livelihood of white workers were bolstered by the reports of *Irish World* correspondents. For example, one reporter based in Washington, DC, wrote that there was evidence to support the claim that “thousands of the most degraded subjects of the Chinese


Emperor are daily bought and sold in the State of California, like cattle in the market” and alleged that the Chinese Six Companies “owned” Chinese labor and compensated each worker no more than ten cents per day.\textsuperscript{112} Although Chinese immigrants were not controlled by the Six Companies, most were unwilling to work for a daily wage as low as ten cents, and they certainly did not subsist on a diet of rats and rice, the perception that this was the case inflamed opposition toward the Chinese from Irish workers, who composed the bulk of the \textit{Irish World’s} readership.

Also problematical for interracial labor cooperation were the erroneous representations of Chinese workers as “slaves” or “coolies” in the \textit{Irish World} and Ford’s tendency to frame the issue of Chinese immigration as “a question between free labor versus slave labor.” The Chinese who came to America “as the vile instrument of the New Slave Power, the object of which is to debase the White Wage Workers of this land,” Ford informed his readers, “we say to him: stand back! Your right ends where ours begins. You may debase yourself, but your act must not drag us down with you…. Yes; ‘the Chinese must go,’ or else the American laborer must go!”\textsuperscript{113} The grotesquely exaggerated images of Chinese immigrants that appeared in the \textit{Irish World} reinforced the idea that the Chinese were synonymous with “slave” labor or were racially inferior and may partially account for why so many Irish American workers and labor leaders nationwide favored or lobbied for Chinese exclusion.

The negative images of the Chinese that appeared in the \textit{Irish World} also served as a mechanism for Irish Americans to enhance their own image by highlighting an immigrant group more alien than themselves. As discussed earlier in this chapter, many Anglo-Saxon Protestant nativists articulated in public fora the idea that the Irish were no more desirable as immigrants than the Chinese. In the context of the Chinese immigration restriction debates of the late 1870s and early 1880s, some also expressed the viewpoint that if the Chinese were to be excluded then so should the Irish, a sentiment vigorously contested by the latter. For example, Ford critiqued a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{112} “Letter from Washington,” \textit{Irish World}, February 22, 1879, p. 5, col. 2.
\item \textsuperscript{113} “‘The Chinese,’” \textit{Irish World}, March 1, 1879, p. 4, col. 1-2.
\end{itemize}
New York *Commercial Advertiser* editorial that voiced support for the Fifteen Passenger Bill and posed the following rhetorical question: “If it is right to exclude Chinamen, why not exclude Irishmen?” Ford informed his *Irish World* readership that comparisons between the Irish and Chinese defied “the rules of logic” and that the “case of the Irishman emigrating to this country bears no resemblance to that of the Chinaman.” The Chinese, Ford charged, emigrated to the United States “with no intention of permanently remaining in this country” whereas the Irish “comes to make this land his home, to become part and parcel of our people, to help by brain and muscle to develop the resources of the Republic.” By contrast, the Chinese immigrant came to the United States with “no desire to add to its wealth or prosperity by any labor of his.” Ford criticized the *Commercial Advertiser* and other mediums of big business for accusing the Irish of waging a xenophobic movement not unlike that experienced by the Famine Irish a few decades earlier at the hands of nativist groups such as the Know-Nothings. “The New York *Commercial Advertiser* and the rest of the capitalistic press know very well the tendency of this Chinese immigration,” Ford wrote, “it lessens the value of labor, and proportionately increases the power of Capital, and it is this knowledge that makes them such stout defenders of it.”

Although Ford voiced class-conscious rhetoric and professed support for racial equality for the Chinese, he then proceeded to erroneously describe Chinese workers as akin to slaves. “We recognize in the Chinaman a brother,” he wrote, “and we are not opposed to him because he is a Chinaman, but because, in the hands of soulless men, he is becoming a means of pushing labor back into a state of serfdom.” In the same editorial, however, Ford described the Chinese “not as a free agent, but as a bonded slave who has sold himself for a miserable pittance, on which he lives in a manner that is a violation of all decency and Christian civilization.” If German or English immigrants were also “so lost to self-respect as to enter into a contract to emigrate to this country and live in

114. “Is it a Know-Nothing Movement!” *Irish World*, March 8, 1879, p. 4, col. 2-3. For another example of Irish Americans rejecting arguments that the anti-Chinese movement and the Know-Nothing movement were alike, see “The Movement Against the Chinese,” *Catholic Citizen* (Milwaukee), April 1, 1882, p. 4, col. 6.
the same manner and work on the same terms as the Chinese live and work,” Ford argued, “we should be just as outspoken in our opposition.” ¹¹⁵

The *Connecticut Catholic*, established and edited by the Irish American publisher M. F. Scanlan, is another example of efforts by the East Coast Irish to reject comparisons between Irish and Chinese immigrants and to dismiss arguments that immigration restriction laws ought to be equally applied to both groups. Scanlan observed in one editorial that the Irish came to the United States “with the desire to be citizens and throw in their fortunes with the country” whereas the Chinese were sojourners who had no intention of becoming citizens. While the Irish repatriated money to help others emigrate and “settle here and build up the country,” Scanlan claimed that “Chinamen only come here to make money; they save all they can, and carry it back to China.” Overlooked by Scanlan were the huge sums of money that Irish Americans repatriated to Ireland and, in terms of immigrant groups, the unparalleled discrimination and hostility that the Chinese faced in the United States. Another major area of difference Scanlan underscored for his mostly Catholic Irish American readership was religion. “The Irish are Christians who revere and love the family, and who practice, in the majority of cases, the solid Christian virtues,” Scanlan maintained, whereas “[t]he Chinese are degraded pagans, whom it is almost impossible to convert, and whose Joss houses and opium dens are a disgrace to a Christian land.” Projecting an image of the Chinese as unassimilable and unfit for citizenship, Scanlan asserted that the Chinese “are and must always, remain strangers and aliens…. The increase of the Irish race in America would be a blessing—that of the Chinese would be a curse.” ¹¹⁶

The *Irish World* and *Connecticut Catholic* were not the only newspapers owned, edited, and read by Irish Americans that called for Chinese immigration restriction. The *Labor Standard*, an “organ of the wage workers of the United States” edited by the Irish-born Fenian and socialist


Joseph Patrick McDonnell, called on workers nationwide to unite in opposition to Chinese labor and demand Chinese immigration restriction.117 McDonnell considered the more incendiary speeches delivered at sandlot rallies during the height of Denis Kearney’s agitation as “wild and unwise” but he nonetheless expressed sympathy with the anti-Chinese movement. “It must be remembered, however, that our brothers of California have been reduced to a miserable condition by the competition of Chinese labor,” McDonnell wrote, “and great allowance must be made for unwise acts committed by men smarting under cruel wrongs.” He proposed that rather than “having isolated unions … the workingmen of San Francisco should organize as laborers and enter into alliance with their organized brothers in all other parts of the United States.”118 An interracial union composed of Irish and Chinese workers is not what McDonnell had in mind. When Kearney was in Boston as part of his eastern tour, McDonnell embraced the “great agitator’s” call for Chinese immigration restriction. “To the workingmen of California, as to the workers everywhere, we reach the right hand of fellowship. We can understand the terrible evils of Chinese cheap labor as well as the dangers that flow from such a source” McDonnell wrote, and “[w]e will do all in our power to banish the evil. It is an evil and it must and shall be stopped.”119 After the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1882, Irish American labor newspapers did not desist from their calls for Chinese exclusion. The Irish World, for example, continued to call for more stringent Chinese immigration restriction laws until the Chinese Exclusion Act was extended indefinitely in 1904.120


Irish Americans, the Catholic Church, and Chinese Exclusion

In addition to views expressed in Irish American labor newspapers, the stance of Irish immigrants on the “Chinese question” cannot be understood without examining another major pillar of the Irish American community, the Catholic Church. Comparable to organs of the Catholic Church on the Pacific Coast such as the San Francisco Monitor, Catholic newspapers located east of the Rockies with a mostly Irish American readership such as the New York Freeman’s Journal and Catholic Register, Boston Pilot, McGee’s Illustrated Weekly in New York, Milwaukee Catholic Citizen, and Connecticut Catholic, unequivocally supported Chinese immigration restriction. These newspapers, many of which served as the official organs of the Catholic hierarchy in their respective diocese, reveal that some of the most vituperative attacks against the Chinese emanated from the Catholic Church or at the very least newspapers that catered to mostly working-class Irish Catholics. Besides organs of the Catholic Church, many Irish American priests active in the late nineteenth-century labor movement, notably Father Peter C. Yorke in San Francisco, were also fervent opponents of Chinese immigration. When Irish American clergy and Catholic Irish American newspapers lobbied for Chinese immigration restriction and the latter filled their sheets with negative Chinese stereotypes, the prospect of greater understanding or cooperation between Irish and Chinese workers diminished. In the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century, there is little evidence of Catholic Irish American clergy advocating racial equality for the Chinese or censuring the movement for Chinese immigration restriction. It would be facile to suggest that the views expressed in these newspapers were indistinguishable from those of the broader Irish American community, which was not a monolith. Nonetheless, the information and perspectives that these editors chose to publish both reflected and impacted their mostly Irish American working-class readership’s attitudes, perceptions, or actions toward the “Chinese question” considering the central role of the Catholic Church in Irish American life.
Among late nineteenth-century newspapers, the *New York Freeman’s Journal and Catholic Register*, which was the official mouthpiece of the Catholic Church in New York City, was one of the fiercest critics of the Burlingame Treaty, Chinese immigrants, and diplomatic relations between the United States and China. When the first official Chinese Embassy to the United States was preparing to present its credentials to President Hayes at the White House, McMaster questioned the liberty of the Chinese to “send pompous Embassies to Washington, to buy the right of sending their festering swarms of pigmy Mongolians over here, to take the place of honest Christian laborers!” That China, semi-colonized by the British and other imperialist powers, was entitled to an embassy in the United States whereas Ireland, colonized by the British, was denied this privilege may have sat unwell with many Irish Americans. Although McMaster called for an annulment of the Burlingame Treaty, which he maintained provided an “opening to that execrable and polluted race of cunning Pagans, a free access to American soil,” he also called for the deportation of Chinese immigrants. “The vile, leprous, rat-eating, Chinese ought to be expelled from America,” he proclaimed, and the only exception was if they were confined to “penal colonies, under strict masters.” In contrast to some Americans, McMaster mocked the idea that “polluted, crafty, vicious, self-conceited human beings” such as the Chinese were capable of conversion to Christianity. “Take the first hundred Chinese you meet,” he explained, “and it would be easier to convert five hundred of the most abandoned persons, of white blood, that you find in the worst of our city streets!”

McMaster also attacked the decision by President Hayes to veto the Fifteen Passenger Bill and questioned the propriety of diplomatic relations with the Qing Empire. “To Pagans, the United States, in its better days,” McMaster wrote, “never sent Ambassadors; or Ministers!” He furthermore argued that Anson Burlingame’s “uncouth, absurd, and pernicious ‘Treaty’ … between the people of the United States and the rice and rat eating pagans of China…. was a monstrous outrage! No ‘treaty’ ought to have been made with a people

so abhorrent to Christian civilization!” Emphatically opposed to Chinese immigration, McMaster asserted that “Chinese emigration to the United States is an unmixed evil” and advocated that “[i]t ought to be stopped. It must be stopped!”

Comparable to the *Irish World*, the *New York Freeman’s Journal and Catholic Register* summoned up “yellow peril” images of the Chinese, which further reinforced negative perceptions of the Chinese among its mostly East Coast working-class Irish readers. “Hordes of Chinese, steeped in all the vices of Paganism, threatened to overrun the Pacific Coast,” McMaster wrote, and these “hordes which, like the locusts, come only to devour and then to disappear, leaving place for increasing hordes.” McMaster viewed the twenty-year Chinese immigration restriction bill passed by Congress in April 1882 as “a measure of self-protection which was necessary to check the inroad of Pagans, bent on money-getting, who bring neither wives nor children, but nameless vices and vilest corruption.” That most Chinese men faced serious obstacles bringing their wives with them to the United States because of the Page Act of 1875 and were subjected to racial hostility, discrimination, and denied naturalization rights, exposes the hypocrisy of McMaster’s views on the Chinese. After President Arthur vetoed the twenty-year bill, McMaster criticized the President and renewed his attacks on Anson Burlingame and the US-China bilateral relationship. In one editorial McMaster described Burlingame as “one of the vilest and most degraded creatures that ever called himself a New Englander” and called on President Arthur to grant “our deliverance from the curse brought on us by the bargain made, in shape of a Treaty, by that most despicable, and most infamous and filthy biped-Burlingame.” McMaster furthermore maintained that since “this vile and dangerous Chinese population” was responsible for an array of social ills such as opium smoking, divorce, polygamy, and the corruption of young people, Chinese immigration restriction should take precedence over trade relations with China. “We give no weight to what weakens the force of his veto,” he wrote, or “talk of advantage by


123. Ibid., March 18, 1882, p. 4, col. 6.
commerce with these wretched people. There can be nothing but harm from Chinese immigration.”

By the late 1870s the *Pilot*, which was the official organ of the Archdiocese of Boston and the oldest surviving Catholic newspaper in the United States, emerged as one of the most vociferously anti-Chinese Irish American newspapers. The *Pilot* called for a denial of naturalization rights to the Chinese, repeal of the Burlingame Treaty, and advocated Chinese immigration restriction legislation including the Fifteen Passenger Bill and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. After Chinese workers landed at Calvin Sampson’s North Adams factory in 1870, the *Pilot* was not opposed to voluntary Chinese immigration and expressed the view that Chinese immigrants were capable of assimilation. By 1876, however, the *Pilot* reversed its position. O’Reilly maintained that the Chinese were unassimilable, unfit for citizenship, and he called for a complete halt to Chinese immigration. “Manifestly the influx of Chinese into this country is to be looked upon with the gravest apprehensions,” O’Reilly noted, and he argued that it was “high time that our government should deal thoroughly with the matter.” Echoing the sentiments of other Irish Americans who tried to distance Chinese immigrants from the Irish community in the United States, O’Reilly asserted that “Chinese immigrants differ in character from all other immigrants” and some of the reasons he gave were that they were “valueless as a citizen,” incapable of assimilation in civilized societies, and bankrupt in a moral and religious sense. Accordingly, O’Reilly argued, “Mr. Burlingame’s penchant for China and Chinese should not be allowed to become detrimental to the best interests of the Republic.” O’Reilly opposed “all armed confederation against the Chinese,” although he asserted that “it’s clearly the duty of our government to have the entire fabric of relations with China settled on a new basis.” Similar to the *Irish World* and the *New York Freeman’s Journal and Catholic Register*, the *Pilot* warned its readership about the potential of hundreds of millions of Chinese to overrun the United States, a leitmotif in Irish American labor and Catholic newspapers that was hardly conducive to better

124. Ibid., April 15, 1882, p. 4, col. 1.
Irish and Chinese interethnic relations or intercultural understanding. “China could, without missing the grant,” O’Reilly elaborated, “supply the United States with 50,000,000 or one-eighth of her population, that is ten millions more than the entire population of the United States. These, if we suppose them entitled to the naturalization laws, would outvote the proper inhabitants of the country.” O’Reilly, however, had a different vision for the future direction of the United States, essentially a racially circumscribed democracy wherein Chinese immigrants were precluded from citizenship through naturalization and its attendant voting rights in particular.

Prior to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, O’Reilly was explicit in his calls for a racially restricted democracy and expressed alarm that certain Chinese immigrants were naturalized in New York and Massachusetts. He called for a “clear and comprehensive law” to close this loophole or at least a stricter interpretation of the citizenship clause in the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. As O’Reilly informed readers of the *Pilot*, “the question of vital importance in the future relative to naturalization will be that of the interpretation of the clause touching color, as this has heretofore been regarded as the one provision calculated to save American institutions from the influence of the ballot in the hands of Mongolian hordes.” When Congress eventually passed a twenty-year Chinese immigration restriction bill in 1882 that included a clause barring Chinese naturalization at the federal level, O’Reilly commended it as “proper and necessary.” O’Reilly furthermore called on his working-class readership to “vote away this danger” of Chinese immigration at the polls. “Let the laborer, clinging to his ballot, test every man who would represent him,” O’Reilly explained, with the goal of “exacting pledges that he will be sound at least on one point—that the Burlingame treaty must be modified.” Chinese immigration was the paramount political issue, O’Reilly


127. “Keeping out the Chinese,” *Pilot* (Boston), March 18, 1882, p. 4, col. 4-5.
added, “and the laboring men of America can force its adoption on both parties.” Given that Chinese immigration, according to O’Reilly, “menaces our future” and Chinese immigrants were “aliens to our interests, and our civilization,” O’Reilly asked his readership if they and future generations were going “to be bound in the Nessus’ shirt of a Burlingame treaty?” His answer was a resolute no. “Forbid it, manhood! Restore China any consideration we enjoy, revoke our agreement, and demand or invite another in its place,” O’Reilly wrote, and he advocated that “the treaty with China must be reopened and modified, or broken and abandoned.”

After President Arthur vetoed the twenty-year Chinese immigration restriction bill, O’Reilly penned an editorial in protest. “Should Congress fail to pass a restriction bill over the veto,” he warned, “it will be small comfort to reflect that the President and his party shall suffer for it. The Country will suffer more.”

That the Chinese worker followed “an inferior civilization,” O’Reilly explained in one editorial, it “cuts the ground from under the feet of the American workingman.” In particular, statements that “ten to forty Chinamen live in two or three rooms which would only accommodate one American workingman and his family,” that the Chinese were sojourners who did not bring family with them to the United States and repatriated all of their wealth, or that they lived on a diet that consisted of rice, helped convinced many Irish American workers that continued Chinese immigration would result in, as O’Reilly termed it, “the ruin of our own people.”

An editorial in McGee’s Illustrated Weekly, a New York Catholic diocesan journal owned by Irish-born James E. McGee, asked its predominantly Irish readership “why should we … open our gates to a horde of heathens from beyond the seas?” Besides portraying the Chinese as an alien “other,” the journal called for an immediate halt to Chinese immigration. “The line must be drawn somewhere, and it is time that the government drew it,” the editorial wrote, and

128. “Should the Chinese Be Kept Out?” Pilot (Boston), February 22, 1879, p. 4, col. 3-4.
129. Pilot (Boston), April 15, 1882, p. 4, col. 2.
furthermore maintained that “[i]f the good of the nation requires that the Chinese should be shut out from our midst let them be shut out firmly and relentlessly.” McGee’s Illustrated Weekly also echoed the “yellow peril” threat that appeared in numerous other Catholic Irish American newspapers and proclaimed solidarity with white workers in California when it wrote:

[W]e of the East forget that if there were no Chinese in California there would be fewer Hoodlums. The Chinese are so eager to monopolize every industry, that there is nothing left but Hoodlumism for boys and young men. The Chinese are crowding the people of our race from every branch of labor…. if we accept the facts of their industry and quickness as reasons why they should be allowed to swarm into California and drive Californians before them like the foam on the wave, we may as well surrender the United States to China at once…. The Chinese will wipe us [in the East] out when California has become to [sic] small for them.131

Describing the Chinese as “a low, degraded, immoral set,” the Connecticut Catholic also maintained “that the influx of Chinese in great numbers should be discouraged or prohibited.” In contrast to the New York Freeman’s Journal and Catholic Register, however, the Connecticut Catholic opposed unilateral abrogation of the Burlingame in favor of a diplomatic solution.132 One of the most popular newspapers among Catholic Irish Americans in Wisconsin, the Milwaukee Catholic Citizen, supported race-based Chinese immigration restriction legislation and criticized opponents of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. In the context of rejecting comparisons between the Know-Nothing movement and the anti-Chinese movement, one editorial argued that “the Chinaman’s mode of living renders competition with him by American labor almost impossible…. [i]t is not desirable to have a mixture or assimilation of races in this country and it will not do to preserve here the cast of color.”133


Irish American labor leaders and workers nationwide including those affiliated with the Knights of Labor lobbied Congress to pass Chinese immigration restriction legislation in the years before 1882. The pro-Chinese exclusion stance of delegates who attended the Knights of Labor General Assembly in Pittsburgh from September 7-11, 1880, is additional evidence to negate the claim that a Chinese exclusion resolution adopted by the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions (FOTLU) on November 18, 1881, was the beginning of the national labor movement’s support for a prohibition on Chinese immigration to the United States.  

At the General Assembly in Pittsburgh, where all but one of the delegates represented workers east of the Rockies, Powderly announced that membership of the Knights of Labor had surpassed 40,000, a figure that mushroomed to over 700,000 in the next five years. The Chinese immigration restriction resolution adopted by the Knights of Labor delegates in Pittsburgh also flies in the face of arguments that organized labor east of the Rockies welcomed Chinese immigrants to America in the years prior to the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

Between the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 and its indefinite extension in 1904, the two most powerful national labor organizations, the Knights of Labor and the AFL, forbade Chinese workers to join their ranks and agitated for more stringent Chinese immigration restriction legislation. The pivotal role that Terence V. Powderly played in the Chinese exclusion movement as Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor (1879-93) has received extensive treatment from historians. In his position as US Commissioner-General of Immigration (1898-1902), Powderly worked with organized labor to exclude Chinese immigrants.

134. Gyory, Closing the Gate, 220.


He recruited pro-labor and anti-Chinese employees to the Bureau of Immigration, which helped him establish and oversee an immigration system that enforced the Chinese exclusion laws in an unsparing manner and set a major precedent for US immigration policy and border control. He also extended the Chinese exclusion laws to Hawaii and the Philippines, territories ceded to the United States after the Spanish-American War of 1898 and that had substantial Chinese populations. 138 As Chief of the Division of Information at the US Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization between 1907 and 1921, Powderly continued to influence immigration policy to the detriment of the Chinese in the United States.

In 1908 Ng Poon Chew issued a statement on behalf of his fellow Chinese Americans protesting against the treatment of Chinese by US immigration officials and asserting that the Chinese exclusion laws were enforced in a progressively more stringent and arbitrary manner. Paraphrasing Senator George F. Hoar (R-MA), one of the few politicians who consistently opposed Chinese immigration restriction before and after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Ng maintained that the federal government “enforced the exclusion laws first with water, then with vinegar, and then with red pepper, and at last with vitriol.” Ng furthermore argued that the Chinese Exclusion Act was “carried out with such vigor that it has almost become an extermination law,” specifically the Chinese population in the United States was substantially reduced since the legislation went into effect. 139

Historians have unearthed only a handful of instances in which labor leaders in the United States mounted a genuine attempt to organize Chinese workers between 1882 and 1904. The most prominent case was District Assembly 49 of the Knights of Labor in New York, whose

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138. Ibid.; “Powderly is Confirmed,” San Francisco Call, March 17, 1898, p. 4, col. 5; Erika Lee and Judy Yung, Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10-13. The Bureau of Immigration became the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization in 1906 and in 1913 the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization was divided into two distinct bureaus, the Bureau of Immigration and the Bureau of Naturalization.

membership and leadership were dominated by Irish Americans.140 When the Knights of Labor was at the height of its influence in the mid-1880s, two of its East Coast district assemblies adopted contrasting approaches to the “Chinese question.” The leaders of New York’s DA 49 tried to organize Chinese workers into local assemblies whereas New Jersey’s DA 51 forced George Casebolt, who purchased James Hervey’s Passaic Steam Laundry in 1876, to dismiss all of his Chinese workers. Organized in July 1882, DA 49 had 366 assemblies and more than 60,000 members by 1886, making it the largest district assembly in New York and the second largest in the United States.141 Although a rare case, DA 49’s stance toward Chinese workers nonetheless suggests that the Irish American working-class was not monolithic in its approach to the Chinese and that genuine class solidarity between Irish and Chinese workers was possible. In the late nineteenth century Irish Americans were often the fiercest opponents of Chinese Americans and although conflict and animosity largely defined relations between both immigrant groups, the case of DA 49 is further evidence that some Irish Americans, with respect to Chinese immigrants, not only espoused anti-racism but were also in the vanguard of forging breaches in the Knights of Labor’s policy of Chinese exclusion.

After the Chinese arrived in Belleville on September 20, 1870, the Passaic Steam Laundry was one of the largest employers of Chinese on the East Coast but this changed in March 1886 when ninety white workers, sixty female and thirty male, affiliated with DA 51 went on strike at Casebolt’s factory and demanded the dismissal of all Chinese workers. By December


1886, DA 51 had secured a racially exclusive workplace at Casebolt’s factory. In response, the Chinese held meetings designed to orchestrate an appropriate protest against the Knights of Labor, which they viewed as part of a broader struggle for naturalized citizenship rights and repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act. The *New York Herald* reported that many Chinese felt “very angry” because the Knights of Labor forced them out of Casebolt’s factory on the basis of racial prejudice. In an interview with one “Chinaman, who spoke very good English,” he expressed the opinion that “we have as much right to this country as any other class of foreigners.” Estimating that there were approximately 150 Chinese in Newark who worked mostly in seventy-five Chinese laundries located there, he maintained that the majority of Chinese in the city gave the authorities little trouble, were learning the English language, and hoped to become American citizens. He thought it hypocritical for the Knights of Labor to claim that they were taking jobs from white workers considering “[t]hey are trying to take our living from us. There is not other employment open to us.”

Yuet Sing, a prominent merchant and “leader among his countrymen” in the United States, situated the events in New Jersey within the broader context of the Chinese struggle for civil rights, equality, and justice. “All we want is a fair chance,” he told one reporter, and opined that “[t]he anti-Chinese bill is un-American and we think unconstitutional.” He claimed that there were more than five thousand Chinese in New York and surrounding environs and that they were united behind the goal of repealing the Chinese Exclusion Act “regardless of sectional or class differences.”

In stark contrast, relations between the Chinese and members of New York’s DA 49 were more cordial, especially after DA 49 tried to organize Chinese workers into local assemblies of


144. “John Wants His Deserts,” *Macon Telegraph* (GA), January 6, 1887, p. 4, col. 5.
the Knights of Labor. At the forefront of this effort were Irish Americans Thomas B. Maguire and James E. Quinn, who served as master workmen of DA 49 in the 1880s. “District Assembly 49,” wrote the New York Herald, “believes that all men were created free and equal and takes not into consideration race, creed or color.”¹⁴⁵ DA 49, unlike almost all the Knights of Labor assemblies, extended these ideals to the Chinese. In September 1886, twenty Chinese cigar makers and laundry workers sent to Master Workman Maguire an application for a charter to form a local assembly of the Knights of Labor, which he agreed to.¹⁴⁶ When Quinn succeeded Maguire as Master Workman, DA 49 organized an array of Chinese workers including clerks, cigar makers, and laundry workers into at least two local assemblies of the Knights of Labor. One assembly was called the Patrick Henry Labor Club, headed by Master Workman Lee Sah, a cigar maker, and the other was the named Victor Hugo Labor Club, which was led by Sam Wee, a grocery clerk.¹⁴⁷ Although members of DA 49 were committed to upholding the Knights of Labor’s egalitarian principles of “universal brotherhood,” this was not the case with the upper echelons of the Knights of Labor. When a group of New York Chinese laundry workers applied directly to the General Assembly for a charter to form a local assembly, their request was denied.¹⁴⁸

At the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor held in Minneapolis in October 1887 and Indianapolis in November 1888, Quinn and other members of DA 49 attempted to secure charters for the Chinese but these efforts were rebuffed. In Indianapolis, DA 49 proposed a resolution that “special efforts be made to organize the Chinese” and stipulated that there were no clauses in the Constitution of the Knights of Labor that forbade Chinese immigrants from joining


the organization. Powderly, however, objected and pointed out that the General Assembly had on previous occasions adopted resolutions stipulating that because the Chinese were not “considered worthy of residence in America, they could not be regarded as proper persons to become members of the Knights of Labor.” Powderly mentioned in his autobiography that anti-Chinese opposition from organized labor was initially confined to the Pacific Coast but this changed after the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. “The eastward march of the Chinese immigrant began when the Pacific railway was built,” Powderly wrote, “and ever since the proximity of that race to our shores has been a standing menace to the welfare of the American laborers.” The majority of delegates at Indianapolis likely agreed with these sentiments given that they also voted against DA 49’s proposed resolution to organize Chinese workers. The press reported that Quinn “created a sensation” and faced opposition and ridicule when he recommended Chinese eligibility for membership in the Knights of Labor and that since then “a heap of quiet fun has been poked at District 49.” Although the Chinese were denied charters and their local assemblies were dissolved, they were able to join DA 49’s mixed assemblies.

**Conclusion**

The nature and extent of organized labor’s involvement in the anti-Chinese movement in the United States cannot be understood without the Irish, who dominated the leadership of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century national labor movement. While some historians argue that the national labor movement was devoid of involvement in the campaign for Chinese immigration restriction and that the majority of workers welcomed Chinese immigrants to the United States, chapter 3 demonstrates that these assertions cannot be readily applied to many Irish American labor leaders, the countless Irish workers who embraced anti-Chinese resolutions at

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labor rallies, most organs of the Irish-controlled Catholic Church in the United States, and numerous Irish American newspaper editors. However, claims that Irish workers and labor leaders were irreconcilably racist toward the Chinese also require revision. Competition and racial conflict largely defined relations between Irish and Chinese workers in the late nineteenth century but on rare occasions genuine workplace solidarity did transpire, meaning greater interracial unionism was a possibility during the Gilded Age but ultimately foundered on the rocks of racial exclusivism.
CHAPTER 4
CONFLICT AND SOLIDARITY: THE IRISH AND CHINESE IN NEW YORK

Between the first major wave of Chinese immigration to the United States during the mid-nineteenth century California Gold Rush and the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the vast majority of Irish who lived east of the Rocky Mountains had no direct contact with Chinese immigrants.¹ The 1880 US census reported the Chinese population east of the Rockies as 3,363 or a miniscule .007 percent of the East’s total population of 48.4 million.² This begs the question of why many East Coast Irish, as evidenced in chapter 3, were ardent proponents of Chinese immigration restriction. To help better comprehend the East Coast Irish and Chinese interethnic and interracial dynamic, chapter 4 examines a broader range of social actors—washerwomen, gangsters, merchants, diplomats, politicians, and Catholic clergy—and uses a more diverse set of primary sources including Irish American popular music and performance. The spatial focus of chapter 4 is New York City, which is where the largest Chinese enclave east of the Rocky Mountains took root from around the late 1870s onwards.³ This chapter argues that the New York Irish were a major force behind the Chinese exclusion and immigration restriction movement east of the Rockies and as producers of a variety of popular culture mediums they disseminated anti-Chinese stereotypes and imagery that widened the racial divide between the East Coast Irish and the Chinese. There were instances of genuine solidarity between the Irish and Chinese in New York but the dominant pattern of relations was one of conflict.

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² Gyory, Closing the Gate, 67.

The Chinese were scattered throughout New York but the heart of their community was the bourgeoing “Chinatown” in the Five Points neighborhood located in lower Manhattan.4 “Chinatown” was part of New York’s Sixth Ward, which was dominated both numerically and politically by Irish Americans and widely known as the “Bloody Ould Sixth” because of its reputation for violence and gang rivalry. In the aftermath of the Great Famine of the 1840s, Irish immigrants poured into crowded tenements on the Lower East Side, which was the epicenter of working-class life in New York City. Irish Americans drove other ethnic groups out of their neighborhoods, most notably African Americans, whose population in the Sixth Ward declined from 2,000 to 200 between 1830 and 1870.5 By 1880, the combined Irish-born population of Manhattan and Brooklyn outnumbered that of any other city in the world including Dublin and Belfast, Ireland’s two most densely populated cities.6 The 1890 US census reported a population of roughly 1.5 million for New York City and given that Irish Americans constituted more than one-third of this population (approximately 200,000 Irish-born and 400,000 second-generation Irish), it was an understatement for one Irish immigrant to characterize the city as “a little Dublin.”7 The Chinese who settled and worked in New York were forced to contend with this “little Dublin,” a labor market where the Irish were by far their greatest competitor.

The overwhelming majority of Irish and Chinese in New York during the second half of the nineteenth century were menial workers. In 1870, approximately three quarters of New York


City’s laborers and roughly half of its domestic service workers were Irish-born. Many of New York’s initial Chinese settlers worked in a variety of capacities, including cigar maker, street peddler, cook, and mariner, but by 1880 a disproportionate number worked in the laundry industry and would continue to do so until at least the 1960s. An 1876 New York City business directory listed fifty-six “Chinese laundries” and by 1880 approximately three-quarters of all Chinese worked in the laundry business. This shift in occupational status was largely the result of the anti-Chinese movement that began to gather steam nationally from 1870 onwards. Labor unions pushed Chinese workers out of industries coveted by their predominantly white members and as a survival strategy or means of mitigating anti-Chinese racial hostility, the Chinese worked in areas where white males were conspicuously absent. However, in doing so, they entered a line of work that was dominated by female Irish immigrants and this caused animosity and conflict between Irish women and Chinese men. Simultaneous to this friction, and which underscores the complexity of relations between the Irish and Chinese, was the ultimate form of interracial solidarity, namely the existence of marriages between Irish women and Chinese men.

A major obstacle to comprehending the historical intricacies of Irish and Chinese relations in New York is the paucity of documents that give a direct voice to the menial workers who constituted the bulk of the Irish and Chinese communities in the city (and elsewhere) during the late nineteenth century. One way to better understand the stance of Irish workers toward the Chinese is through the lens of popular culture. The New York Irish were more likely to imagine the Chinese in yellowface form on stage at one of Manhattan’s theaters than to encounter a Chinese in person. For most East Coast Irish immigrants, their knowledge and understanding of

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what they thought of as Chinese was in large part shaped by what appeared in cartoons, newspapers, songs, and plays. Irish Americans were both creators and consumers of these popular culture mediums, which helped construct and disseminate anti-Chinese racial stereotypes. Representations of the Chinese in popular culture do not necessarily reflect how these images were received but, when combined with other primary sources, one can reconstruct a more informed history of New York Irish perceptions of the Chinese.  

The Mulligan Guard Series, Anti-Chinese Stereotypes, and Irish Perceptions of the Chinese

The work of playwright Edward “Ned” Harrigan, most notably a series of plays that he produced, directed, and acted in between the 1870s and 1890s known as the Mulligan Guard series (MGS), provides a window into how the Irish perceived Irish and Chinese interactions in New York City. These plays, which revolve around the Irish American family of Dan and Cordelia Mulligan and their relations with the immigrant, working class, poor, and ethnically diverse peoples who inhabited the Lower East Side, were widely acclaimed by contemporaries for their realism. Twenty-three of Harrigan’s plays each appeared on Broadway more than one hundred times, an unprecedented success that stemmed in part from his ability to “put living men and women on the stage” and because he “literally held the mirror up to the city, and caught its secrets and its follies.” While the MGS does not provide a factual account of events in New York or speak directly for the city’s working-class inhabitants, these popular theatrical representations can be mined to better understand how people at the time conceived of interethnic and interracial relations on the Lower East Side. Maurice Francis Egan, editor of the Irish-American, wrote that Harrigan’s plays were comparable to “a graphic newspaper-report of a


morning in the Jefferson Market police court, or of a séance with Justice Duffy” because he incorporated into his plays the police reports that were printed in the daily newspapers. 13 William Dean Howells, who many regard as the father of American Realism, described Harrigan as the “Dickens of America” while other contemporaries likened him to a “Milesian [Irish] Dickens” and “to New York what Dickens was to London.” 14 More specifically, Harrigan was extolled as “masterly in matters of detail,” for having “the faculty of a scene painter,” and “of being able to produce a life picture with a couple of strokes of a big brush.” 15

A third-generation Irish American, Harrigan was born in the Corlears Hook neighborhood on the Lower East Side in 1844, which was known as “Cork Row” because of the many Irish who lived there. 16 In 1871 Harrigan teamed up with fellow comic Tony Hart (born Anthony J. Cannon in 1855 to Irish immigrant parents in Worcester, Massachusetts) to form “Harrigan & Hart” (1871-85), and together these “merry partners” emerged as the most famous musical-comedy team in the United States. 17 Data on the precise demographic breakdown of the MGS audience is not available although there is evidence to suggest that the most representative group was Irish Americans of a working-class and Catholic background. Irish American critics of the MGS, which included Catholic clergy, newspaper editors, and members of the Irish National


16. Cork, a county in Ireland, is where Edward Harrigan’s grandfather was from. For more on Harrigan’s background and career, see Richard Moody, Ned Harrigan: From Corlear’s Hook to Herald Square (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1980).

Land League of America, were forced to come to terms with the reality that the plays were extremely popular with New York’s working-class Irish. Father Peter Larkin, born in County Galway, Ireland, and a pastor of New York’s Church of the Holy Innocents, criticized Harrigan because he believed the MGS degraded and exaggerated the Irish character. Larkin urged his parishioners from the pulpit to cease patronizing Harrigan’s shows. In a rebuttal to Larkin’s criticisms, Harrigan pointed out that parishioners in the predominantly Irish St. Joseph’s parish, home to the oldest Catholic church in Manhattan and where he resided, attended his shows. Moreover, Harrigan was in possession of letters from New York’s “eminent Catholic clergymen” who endorsed and occasionally attended the MGS. To undermine claims that the MGS exaggerated the lives of many of New York City’s poorer inhabitants, Harrigan invited Larkin to accompany him on a trip to the Lower East Side tenements. “I will show him Dan Mulligan alive and just as I represent him on stage,” Harrigan told one reporter, and the other MGS characters “you knock against them on the street every day of your life.”18 Furthermore, in a show of appreciation and solidarity with his loyal Irish patrons, Harrigan donated personal funds and the proceeds of a St. Patrick’s Day matinee performance of one of his plays, the Mulligan Guard’s Surprise, to the New York Herald’s Irish famine (1879-80) relief fund.19

Scholars have utilized the MGS to help understand working-class Irish life in New York City and in particular Irish interactions with the other groups who lived on the Lower East Side and who also feature in the MGS such as African Americans, Germans, Italians, Jews, and Chinese. Most of these studies focus on Irish relations with African Americans whereas yet to appear is an in-depth analysis of Irish and Chinese interactions both onstage and offstage. Chapter


4 analyzes the MGS in conjunction with other primary sources such as newspapers, songs, letters, and illustrations to explain relations between the Irish and Chinese in New York.

**Rising Tensions on the Lower East Side**

Notable Chinese characters begin to appear in Harrigan’s manuscripts and theater performances after Denis Kearney’s eastern tour propelled the “Chinese question” into the national spotlight with an intensity as never before, and when conflict between the Irish and Chinese in New York escalated to a point whereby it received widespread press coverage. Harrigan tried to capture these rising tensions in his play, *The Mulligan Guard Chowder*, which premiered on August 11, 1879, at the Theatre Comique in New York City. The second and third scene of *The Mulligan Guard Chowder* are set in a fictional working-class neighborhood called Mulligan Alley, where William West appears in yellowface as a Chinese laundryman named Hog Eye, one of the MGS’s stereotypical Chinese characters. Mulligan Alley was a moniker Harrigan likely used to denote the notorious Murderers’ Alley in the Sixth Ward, which was also known as Donovan’s Alley. According to a *New York Times* reporter, Donovan’s Alley was “in its day the worst slum in the City of New York.”

The dialogue in the second scene presents a hostile relationship between Irish and Chinese men and conveys an image of the Chinese as an alien “other.” Dan Mulligan (Edward Harrigan), an Irish immigrant and the main protagonist of the MGS, challenges Walsingham McSweeny (Michael Bradley), his Irish friend and proprietor of the “Wee Drop” saloon, to play a game of handball, a sport introduced to the United States by Irish immigrants in the mid-


nineteenth century and a popular street game in New York City by the 1870s.²³ Rather than risk breaking a saloon window, Mulligan indicates that he instead intends to use the wall of Hog Eye’s laundry. Anxious not to lose the ball through the laundry window, where Hog Eye appears, Mulligan orders him to resolve the situation. “Mooneye shut the shutters,” Mulligan derogatorily yells at Hog Eye, “or I’ll fire you into the street, pigtail and all.” This and the ensuing dialogue highlights the lack of respect Mulligan had for the Chinese and his blithe willingness to threaten the Chinese with violence for a trifling pursuit such as a game of handball. “He’ll not interfere with my pleasure,” Mulligan proclaims to McSweeny, and he advocates physical force as a means of solving the impasse. While Mulligan mentions to McSweeny that it would be good if he “had something to throw” at Hog Eye, he also entertains more sinister acts of violence. “[I]f I had that [Hog Eye] fellow down here,” Mulligan proclaims, “I’d choke the rice out of him.” After Mulligan orders the laundry shutters closed, Hog Eye utters in pidgin English “[n]o sabee llishman,” basically that he did not understand (“sabee”) Mulligan, the Irishman. While this exchange conveys a degree of misunderstanding between the Irish and Chinese, the unintelligible speech allows Harrigan to cast the Chinese as alien and un-American. As tensions escalate, Harrigan’s manuscript indicates that Mulligan “gets brick [and] throws and breaks glass in Hog Eye’s window.” The scene ends with smoke, which indicates a fire, bellowing from the tenements in Mulligan Alley and as was typical in Harrigan’s MGS a “melee” breaks out. The cover of Harrigan and Hart’s Mulligan Guard Chowder Songster (fig. 4.1) vividly captures this scene and the stage directions in Mulligan’s manuscript roughly explain what transpires on stage: “Chinaman throwing out bedding … Noise of engine … Firemen with extinguishers squirt on Chinaman in window.”²⁴ The act of squirting water on Hog Eye reinforces the lack of respect for, and further degrades, the Chinese character on stage.


The leitmotif of Irish Americans perpetrating violence against the Chinese appeared in other forms of popular culture, which make light of anti-Chinese violence. One example is the songs popularized by Irish American comedian Pat Rooney, who was described in advertisements as “the favorite and humorous Irish comedian” and “the great Irish comedian.”

In the late nineteenth century songsters and penny ballads were popular with the working-class in the United States and many of these songs helped circulate and reinforce anti-Chinese stereotypes. Demand for these songs grew to such an extent by 1880, noted the *New York Herald*, “that stereotype plates and steam presses are now needed to fill the orders that flow in daily from Maine to California…. [and a] vein of sympathy with the outcast and the poor permeates all the songs.”

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One of the most popular songs sung by Rooney was “Is That Mr. Rielly?,” which is one of many late nineteenth-century songs that parody Irish American politicians who aspire to higher political office by making over-the-top promises to voters including pledges to kill Chinese immigrants. As one verse of “Is That Mr. Rielly?” reads:

I’d have nothing but Irishmen on the police,
Patrick’s Day’ll be the fourth of July,
I’d get one thousand infernal machines
To teach the Chinese how to die. 27

Supplementing the anti-Chinese messages and stereotypes in Rooney’s songs were his onstage comedy performances. One theatergoer who witnessed Rooney’s stage entrance recollected that he walked “stiff-kneed, from way back stage to the centre, then up to the footlights, shake his fists at the audience and say ‘[t]here never was a Chinese laundry where the Shamrock grows.’” 28

While many East Coast Irish strove to maintain boundaries between themselves and the Chinese, Harrigan’s plays served this aim because they unambiguously positioned the Irish above the Chinese in America’s social and racial hierarchies. The third scene of The Mulligan Guard Chowder builds on the theme of anti-Chinese violence but intertwined with this are representations of the Chinese as a dishonest race with a fondness for thievery. For example, Hog Eye steals Bridget Lochmuller’s bed while attempting to escape the fire in Mulligan Alley. 29

When Mulligan encounters Hog Eye, Harrigan’s manuscript indicates that he “takes bed from Hog-Eye, [and] beats him off.” Bridget Lochmuller enters the stage and upon recognizing her


29. Bridget Lochmuller, played by Annie Mack, was an Irish immigrant married to a German immigrant butcher named Gustave Lochmuller.
bed, Mulligan explains that “I saw that moon-eyed leper stealing it, and I prevented him.” Stereotypical representations of the Chinese, conveyed through racial language such as “moon-eyed leper” and “pigtail,” further embedded the dissimilarities between Chinese and Irish characters on stage. Reviews of the play reported that “William West made a hit as Hog-eye, a Chinaman.”

**Irish Washerwomen and Chinese Laundrymen Clash Onstage and Offstage**

In the MGS tensions between the Irish and Chinese in New York were not confined to men. In the second half of the nineteenth century Irish women were at times the most formidable opponents of the Chinese. Conflict between Chinese men and Irish women was most common when the former entered the laundry industry, a field of labor or enterprise traditionally dominated by the latter. This rivalry is captured in Harrigan’s *Mulligan’s Silver Wedding*, which premiered at the Theatre Comique on February 21, 1881. The seventh scene of this play revolves around, as described by one *New York Herald* correspondent, “the settlement of the Chinese question by Honora Dublin, a washerwoman, and her Asiatic rival in the cleansing of linen, Mr. Hog Eye.” On stage, Dublin and Hog Eye tussle over a clothesline affixed to their respective windows in Mulligan Alley, which Harrigan uses to symbolize the competition between Irish women and Chinese men in the laundry business. Dublin is Walsingham McSweeny’s housekeeper and Harrigan provides a vivid characterization of her in his novel, *The Mulligans*, which is a synthesis of the MGS. She is described as “a brawny Irishwoman...[with] a broad, good-natured, and pock-marked face, and a loud voice that rattled off a thick County Cork

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Hog Eye is portrayed as a thief to symbolize “unfair” Chinese competition. As he approaches Dublin’s clothes line expressing his intentions, specifically “[m]e stealee Ilish woman’s closse…. No onee lookee I takee closee,” Dublin enters the scene and catches him in the act. “Let go of that pulley,” she shouts at Hog Eye, “you Chinee thief you,” and after a struggle over the line, and in particular a pair of socks and undershirt that Hog Eye claimed was his, the line and clothes fall onto the mud below. Both Hog Eye and Dublin dash to retrieve the line and end up simultaneously grasping it. In *The Mulligans*, Harrigan provides a vivid picture of the “tug of war” that ensued between Dublin and Hog Eye (renamed Ah Wung in the novel). “Her powerful arms swung the Chinaman around…. While the sinewy, lithe and light body of Ah Wung was making its circuits, he clung fast to the stockings…. Finally the Chink landed on his feet, and faced Honorah.”

The dialogue between Dublin and Hog Eye is designed to indicate to audience members that the threat from Chinese workers stemmed not from any inherent positive qualities on their part but rather because of their predilection for theft and dishonesty. “You’re a daylight robber,” Dublin shouts at Hog Eye, and “[y]ou come down here in Mulligan Alley, and lay claim to my socks and pulley line.” The play also conveys some of the major complaints that the East Coast Irish expressed toward the Chinese. The charge that “cheap Chinese labor” undermined the wages and standard of living for the Irish and other workers is a recurring one. “You come over here and undermine me in my washing,” Dublin complains to Hog Eye, and “[w]here I charge ten cents for a frilled bosom, and five cents for a dickey, you charge three cents; and the divil a button you lave on a shirt—You moon eyed rice destroying vampire.” Interactions between Dublin and Hog


35. Edward Harrigan, *Mulligan’s Silver Wedding: Comic Play in One Act and 9 Scenes* (1881), vol. 8, Reader’s Collection, Library of Congress Copyright Office Drama Deposits, Box I: 15, scene 7, 119-20, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.


37. Ibid., 375.
Eye, besides conveying to theater audiences that the Chinese underpriced Irish women in the laundry industry, suggests that Chinese immigrants had the potential to deny the Irish upward mobility by taking their jobs and confining them to menial occupations such as domestic service. “Chinaman washee welly cheapee,” Hog Eye informs Dublin, and “Ilishwoman washee halleeway or sidewalk, Chinaman washee collar aller same new.”

Considering how few Chinese lived east of the Rockies, the idea that the Chinese posed a major threat to the livelihood of Irish workers was more imaginary than real. However, the perceived potential for the Chinese to arrive on the East Coast in incalculable numbers, a “yellow peril” image fueled by popular culture, did little to assuage anti-Chinese sentiment. Helping solidify this image were the many songs that accompanied Harrigan’s plays and that had nationwide circulation and popularity. Some songs, which were widely sung by New York’s working-class Irish, revolve around anti-Chinese themes that reinforced negative Chinese stereotypes. One of the songs in Mulligan’s Silver Wedding conveys a stereotypical image of the Chinese as deceitful, alien, and lacking masculinity. When Cordelia Mulligan (Annie Yeamans) inquires about her washing, Dublin informs her that various items of clothing went missing including a pair of socks that McSweeny was going to wear to the Mulligan Guards’ picnic. “I think Ah Wung is making free wid me clothes line that stretches across Mulligan Court from his windy to mine,” Dublin informs Cordelia, “but time will tell, as the ould song says:”

Chineymen are deep and sly,
A curse I do bewail!
They wear a frock like women do,
An’ on their head a tail!

38. Harrigan, Mulligan’s Silver Wedding, Scene 7, 122.


41. Ibid., 326.
Other songs by Harrigan such as the “Longshoreman’s Strike; Or, The Poor Man’s Family” conveyed images of the Chinese as a threat to the livelihood of working-class Irish families:

They bring over their Italians  
And Chinamen from the South,  
Thinking they can do our work,  
Take the bread from our mouths;  
The white man’s children they must starve  
Shure we will not agree  
To be put down like a worm in the ground,  
And starve our family.  

The impression that Irish women vigorously resisted Chinese encroachments on their laundry business is encapsulated in Dublin’s assertion to Hog Eye that “Asia must walk over Ireland before I give them [socks] up.” The stage directions in Harrigan’s manuscript indicate that theater audiences learn that Irish women ultimately gained the upper hand in the struggle for control over the laundry industry and were not shy about using force to defend their interests. “Mrs. Dublin beats Hog Eye, puts him in horse trough, pumps [water] on him,” Mulligan writes, and she is seen exiting the door triumphantly with clothes and clothesline pulley in hand. One New York Herald reviewer summed the play up as “the Chinese question” not only “fully propounded” but also physically “pounded” by Dublin.

Life offstage reveals that there were instances when Irish women gained the upper hand over the Chinese in the laundry business. In the New Jersey township of Weehawken, situated on the west bank of the Hudson River opposite Manhattan, there were no Chinese laundries at one point in its history because the town’s Irish washerwomen drove out all their potential Chinese competitors. For example, when Yorp See attempted to establish a laundry on Weehawken’s Park


Avenue in October 1887, the town’s Irish washerwomen, with the support of their Irish-born Catholic and Fenian Mayor, Simon Kelly, forced his departure. Upon hearing about Yorp See’s arrival in Weehawken, a local delegation of washerwomen marched to Mayor Kelly’s house to voice their opposition to Yorp See, who they described in racially charged rhetoric as a “yaller [yellow] blackguard,” “yaller duffer,” and “yaller thafe [thief].” Yorp See and other Chinese immigrants, the washerwomen argued, were a threat to their livelihood. A spokeswoman for the group, described by Jersey City’s Evening Journal as a “Mrs. Crogan, who supports herself and seven children, by daily toil at the wash-tubs,” threatened that she and the other washerwomen would remove Yorp See by force if necessary. After the washerwomen threatened to forcibly eject Yorp See from Weehawken, Mayor Kelly responded to their demands and persuaded him to locate elsewhere. One Evening Journal report stated that Mayor Kelly excluded Yorp See from the community because “a lot of angry Irish women threatened to become riotous and to proceed to acts of violence unless the Chinaman was expelled from the township.”

The incident involving Yorp See was not exceptional. When a Chinese man named Lee Hop attempted to establish a life for himself in Weehawken a few months after Yorp See’s expulsion, the washerwomen drove him out of town. Moreover, Irish washerwomen’s anti-Chinese hostility was not unique to Weehawken. In major cities such as Newark, where approximately one hundred Chinese laundries operated in 1886, Irish washerwomen took actions aimed at driving the Chinese out of the laundry industry. Unable to banish the numerous Chinese laundrymen who worked in Newark, they resorted to other tactics. For example, in December

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47. “City and Home Matters,” Evening Journal (Jersey City), October 13, 1887, p. 2, col. 2.

1886, Irish washerwomen participated in a boycott organized by the Knights of Labor against
Chinese laundries in New Jersey.49

**Irish Gangs Terrorize Chinese Laundry Workers**

A spate of robberies and assaults on Chinese laundrymen in 1882 by Irish gangs in New
York and Brooklyn received extensive press coverage. Coinciding with these events was the
theme of gang attacks on Chinese laundries in one of Harrigan’s most popular plays, *McSorley’s
Inflation*, which premiered at the Theatre Comique on November 27, 1882.50 This play revolves
around the political aspirations and machinations of an Irish immigrant named Peter McSorley
(Edward Harrigan), who seeks election to the position of coroner in his local constituency.51
Harrigan introduces to the New York stage a new Chinese character named Hung Long (John
McCullough), who is the proprietor of a washhouse. John Killahaen (John Queen), a laborer from
County Monaghan, Ireland, complains to McSorley about Chinese laundrymen undermining his
wife’s wages in the laundry business. “My wife had the washing at McSweeneys and Frinches
hotel for a dollar a dozen,” Killahaen informs McSorley, “but Mister one lung [sic] up stairs took
it away for twenty five cents a dozen.” McSorley promises to protect Killahaen after he is elected
to office. “That’s where the protective tariff would be paramount to free trade. The free trade
gives the Chinamen a right to go in free to the hotel,” McSorley explains to Killahaen, “but if I
am elected the protective tariff will protect you.” An impatient Killahaen, however, seeks
immediate action. He is able to extract five dollars from McSorley in exchange for the promise of
his vote in the coronership election, which he uses to buy Hung Long’s washhouse. However,


3, col. 6; “McSorley’s Inflation,” *Daily Tribune* (New York), November 28, 1882, p. 5, col. 2; “The
Short-Tail Gang Again,” *Truth* (New York), September 29, 1882, p. 3, col. 3; “Chinese Laundry
Tribune*, October 30, 1882, p. 2, col. 5.

Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, MSS Plays.
Hung Long’s washhouse is located on property owned by the German landlord Mister Funke, who permits only “nagurs and Chinamen.” Killaheen is portrayed trying to circumvent this obstacle by impersonating a Chinese laundryman.\(^{52}\) This backfires when a character known as the “Fighter,” described in Harrigan’s manuscript as “one of de border gang,” enters the laundry with a revolver. The stage directions indicate that the audience can hear the sound of a pistol shot as Killaheen, dressed as a Chinese laundryman, is embroiled in a tussle with the “Fighter.”\(^{53}\)

Harrigan’s decision to feature a Border Gang member attacking a Chinese laundry with a revolver was likely influenced by several widely publicized robberies and gun attacks perpetrated on Chinese laundrymen by Irish gangs in New York. On September 29, 1882, the Short Tail Gang robbed Charley Lee at gunpoint in his laundry on Wythe Avenue in Brooklyn and in October the gang staged several violent robberies on Chinese laundries on the east side of Manhattan. For example, Hong Wah and Ching Po were held at gunpoint and rope-tied to chairs at their laundry on Forsyth Street and Quong Kee faced similar treatment at his laundry on Chatham Street.\(^{54}\) The origins of the term “Short Tail” is unclear but one *New York Herald* reporter speculated that it originated from the custom that at one time in the gang’s history membership required one to don a short coat and spring-bottom trousers.\(^{55}\) Described by journalists as “the terror of the Thirteenth precinct” and “an organization which has completely terrorized the respectable residents of the East Side,” the Short Tail Gang had their headquarters

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\(^{52}\) Harrigan, *McSorley’s Inflation*, act 2, scene 1, 7-8. Killaheen is also spelled “Kilaheen” in Harrigan’s manuscript.

\(^{53}\) Harrigan, *McSorley’s Inflation*, act 2, scene 2, 27.


at John Lenihan’s saloon (fig. 4.2) on the southeast corner of Rivington and Goerck streets.\textsuperscript{56} Lenihan, an Irishman who was described as “the political pull of the Short Tails,” was a member of the “Limerick Men Association” and was part of the Tammany Hall General Committee of the Fifth Assembly District.\textsuperscript{57} It was common for nineteenth-century Irish gangs to have their headquarters in saloons owned by a neighborhood ward heeler such as Lenihan. The Short Tails, like most gangs in New York, received support or sympathy from their local community. The gangs in turn helped newly arrived immigrants from Ireland insulate themselves against competition from other groups such as the Chinese and navigate their way around a hostile and unfamiliar urban environment where discrimination, prejudice, poverty, and violence were prevalent.\textsuperscript{58} A photograph (fig. 4.3) taken in the late 1880s by Jacob A. Riis, a Danish-born social reformer whose pioneering photojournalism documenting “how the other half lives” in New York City’s slums garnered him wide acclaim, depicts several Short Tail Gang members under a pier in the Corlears Hook area of the Lower East Side.\textsuperscript{59}

The Chinese were so accustomed to robberies on their laundries and attacks from gangs of youth firing missiles at their windows that their first task upon opening a new laundry was to reinforce the security of their premises with a wire screen.\textsuperscript{60} A McSorley’s Inflation courier (fig. 4.4) used by Harrigan’s touring troupe, M. W. Hanley’s Company, visually captures the link between Chinese laundries and violence. Hung Long is depicted mid-air after forceful ejection


from a second-story laundry window and below him is inscribed Denis Kearney’s catchphrase “[the] Chinese Must Go.” Other prominent Irish gangs that waged war on Chinese laundries were the Whyos and the gang explicitly referred to in McSorley’s Inflation, the Border Gang. The Whyos, known as such because its gang members yelled to each other a “Why-oh!” sound whenever the police approached them, were a predominantly Irish gang who carried out assaults and raids on New York’s inhabitants including the Chinese. The Border Gang, which was known as such because the gang’s headquarters straddled the borders of the Seventh and Thirteenth precincts, was described as “one of the worst collections of criminals and plug-uglies in the city” and its members also waged attacks on Chinese laundries. For example, in September 1885, Border Gang members Michael Murphy and Michael Coughlin raided Gy Gey’s laundry on Delancey Street and stole dollar bills and silver.


Denis Kearney and the Commercialization of Chinese Exclusion

By the late 1870s Denis Kearney’s image and his anti-Chinese slogans such as “moon-eyed leper” and “de chinamen must go” (the Chinese must go), the latter evidenced in figure 4.4., appeared in Harrigan’s plays and theatrical performance advertisements and they were used to sell various other products and services. 64 This form of Gilded Age commercial advertising widely circulated negative and racialized images, stereotypes, and caricatures of the Chinese, which in turn helped perpetuate or exacerbate anti-Chinese sentiment. After Kearney’s eastern tour in 1878 he became a household name and he more than any other individual personified the anti-Chinese movement. Businesses such as the Cincinnati-based Simon and Gault Manufacturing Company used a Kearney-themed metamorphosis advertising trade card (fig. 4.5)
to boost consumer demand for their “Peerless Wringer.” Produced by the Donaldson Brothers Steam Lithographic Printers firm located in Five Points, New York, it was one of many color trade cards ubiquitous in the United States by the late 1870s. A metamorphosis card was a fold out card divided into two or more parts. The first part of the “Peerless Wringer” card depicts a scene where Denis Kearney persuades a Chinese man, derogatorily named Ah Sin, to put his queue through the wringer. “What makee dis,” Ah Sin asks Kearney, who responds: “Put Your Pig-Tail In.” The second part, which can be viewed when the card is folded out, depicts Kearney running Ah Sin’s queue through the wringer and the message “Ah Sin Obeys, Though Rather Slow! The Question’s Solved, Chinese Must Go.” Kearney also permeated songs that were popular with working-class Irish Americans and sold in sheet music or penny ballad form. One song, titled “Denis Kearney, The White Working Man’s Hero,” glorifies Kearney’s efforts to rid

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

Figure 4.5. *The Chinese Question Solved by the Peerless Wringer* (New York: Donaldson Brothers, n.d.). Courtesy Trustees of the Boston Public Library, Print Department.


California of Chinese immigrants on behalf the “white workingman.” The song begins as follows:

You have heard of Moriarty, Mulcahey and Malone,
Also of McNamara, O’Malley and Muldoon;
But I will sing of Kearney, an anti-Chinaman,
He’s down upon Mongolians, and all their dirty clan.

So give three cheers for Kearney,
For he’s a solid man;
He’ll raise a grand big army
and drive out the Chinaman. 67

“To Avoid a Life of Toil”:
Irish Women, Chinese Men, and Interracial Marriage in New York City

Female Irish immigrants were sometimes among the foremost proponents of Chinese exclusion in towns and cities east of the Rocky Mountains but concurrent with hostility and conflict was the existence of marriages between Irish women and Chinese men. Research by John Tchen and Mary Lui shows that there were Irish-Chinese marriages in New York City between the 1820s and the early twentieth century. 68 Tchen’s work indicates that between 1820 and 1870 one in four Chinese men living in Manhattan were married to Irish women, although the Chinese population in the city during this time peaked at no more than seventy. 69 By 1900 the percentage of Chinese men married to immigrant Irish women declined sharply. Based on census data for New York’s Sixth Ward, where Chinatown was located, Lui discovered eighty Chinese men married to “white” women, of which forty-three, including their parents, were born in the United States whereas only twelve were of Irish descent. 70


69. Tchen, “Quimbo Appo’s Fear of Fenians,” 128-29. The New York Tribune estimated that there were no more than 70 Chinese living in New York in 1869. See Anbinder, Five Points, 397.

70. Lui, The Chinatown Trunk Mystery, 156.
This chapter furthers the analysis of Tchen and Lui on the nature of marriages between Irish women and Chinese men and examines the relatively unexplored ramifications of these mixed marriages for relations between the broader Irish and Chinese communities including the former’s involvement in New York’s anti-Chinese movement. There is evidence that Irish women who married Chinese men bettered their material circumstances but in doing so they faced ostracism from their local Irish community. Although miniscule compared with the total number of marriages in New York City, marriages between Irish women and Chinese men engendered or exacerbated Irish male hostility toward the Chinese. As demonstrated in prior chapters, many Irish vigorously opposed the parallels that their host society drew between Irish and Chinese immigrants and strove to distance themselves and the larger Irish American community from all linkages with the Chinese. Central to this process was eliminating or limiting physical amalgamation between Irish women and Chinese men. The occurrence, nature, and consequences of these interracial marriages in New York were not unique and existed in other places such as Boston, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and the Australian colonies.  

Details about Irish-Chinese marriages in magazines and newspapers reveal a pattern of what sociologists call hypergamy (colloquially called “marrying up”), that is to say working-class Irish women married Chinese men of higher economic status. An image (fig. 4.6) that appeared on August 20, 1892, in New York’s *Once a Week*, an illustrated magazine established and edited by Irish-born Peter Fenelon Collier, depicts an Irish woman dressed in Chinese garb alongside her Chinese husband. The article accompanying the illustration wrote that “ease-loving Irish-

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American girls” married Chinese men, typically laundrymen, “to avoid a life of toil.”72 The illustration, most notably the Irish American woman portrayed wearing Chinese “costume,” also suggests that some Irish women were willing to adopt Chinese cultural norms after marriage. Augusta Carto, a Protestant missionary acquainted with many of New York’s Chinese inhabitants because of her work in Manhattan’s Chinatown, also underscored an economic motive. She observed that it was rare for Irish (as well as German and Italian) women and Chinese men to live happily together “because the women usually married the Chinaman’s money rather than himself,” which engendered discontent in relationships to the point where “the Chinese husbands pack up and run off to other cities.”73 There is no way to determine the incidence of marital breakdown between Irish women and Chinese men as described by Carto. What is clear is that some marriages did persist and unions between Irish women and Chinese men sometimes resulted in family formation. A New York Daily Graphic reporter who visited the Five Points neighborhood in March 1873 encountered a Chinese man named Yu Wing (fig. 4.7, right) and his “hybrid [Irish-Chinese] family.” The reporter noted that Yu Wing, a cigar peddler in Manhattan for thirty years and “the oldest Chinaman in New York,” was married to “a lady of Milesian [Irish] extraction.” While this Irish woman’s marriage to Yu Wing did not provide an escape from “a life of toil” given that she worked in a laundry (fig. 4.7, left) in the notorious Donovan’s lane, which the reporter described as an “unsavory stretch of rambling hovels and Alpine ranges of garbage heaps,” she did at least have a family and a loyal husband who, according to the Daily Graphic reporter, “attends to the culinary department, and not infrequently does the washing when his wife is indisposed.”74


Marriages between Irish women and Chinese men in New York resulted in outbursts of anti-Chinese agitation by Irish men and the Irish American community shunned Irish women who crossed racial lines to marry Chinese men. Harrigan’s plays also indicate that conjugal or intimate relations between Irish women and Chinese men were likely off limits to his predominantly male Irish American audiences. Although romantic unions between Chinese men and African American women, marriage between Chinese men and Italian women, or marriage between Irish women and men from other European countries such as Germany, were part of the MGS, Irish women forming meaningful relationships with the Chinese was taboo.

Romantic overtures by Chinese men toward Irish women did appear in the MGS but they always went unrequited. One example is the interaction between Hog Eye and Honora Dublin in *Mulligan’s Silver Wedding*. Hog Eye attempts to charm Dublin and convey his suitability as a husband when he asserts that “[m]e welly goodee man. Me likee you—me no likee frightee…. makee welly goodee wife. All same melican [American], callee missee Hog Eye.” While Hog

![Figure 4.6. “Irish Girl—Wife in Chinese Costume.” From: *Once A Week: An Illustrated Weekly Newspaper* (New York), August 20, 1892, p. 12.](image-url)
insists that he is no different to other American men and therefore a suitable marriage partner, Dublin conveys to theater audiences that a union between an Irish woman and a Chinese man is unthinkable by representing the Chinese as sub-human and calling into question Chinese manhood and thereby reinforcing Irish American racial superiority and masculinity:

You’re a Mongrel Asiatic. Would you propose the marriage lines to me? Why don’t ye have whiskers on your face like a man? You baboon you…. You’re not half a man. You’re a pagan. You eat your dinner with drum sticks. You’re a monkey. You have a tail growing out of your head.”

Harrigan wrote in *The Mulligans* that “the blending of the Irish and German races produced a charming combination,” namely the daughter of Gustavas and Bridget Lochmuller, but the MGS portrays amalgamations between Chinese men and Irish women at variance with family formation. For example, in response to Hog Eye’s marriage proposal, Dublin asserts that “[t]he divil a baby did ye ever bring to this country. The sight o’ ye would pison [poison] a child.” Again, Dublin characterizes Chinese men as unsuitable marriage partners for Irish

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women by disputing their manhood. “The likes of ye coming to a free country,” Dublin scoffs at Hog Eye, “and walking around in petticoats, and calling yourself a man. Bah! Ye omadon [amadán] ye.” Harrigan was likely cognizant of Irish-Chinese marriages on the Lower East Side given his familiarity with this part of Manhattan. That these marriages did not appear on stage suggests that his mostly working-class male Irish audience disapproved of conjugal relationships between Irish women and Chinese men. Offstage, male Irish immigrants used the existence of Irish-Chinese marriages or contacts between Irish women and Chinese men as a pretext for stirring up anti-Chinese agitation and attempting to drive Chinese immigrants out of their neighborhoods. Irish American men channeled their ire toward two sites in particular, namely Chinese laundries and Chinese opium dens.

“We Must Guard Against Them”: The New York Irish and the Politics of Chinese Exclusion

While Irish gangs played havoc with Chinese laundry workers, Irish American politicians attempted to pass legislation designed to exclude Chinese immigrants from the laundry industry and dissuade further Chinese migration east of the Rockies. When the Brooklyn Common Council met on December 27, 1880, the Irish-born alderman of the twelfth ward, James Donovan, proposed issuing laundry licenses “only to persons who are citizens of the United States.” This legislation was aimed at the Chinese considering that almost all Chinese were not American citizens and the Chinese were denied the right to American citizenship through naturalization after judge Lorenzo Sawyer of the Circuit Court for the Ninth Circuit ruled in the case In re Ah Yup (April 29, 1878) that a Chinese named Ah Yup was not entitled to be naturalized because he not a “white person.” Donovan’s ultimate goal, however, was the passage of federal legislation restricting Chinese immigration. He told reporters that “what I want to be understood about most particularly is my opposition to Chinese immigration.” Donovan identified himself as part of the

78. Ibid., 121. Amadán translates from the Irish into the English language as fool or idiot.

“white” race and maintained that the Chinese were a threat to white supremacy: “We must guard against them, if we can, or they will become our masters. They can, if the floodgates of immigration are thrown open to them, sweep over our country in such multitudes that they may become, not the masters of any party, color or nationality, but masters of all white men.” Estimating that the population of China numbered 400,000,000, Donovan warned that the Chinese could overrun the United States and claimed they were “already swarming our cities in alarmingly large numbers.” The parallels between Irish anti-Chinese immigrant rhetoric in the 1880s and Know-Nothing anti-Irish immigrant sentiment in the 1850s are striking. Given how few Chinese resided east of the Rocky Mountains in 1880, Donovan’s sensationalism was likely designed to garner more political capital. Donovan also warned that there were between fifty and seventy-five Chinese laundries operational in Brooklyn and that this number would soon increase. He claimed that the Chinese monopolized “a great portion of the washing that was done by poor white women who supported their children by that industry” and that many of these women were driven out of the workplace because of unfair competition from the Chinese, which forced them to subsist on the charity of others. Accordingly, he was “opposed to the Chinese and to giving them any encouragement.” At the same Common Council meeting, Irish American Daniel O’Connell, the alderman of the ninth ward, proposed legislation that required each Chinese laundry to purchase a five-dollar license fee.80

There is evidence to suggest that Tammany Hall, the New York City Democratic political machine led and dominated by Irish Americans after “Honest John” Kelly replaced William “Boss” Tweed as Grand Sachem (leader) of Tammany Hall in 1871, was a major force behind the anti-Chinese movement in New York. In a history of Tammany Hall written in 1893 by Nelson Smith, the Chairman of the Tammany Hall General Committee, he maintained that Tammany was an ardent supporter of newly arrived immigrants to the United States but singled out one national

group as the sole exception to this rule, namely the Chinese. Tammany Hall “has maintained our wise and liberal National policy, which has always welcomed to our shores and invited to our citizenship the down-trodden people of other nations,” Smith explained, “except thieves, paupers and Chinese.”81 East Coast Irish American newspapers championed the Democratic Party’s campaign for Chinese exclusion and vilified Republican politicians who wavered from a Chinese exclusion platform. For example, when Republican nominee James A. Garfield was embroiled in the “Morey letter” scandal in the two weeks before the presidential election, which was a letter purportedly written by Garfield to a Henry L. Morey welcoming the immigration of Chinese laborers to the United States, the Irish-American published a censorious editorial and racialized (fig. 4.8) image of Garfield titled “Ah Sin Garfield.”82 Garfield is depicted sporting a Chinese queue and is identified as “Ah Sin,” which was a demeaning Chinese stereotype popularized by the American writer Bret Harte in his 1870 poem “Plain Language from Truthful James.”83 Although the “Morey letter” was a forgery, the Irish-American tried to make a case for its authenticity by pointing out Garfield’s past record on the “Chinese question,” such as when he supported the decision by President Hayes to veto the Fifteen Passenger Bill.84

Many of the editorials and illustrations that appeared in late nineteenth-century Irish American newspapers published in New York sustained anti-Chinese stereotypes by linking the Chinese with rats, rice, and pigtails. By the late 1870s Irish Democrats used these images in attempts to discredit their political opponents. One editorial in the Irish-American referred to the


Republican Party as the “‘Rat and Rice’ Party” because it was allegedly in favor of “advocating the introduction of laborers who herd together, twenty in a room, and live on rats and rice, at wages of thirty cents a day.”85 Another editorial, which labeled Garfield “‘Chinee’ Garfield,” asked workers to “[k]eep this in your mind, and don’t forget it! Democratic success means plenty of work, with good wages, and empty poor-houses. Republican success means a horde of Chinese Coolies in your workshops, starvation wages, and crowded poor-houses. Make your choice and vote as you think best for your interests.”86 Similarly, an Irish World illustration (fig. 4.9) asked its readers to choose from three dishes held by representatives of the Republican Party (“Rice & Chinamen”), Democratic Party (“Yellow Meal and Free Trade”), and the Greenback Party (“Roast Beef and Prosperity”).87

![Figure 4.8. “Ah Sin Garfield.” From: Irish-American, November 6, 1880, p. 5, col. 1-2.](image1.jpg)

![Figure 4.9. “The Three Political Dishes.” From: Irish World, November 16, 1878, p. 8.](image2.jpg)


86. “‘Chinee’ Garfield,” Irish-American (NY), October 30, 1880, p. 4, col. 3.

When President Arthur vetoed a twenty-year Chinese immigration restriction bill, John Kelly denounced him at a Tammany Hall General Committee meeting. “Our late president [Garfield],” Kelly told his audience on April, 6, 1882, “was accused of writing a letter in which he favored the employment of Chinamen … The letter was pronounced a forgery, but a Republican President and his Congress now advocate the principles expressed in the letter.” Kelly also reinforced the connection between Chinese workers and slave labor when he informed his predominantly Irish American working-class audience that it was an injustice to force white workers to compete with Chinese “slaves.” At the General Committee meeting Kelly also advocated support for the cause of nationalist agitation in Ireland, which is another example of Irish Americans campaigning on the twin issues of Chinese exclusion and Irish nationalism.

Harrigan’s McSorley’s Inflation provides insights into the extent to which anti-Chinese political agitation by New York Irish politicians was driven by political opportunism or pressure from below. McSorley supports the anti-Chinese stance of his Irish and African American constituency in the hopes of winning their votes. Killaheen expresses gratitude to McSorley for landing him a job “on the pipes” but is indignant because an Italian was hired as his replacement, presumably because the Italian worker was willing to work for lower wages. Sympathizing with his fellow-Irishman, McSorley proclaimed: “I view with great alarm the progressive movement of the Italian element.” As threatening as the Italian influx seemed, Killaheen considered Chinese immigration a more pernicious and sinister development when he asserted that “the Italian is nothing to the Chinamen.” McSorley’s response conveys to theater audiences that Irish politicians demonized the Chinese as part of their eagerness to win votes. “The Chinaman,” affirmed McSorley, “ah he’s the scum of a barbrrization that would put its leppress hands upon the Anglo-Saxon Circassion, and drive us into the whirlpool of the Pacific Ocean my execration and indignation be upon them.” Although Harrigan’s audience likely considered McSorley’s

vocabulary comical and farcical, his rhetoric nonetheless reinforced negative images and stereotypes of the Chinese including the idea that the Chinese were a threat to the interests of Irish American workers. In the contest for African American votes with the incumbent, Coroner Slab (Edward Burt), McSorley seeks to outdo him by offering more generous monetary inducements. The theme of Irish American politicians politicizing the “Chinese question” in the hopes of securing additional votes also appears in numerous popular songs. One of the most popular, Pat Rooney’s “When McCormack Rules the State,” revolves around the presidential aspirations of an Irishman named Jerry McCormack and the quixotic policies he promises to fulfill if elected to the presidency. The chorus reads as follows:

Then we’ll have no Italian Congressmen,
The Chinese must emigrate;
There will be the devil to pay in the Fourteenth Ward,
When McCormack rules the State.91

Similarly, a verse of Irish American songwriter John E. Murphy’s “President McMullen” centers on an Irishman named McMullen and the promises he makes in the hope of becoming the next president of the United States:

I’ll raise the laborers’ wages, politicians’ I’ll reduce,
Soap and sugar I’ll give away, and all kinds of produce;
All Chinese must emigrate, and go back home again,
And when I’m there in Washington, I’ll stick to Senator Blaine.92

89. Harrigan, _McSorley’s Inflation_, act 2, scene 1, 7.


Many Chinese in New York were indignant at the actions of the Brooklyn aldermen and implemented a plan designed to protect the livelihood of Chinese laundry workers. At the forefront of this struggle, one that was part of a broader campaign by Chinese Americans for equality and justice, were members of the New York-based Loon Ye Tong. Established by Tom Lee, a prominent Chinese community leader known as “the great Mongolian magnate of Mott Street,” the Loon Ye Tong was described by the *New York Herald* as “a trades union, social, benevolent and political club.” Functioning in a way similar to the Chinese Six Companies in San Francisco, the Loon Ye Tong represented the interests of the Chinese in New York, Brooklyn, and Jersey City and one of its main goals was to secure citizenship through naturalization rights for Chinese immigrants. Loon Ye Tong members resolved that if a Chinese immigrant were denied a laundry license they would challenge the Brooklyn aldermen in the Supreme Court. They also voted in favor of sending a petition to the Chinese Embassy in Washington, DC, asking for advice on how best to deal with the actions of the Brooklyn aldermen. Furthermore, they called for the establishment of a Chinese consulate in New York City to help better protect their interests.

On January 19, 1881, Lee received a letter addressed to the Chinese community from the Chinese Minister, Chen Lanbin, which contained advice on how to deal with the anti-Chinese laundry legislation proposed by Donovan and O’Connell. Chen pointed out that the actions of the aldermen were unconstitutional and violated treaties signed between the United States and China. James C. Baptiste, a prominent spokesperson for the Chinese community in New York and described by the *New York Herald* as “one of the most intelligent Mongolians in the city and who

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speaks good English,” agreed with Chen when he stated that “the Brooklyn aldermen have no authority to take away the only means of earning an honest living which the majority of the Chinese in the city have.” However, fearful of exacerbating the anti-Chinese movement, Chen advised them not to apply to the Supreme Court for a writ of mandamus until the anti-Chinese laundry laws were enforced. Chen considered the five-dollar laundry license fee reasonable but only if it was applied equally to all immigrant groups. Cognizant of the history of Ireland, Irish American political power, and the involvement of the New York Irish in the anti-Chinese laundry movement, when Chen was asked what the Chinese would do if they were driven out of the United States, he wryly stated that “[t]hey will go to Ireland, the only country that is not ruled by the Irish.”

East Coast Irish politicians’ opposition toward the Chinese was not confined to Brooklyn aldermen or the years prior to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Timothy D. “Big Tim” Sullivan, an Irish American politician who dominated turn-of-the-century New York City politics, spearheaded a campaign to drive Chinese workers out of the laundry industry. In his capacity as a New York State Assemblyman, Sullivan introduced a bill on January 12, 1888, titled “An Act in relation to laundries,” which required that all Chinese laundries issue an English-language receipt to customers. This law was aimed specifically at Chinese laundry workers because most were not proficient in English. Although Sullivan was the face behind the anti-Chinese laundry bill and he introduced it in the New York legislature, there is evidence to suggest that this was a bottom-up movement with widespread support. For example, during debates over the proposed laundry bill in the New York legislature, Sullivan stated that “residents

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of the tough wards of the city” demanded it.  

Sullivan’s electoral base was the Bowery District, which was heavily populated with workers and immigrants. Known as “King of the Bowery,” Sullivan and the Tammany machine he headed were a dominant force in Lower Manhattan politics and their power base stemmed from their ability to accommodate the needs of constituents including the demand for Chinese exclusion. Underscoring the tensions and sometimes violent clashes that existed between the Irish immigrant working-class population in his constituency and the Chinese who worked in the laundry industry, O’Sullivan argued that the bill was necessary to keep the Irish out of jail and the Chinese from being “mangled.” After much debate and widespread press coverage the bill was killed in the New York State Legislature on February 1, 1888. Those opposing the proposed bill argued that it was not only unconstitutional but also had the potential to disrupt US-China relations. For example, Assemblyman Ernest H. Crosby argued that “it threatened to disturb the peace of friendly nations.”

The New York Chinese community, comparable to its response to the discriminatory laundry laws proposed by Brooklyn’s Irish American aldermen, mobilized in defense of its interests. The New York Herald reported there was a “perfect uproar” from the Chinese, “Chinatown is in a ferment,” and the “Chinese Wash Association” forwarded petitions to the legislature opposing Sullivan’s bill. While Chinese laundry workers were often victims of violence, they were not shy about using force to defend themselves and their interests. For example, the Brooklyn Police Inspector, Henry L. Jewett, estimated approximately one hundred

Chinese laundrymen living in Brooklyn in 1882 and that year’s annual report for the Brooklyn Police Department listed forty-four Chinese arrests, which “in nearly every case was assault.” Edward Harrigan’s work also indicates that the New York Chinese were not meek when confronted with violence or threats to their welfare. For example, in The Mulligan Guard Chowder the stage directions in Harrigan’s manuscript indicate that Hog Eye “blows water on Mulligan.” Furthermore, in The Mulligans, when Ah Wung is “juggled by the Irishman,” one of his employees, described as a “small-eyed Chinaman,” approaches the window of the laundry on the second story of the tenement building and throws “a dipper of hot water” on Honora Dublin.

The Catholic Church, Irish Immigrants, and the “War on Opium Dens”

When the Chinese population in New York’s Sixth Ward rapidly expanded in the late 1870s and a “Chinatown” began to emerge in the early 1880s due in large part to an influx of Chinese “refugees” fleeing the Denis Kearney-led anti-Chinese agitation in California, the predominantly Irish American residents in the ward tried to halt and reverse these demographic changes. Anti-Chinese agitators, in their attempts to drive the Chinese out of Five Points, exacerbated prevailing fears of physical contact between Irish women and Chinese men. To more effectively mobilize support for Chinese exclusion, Sinophobes linked the threat of racial amalgamation with the menace of Chinese opium dens. Many Irish in the Sixth Ward accused Chinese men of luring young Irish women into opium dens and subjecting them to a life of debauchery after they succumbed to opium addiction. At the forefront of these accusations and attempts to eliminate or reduce the Chinese presence in the Five Points were some of New York’s


Catholic clergy, most notably Father James T. Barry, an Irish-born Catholic priest who served at the Church of Transfiguration located on Mott Street in the heart of Chinatown.  

In May 1882 Barry, armed with a petition signed by many of his parishioners and the support of the Catholic Young Men’s Association (CYMA), helped persuade the New York State Legislature to pass an act outlawing the sale and consumption of opium. When this legislation failed to completely eliminate opium dens and the Chinese population in Five Points continued to grow, Barry launched a more vigorous campaign to rid the Sixth Ward of opium dens and in the process fanned the flames of anti-Chinese hostility among many of his male Irish parishioners. In May 1883 Barry delivered a scathing critique of the New York Chinese community at a meeting held in the CYMA building on Mott Street. Barry and the CYMA claimed that “the licentiousness of a class of people who have no homes or family ties of their own” coaxed young white girls into opium dens that served as “brothels and houses of ill-fame.” They resolved that the “growth of this evil has been so rapid and the efforts to prevent it so feeble, that it becomes necessary for self-protection.” With Father Barry serving as “honorary president,” the CYMA decided to appoint a committee of five, whose goal was “to remove one of the most revolting evils that has existed in the city of New York.”  

Barry’s exaggerated claims about the Chinese did little to foster goodwill between New York’s Chinese inhabitants and the mostly Irish American parishioners who attended his Church of Transfiguration. Moreover, his anti-Chinese rhetoric helped perpetuate images of the Chinese as a racially inferior “other” and cast the Chinese as threat to the predilection of many Irish in the United States for maintaining unambiguous sexual and racial boundaries between the Irish and the Chinese.  


American community and Chinese immigrants. “It is an insupportable idea,” Barry proclaimed at the CYMA meeting, “that these pagan barbarians can carry on their horrible orgies right among us, corrupt our children and convert our peaceable neighborhood into a hotbed of crime and debauchery.” He also claimed that the Chinese were “destroying the daughters of respectable parents by an organized system” and believed that “[t]he hand of every mother, father and brother ought to be raised against this terrible evil.” Barry informed a New York Herald reporter that he personally observed the ruination of “a hundred little girls” because of the opium dens in Mott Street. “Is it not shameful that these lecherous wretches,” he asked the reporter, “are permitted to debauch the daughters of Christian men and women in the very heart of New York City?” Barry contended that many of his churchgoers and members of the CYMA were constantly complaining about the Chinese and that they were up in arms over having “to witness scenes from their window which are a disgrace to our civilization.” Most controversially, Barry claimed that the Chinese used decoys, such as candy laced with opium, to induce women into their opium dens. These sensational accounts, widely reported in the press, likely exacerbated New York Irish hostility toward the Chinese. As one New York Times editorial wrote, [t]he charge that the Chinamen of Mott street give candy impregnated with opium to little girls … is creating a good deal of excitement among our Irish fellow-citizens.” An editorial in the New-York Tribune wrote that the “Irish everywhere hate the Chinese bitterly enough without being egged on by busybodies [such as Barry]. To aggravate their hatred is highly reprehensible.” That the “Irish everywhere” harbored hate toward the Chinese was an overstated view of relations between the Irish and Chinese. Nonetheless, it is fair to suggest that many Irish Americans supported Barry’s anti-Chinese movement including the Irish-dominated Catholic Church in New York.


Michael Corrigan, the Coadjutor Archbishop of New York, and other Catholic clergy visited the CYMA headquarters to voice their support for the anti-opium campaign. Corrigan, as the *New York Herald* reported, “assured Father Barry that he cordially approved of the undertaking.” At the ninth annual convention of the Catholic Young Men’s National Union held at Brooklyn’s Haverly’s Theater in June 1883, the delegates in attendance also lent their support. The Young Men’s National Union had a nationwide membership of 13,000 and represented at the Convention in Brooklyn were four archdioceses, nine dioceses, forty-six societies, and roughly one hundred and forty delegates. Prominent Church figures in attendance included the Irish-born Bishop of Brooklyn, John Loughlin, and powerful Irish American politicians such as Thomas Francis Grady, who also voiced their support for Barry’s Chinatown crusade. Grady, a New York State Senator known as the “silver-tongued orator of Tammany Hall,” delivered a lengthy address praising the work of Barry and the CYMA, highlighted some of the difficulties that they encountered in trying to root out New York’s Chinese opium dens, and offered a resolution in support of their endeavors. It resolved that the members of the Catholic Young Men’s Union in attendance at the convention “heartily indorse [sic] and approve of the work undertaken by the Young Men’s Association of Transfiguration Parish, New York, in the matter of suppression of the opium dens.”

One of the few openly dissenting voices within the Catholic Church and the Irish American community was Father Thomas F. Lynch, pastor of the Church of the Transfiguration, who told a *New-York Tribune* reporter that the charges made by Father Barry and the CYMA were “grossly exaggerated.” While Lynch extended “heartiest

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sympathy” and “active co-operation” with the endeavor to eliminate vices from his parish including opium dens, he objected to what the reporter termed “stirring up a race prejudice.”

Reinforcing the mostly imaginary links between racial amalgamation and Chinese opium dens was Edward Harrigan’s MGS. Besides projecting stereotypical images of the Chinese as workers or proprietors of laundries, lodging-houses, and opium dens, the Chinese characters represented on stage also lent credence to the idea that opium dens and their attendant iniquities were synonymous with the presence of Chinese immigrants. Mulligan Alley, as Harrigan explains in his novel, The Mulligans, was “never without the scent of opium from the pipes of Ah Wung and his celestial helpers.” The idea that the Chinese used opium to take advantage of Irish women featured in Mulligan’s Silver Wedding. For example, Hog Eye is presented attempting to triumph over Honora Dublin in the contest over a clothesline by cajoling her into his opium den. “Welly nicee ladyee. Come top side of house somee timee—smokee pipe o’ mine,” Hog Eye enjoins Dublin, “[w]elly goodee pipe smokee. Ilish ladyee smokee one pipe opium. See Ilish heaven soon up quick.” In this instance, Dublin manages to repulse Hog Eye’s overtures while underscoring the ramifications of the opium den: “It’s the rotten pipe you smoke. The neighbors are moving out of Mulligan Alley from the fume of it.” This remark summed up developments taking place offstage in Five Points. One tactic deployed by the Chinese “to get possession of a house next door,” explained the New York Herald, “is to disgust the tenants, who leave, and then they offer to pay a good sum in rent.” Many Irish who had the financial means migrated out of Five Points, whereas many of those left behind tried to reverse the Chinese influx. While the Five Points population was predominantly Irish in 1875, by 1890 it was mostly a Chinese and Italian


113. Harrigan, Mulligan’s Silver Wedding, Scene 7, 121.

That the Chinese remained in Five Points and a Chinese quarter took root and expanded into today’s Chinatown was an outcome not without struggles.

“An Outrage on the Chinese Community”:
The Chinese Struggle Against the Five Points Irish

The Chinese in New York were far from submissive when confronted with attempts by Barry, the Catholic Church, and the Five Points Irish to drive them out of their homes, businesses, and burgeoning Chinatown neighborhood. A group of Chinese held a meeting at the office of the Chinese American (美華新報 Meihua xinbao) to formulate a strategy to check growing anti-Chinese sentiment and the harmful aspersions cast upon the New York Chinese community. The Chinese American, the first Chinese-language paper published east of the Rocky Mountains, was established by Wong Chin Foo (王清福 Wang Qingfu) and first appeared in print on February 3, 1883 (fig. 4.10). In the late nineteenth century Wong was one of the most prominent Chinese civil rights activists, among the most ardent opponents of the Chinese Exclusion Act, and perhaps the most trenchant critic of Denis Kearney. Fluent in English, Wong was able to articulate the concerns of his fellow Chinese to the American public and mainstream press. Commenting on Barry’s anti-opium movement, Wong told reporters that the “whole thing is an outrage on the Chinese community here.” He dismissed as absurd the charge that Chinese men gave opium candy to young girls to lure them into opium dens and afterwards subject them to sexual exploitation. He admitted that there were two opium dens in New York City “where girls are kept by Chinamen for immoral purposes” but asserted that the “public must discriminate between the good and bad Chinaman.” Pleading for fairness and common sense, Wong insisted that the “reputable part of our community must not be included in the condemnation which the practices of two or three have called forth.” Wong singled out the New York Irish as the nucleus of the

115. Anbinder, Five Points, 423.

116. For a biography of Wong Chin Foo, see Scott D. Seligman, The First Chinese American: The Remarkable Life of Wong Chin Foo (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013).
anti-Chinese agitation in Five Points. “The trouble is that the Irish are trying to direct this clamor against the whole [Chinese] race,” Wong informed reporters, and he was particularly critical of a “number of young Irishmen, living at 20 Mott street,” which was the headquarters of the CYMA. Not only were the Irish intent on unfairly stigmatizing the New York Chinese community, Wong charged, but they were also “determined to drive the Chinese from the street.” Wong also shifted blame to the women who frequented Chinese opium dens, arguing that they were of “the lowest and most degraded type” and were willing to “go with any one to make money.”

Besides utilizing the mainstream press to counter the sensational claims made by Barry and the CYMA, Wong printed an English-language article in the May 16, 1883, edition of the *Chinese American* and circulated ten thousand more copies than usual.118 Spread over two pages, the article described as “utterly groundless” the accusations about Chinese men using opium to entrap women and instead claimed that white women forced their way into Chinese opium dens “to gratify their curiosity or to satisfy their already acquired habits from other sources than Chinese quarters.” A common strategy Chinese community leaders in the United States used to fight discrimination and attempt to elevate themselves and their fellow Chinese in America’s social and racial hierarchies was to compare themselves in more favorable light to other immigrants groups whose morality and fitness for American citizenship were also questioned by the host society. Insinuating that the Irish were prone to criminality, Wong sarcastically wrote that the “simple fact that an Irish organization had made its appearance in New York to suppress Chinese criminals is enough to settle the whole question.”119

Other prominent Chinatown residents shared Wong’s views and openly protested against the New York Irish and Catholic Church. Der A. Wing, a New York businessman described by the *Truth* as “an extraordinarily intelligent Chinaman,” wrote a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* challenging the anti-Chinese propaganda circulated by Barry and the CYMA. Echoing Wong Chin Foo, Der A. Wing wrote that most Chinese felt a “sense of injustice” because they were unfairly defamed by the actions of a “few guilty ones.” The rhetoric of Chinese community leaders in New York is further evidence that the Chinese in the United States were not without prejudice toward the Irish. “My people are insulted continually and persecuted by those who profess to belong to churches resembling the one in Mott-street,” Der A. Wing complained, and he noted that he and other New York Chinese hoped that Barry would “educate


them to better behavior.” Not content with merely addressing the accusations of Barry and the CYMA, Der A. Wing posed a set of rhetorical questions designed to convey the superiority of the Chinese over the Irish:

How many Chinese are in prisons? How many beggars? How many throw stones and injure others who labor for their bread as we do? How many destroy store windows and insult by calling names as you pass quietly along the street? How many do you see drunk or lying about houseless? How many keep rumholes?

Implying that the Irish were hypersusceptible to these vices, Der A. Wing asked his readers to ponder why many considered the Chinese, in contrast to the Irish, outside the boundaries of American national belonging. He concluded his letter with another attack on the Irish and Catholic Church by stating that the “Brothers” at the Church of Transfiguration had little spare time to enlighten the “Heathen Chinese” because they were too busy dealing with problems from their own followers.¹²⁰

### “Swords Against the Kearneys of the East and West”:
The New York Chinese Confront Denis Kearney

Many New York Chinese considered Denis Kearney their archenemy and the greatest threat to their interests even though the “great agitator” was a resident in California. There was a strong link between Kearney, anti-Chinese sentiment in Five Points during the late 1870s and early 1880s, and the decision by the Qing government to establish a consulate in New York in 1883. The anti-Chinese movement headed by Kearney in California drove hundreds if not thousands of Chinese out of the state to other parts of the United States. A Mrs. Timothy Sergeant, the daughter of a former governor of Alta California, Juan Alvarado, witnessed some of the results of Kearney’s anti-Chinese campaign in California while helping fleeing Chinese settle in New York. “The threats of Kearney and his followers have stopped up the channels of

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business, and hundreds of business men are preparing to leave,” she told a *New York Herald* reporter after reflecting on her experience in San Francisco, and the “poor Chinese are frightened almost to death at the prospects which are held up for them if they remain.” Woo Kee, a prominent merchant and leader of the Chinese community in New York, worried about the difficulty of accommodating the new Chinese arrivals and their potential to intensify anti-Chinese sentiment. He and other Chinese lobbied the Chinese Minister in Washington, DC, Chen Lanbin, to establish a Chinese consulate in New York to help better protect their welfare and security.  

Kearney delivered a violent speech at a meeting held by the First Branch Club of the Tenth Ward Workingmen at San Francisco’s Irish-American Hall in March 1880, which resulted in his arrest and conviction for using incendiary language. When news broke of Kearney’s arrest and incarceration in San Francisco’s House of Correction on April 19, 1880, many Chinese were elated. Capturing these sentiments is a cartoon (fig. 4.11) published by antiquarian and journalist Isidor Nathan Choynski and interviews with Chinese residents in New York’s Chinatown by a *New York Herald* reporter. Although relieved that Kearney was imprisoned, the consensus among the Chinese in New York was that his sentence was not stiff enough, especially given the chaos and hardships he had caused the Chinese in the United States. Chinese community leader James Baptiste believed that Kearney “ought to be hung, he ought to be burned, he ought to be torn in pieces and thrown to the dogs—the loafer.” Baptiste, alluding to the superiority of the Chinese over Kearney and his followers, maintained that Kearney “destroyed the homes and happiness of an inoffensive, peace-loving people, because they work hard and don’t spend their money in the rum shops.” He furthermore asserted that “[m]y countrymen are human beings with finer sensibilities” in contrast to a “coarse ruffian” such as Kearney. Baptiste also opined that the course of history would have been different for the Chinese in California had Kearney decided  


not to emigrate from Ireland to the United States. “My people would have been inclined to mix up
with the Americans of San Francisco were it not for Denis Kearney,” Baptiste maintained, “and I
know that many who would have helped us there were driven from us through fear that he would
attack them with blackguard speeches.” Baptiste was at the forefront of attempts to win for
Chinese immigrants a right to citizenship through naturalization but in his view this goal was
scuttled by Kearney. “It is the noise which Kearney made,” Baptiste explained, that “principally
… defeated the efforts of the Chinese in their applications for citizenship.” However, Baptiste
was not prepared to forgo his struggle because he believed naturalization rights were key to
justice and equality for the Chinese in the United States. “We won’t sell out votes like Kearney,”
Baptiste declared, “but we will use them like swords against the Kearneys of the East and West,
knowing that the better class of Americans wish to give us fair play.” Tom Lee was in favor of
lynching Kearney and, similarly, Woo Kee hoped to see Kearney “hang like dog” and believed
that many Chinese in San Francisco would kill Kearney if the chance arose.123


When Kearney arrived in New York City in the summer of 1883 the Chinese were understandably worried considering he spent months fomenting anti-Chinese sentiment on the East Coast in 1878. However, the purpose of Kearney’s trip to New York in 1883 was not to agitate the “Chinese question” in any serious way. He had already achieved his goal of securing Chinese immigration restriction legislation when the federal government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. His visit to New York was part of an anti-monopoly speaking tour to major cities located east of the Rockies. He also planned to establish and secure support for a new labor party. The Chinese were nonetheless uncertain about Kearney’s intentions and some community leaders decided to confront him in an attempt to stave off any potential anti-Chinese propaganda or agitation. Wong Chin Foo was the most outspoken critic of Kearney and challenged the “great agitator” to a duel and a public debate. Wong also pilloried the wider Irish American community in a letter he penned to Kearney and that was released to the public via English-language newspapers:

You and I are both citizens of the United States by adoption. You have achieved such fame as belongs to you by insisting that the race to which I belong shall be denied the advantages which this country has always offered to your own. I, on the other hand, in the face of the enmity of your race and its friends, represent the just demand of my people for fair play as against yours. I belong to the most ancient empire on this globe. You, by your own statement, belong to the most dependent and ill treated nation of serfs ever deprived of its liberties. The flag of my country floats over the third greatest navy in the world. Yours is to be seen derisively displayed on the 17th of March in the public streets and triumphantly hoisted on an occasional gin mill. The ambassadors and consuls of my nation rank at every court in Europe with those of Russia, Germany, England and France. Those of your race may be found cooling their heels in the lobbies of any common council in which the rum-selling interest in politics predominates. The race which I represent is centuries old in every art and science. That of which you are the spokesman apologizes for its present ignorance and mental obscurity with the plea that your learning and literature was lost in the mythical past. If you and I were each to address the American people in our native tongues, we should be equally unintelligible to our audience. In speaking the language of this country, which is naturally the language of neither of us, we should [start?] on the same ground. Perhaps you speak English as well as I do. Some Irishmen do. In such as case we should be on the same plane linguistically, however we might differ in natural dignity and intelligence.... You are a disappointed demagogue, and you are going in a day or two to stir up the prejudice of your ignorant but well meaning brother Irishmen against my brother Chinamen at a public meeting.

demand of you the right to meet you there or anywhere else as the champion of my race. I demand of you the right to array against what you may say to the assisted immigrants of your people, what I have to say in behalf of the industrious and unassisted immigrants of mine….”

Kearney informed a reporter that it was his intention to ignore Wong because as far as he was concerned the “Chinese question” was settled. Kearney also stated that Wong, who he described as a “cockroach Chinaman,” was a ploy by enemies to derail his “mission … to help the masses to obtain higher wages” and that he would not be sidetracked by the “blackguard vaporings of Chin Foo … or any other representative of Asia’s almond-eyed lepers.” Wong, in response to a question about the type of weapon he hoped to use in a duel with Kearney, wittily remarked that “I would give him his choice of chop-sticks, Irish potatoes or Krupp guns.”125

Conclusion

Chapter 4 demonstrated that Irish Americans ranging from gang members and politicians to Catholic clergy and newspaper editors were a major force behind the anti-Chinese movement in New York, where the largest Chinese settlement east of the Rocky Mountains took root after the late 1870s. As producers and consumers of popular culture such as songs, cartoons, and theater performances, the New York Irish helped construct, disseminate, and reinforce anti-Chinese stereotypes and images of the Chinese as a racially inferior “other,” which ultimately widened the racial divide between Irish and Chinese immigrants on the East Coast. Although many Irish in New York were the fiercest critics of the Chinese and the main pattern in relations between both groups was one of conflict, for much of the nineteenth century Irish women were more likely than any other ethnic group in Manhattan to cross racial lines to marry and form families with Chinese men. However, Irish women, and washerwomen in particular, were also at times in the vanguard of campaigns to exclude Chinese men from their neighborhoods. Irish-Chinese marriages, the quintessential manifestation of interracial solidarity, ran counter to efforts

by many New York Irish to dissociate themselves and the larger Irish American community from all links with the Chinese. Interracial marriage in conjunction with the emergence of a “Chinatown” in the Irish-dominated Sixth Ward exacerbated Irish anti-Chinese hostility and afforded many Irish with a pretext for waging a war on Chinese laundries and opium dens. Although the Chinese lacked the wherewithal to present an effective counter popular culture narrative or image, they did use other fora such as Chinese newspapers and the mainstream press in an attempt to win equality, respect, and assert their Americanness. The establishment of a Chinese consulate in New York came about in large part because the Chinese advocated for one in response to Irish anti-Chinese agitation. This underscores once more how the Irish shaped relations between the United States and the Qing Empire.
CHAPTER 5

FUR, GOLD, RAILROADS, AND EXCLUSION: THE IRISH AND CHINESE IN CANADA

The maritime fur trade drew the first Irish and Chinese migrants to the Pacific Northwest in the late eighteenth century. While Irish-born sea captains such as John Green, James Magee, John Barry, and John O’Donnell were pioneers in direct trade relations between the East Coast of the United States and China and the latter’s command of the ship Pallas facilitated the landing of the first Chinese on United States soil, it was the Irish-born explorer and fur-trader John Meares who brought the first Chinese crew to the Pacific Northwest in 1788.¹ This helped forge the first trade links between China and what became the Canadian province of British Columbia. Not until the Fraser Canyon gold rush in 1858, however, did the first major wave of Irish and Chinese converge in the Pacific Northwest. Following similar migration paths and trade routes, especially those from California and the Australian colonies, whose gold rushes had earlier attracted migrants from around the world, thousands of Irish and Chinese flocked to the Fraser River basin in search of gold and opportunity.

Although the body of published work on the history of the Chinese in British Columbia is voluminous, the history of the Irish there is largely untold.² There is no book-length study of the Irish in British Columbia and in the most exhaustive study of Irish emigration to North America,

¹ Based on available primary sources, O’Donnell brought the first Chinese to the East Coast of the United States and Meares’s ship carried the first Chinese to the Pacific Northwest. For more on Meares’s expedition from China to the Pacific Northwest with a crew of Chinese, see John Meares, Voyages Made in the Years 1788 and 1789, From China to the North West Coast of America (London: Logographic Press, 1790).

Kerby Miller’s *Emigrants and Exiles*, there is no mention of the Irish in British Columbia. This is surprising given that the Irish have been a conspicuous presence there since the first European exploratory and fur-trade expeditions to the Pacific Northwest. The Irish and Chinese were central to British empire-building in British Columbia. The Chinese built scores of roads, bridges, and tunnels, worked in the mining, forestry, and salmon-canning industries, and their labor was indispensable to the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), a feat that linked British Columbia with the rest of Canada. Although Irish fur traders, some with the support of Chinese sailors and artisans, helped establish the British Empire in the Pacific Northwest, it was in the fields of law, policing, politics, and colonial administration that the Irish contribution was most notable. As gold commissioners, stipendiary magistrates, and constables, the Irish provided law and order on the British Columbia gold rush frontier and they served at the upper echelons of colonial and provincial government including the positions of governor, lieutenant governor, premier, and attorney general.

While a comprehensive history of the Irish in British Columbia remains to be written, chapter 5 focuses on the Irish and Chinese interethnic and interracial dynamic there from the fur-trade era through the passage of the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885, a statute that imposed a fifty-dollar tax on “every person of Chinese origin” who entered Canada. Also known as the Chinese head tax, it was the first federal law in Canadian history to restrict an immigrant group on the basis of race and it set a precedent for the future enactment of more stringent Chinese immigration laws.

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immigration restriction legislation. After the Colony of British Columbia entered Confederation as a province of the Dominion of Canada in 1871, Irish-born premiers John F. McCreight, George A. Walkem, and Andrew C. Elliott led four out of the first five provincial governments and they were in positions of power at a time historians agree was a key turning point in the reception of the Chinese in British Columbia, namely from an era of general tolerance and cooperation to one predominated by animosity and concerted opposition. British Columbia’s provincial status gave rise to a new political climate of responsible government, which rendered anti-Chinese rhetoric and agitation a major source of political capital and white supremacy therefore supplanted the ideal of multicultural imperial citizenship. This chapter argues that Irish-born politicians in British Columbia were at the forefront of efforts aimed at nationalizing the “Chinese question” and expressed anti-Chinese solidarity with Sinophobes in other white settler societies such as California and the Australian colonies. Moreover, they passed numerous Chinese exclusion laws that interfered with the British Empire’s official policy of equality for all imperial subjects, which strained relations between British Columbia and the Canadian Parliament as well as Ottawa and London, and their actions elicited strong protests from Chinese settlers in British Columbia and Chinese diplomats based in America and Britain.

Multiple ethnic groups interacted with the Chinese in the Pacific Northwest but much of the literature on the anti-Chinese movement in British Columbia subsumes immigrants from Europe under simplistic categories such as “white British Columbians,” “white community,” “white residents,” “white groups,” and “Victorians.” Moreover, recent scholarship that examines

5. The Chinese head tax was raised to one hundred dollars in 1900 and five hundred dollars in 1903. Comparable to America’s Chinese Exclusion Act, there were exempt groups such as diplomats, merchants, and students, but the vast majority of Chinese migrants to North America were laborers and therefore subject to Chinese immigration restriction laws.


Chinese exclusion from broader comparative and transnational perspectives uses categories such as “Anglo-Saxons,” “Anglo miners,” and “Anglo laborers” to denote the array of white migrant groups in the Pacific Northwest. The diversity of ethnic groups from Europe is underscored in British Columbia’s 1881 census, which lists the place of origin for some of the province’s inhabitants as English, Irish, Scotch, Welsh, German, Italian, French, Scandinavian, and Spanish. The population of British Columbia was reported as 49,459 and under the place of origin rubric it consisted of 4,350 Chinese or 8.8 percent of the total population and 3,172 Irish or 6.4 percent of the total population. If one looks at the population born in Britain and Ireland, which supplied a significant proportion of the political power holders in British Columbia in the late nineteenth century, Ireland was the second largest group (1,285) after England (3,294) and was followed by Scotland (1,204). In other words, “white British Columbians,” or those who were part of the political elite in British Columbia, were not a homogenous group. The Irish, whether of the Green or Orange variant, brought with them from Ireland their own traditions, cultures, and experiences, which in turn shaped the nature of their attitudes, perceptions, and interactions with the Chinese. A major finding is that Anglo-Irish in positions of power in British Columbia shared a level of hostility toward the Chinese equivalent to that of the most ardent Catholic Irish Sinophobes but there is also evidence to suggest that some Irish in British Columbia eschewed white supremacy and openly cooperated or expressed solidarity with the Chinese. This chapter provides first-hand perspectives on Irish and Chinese experiences in British Columbia including the attitudes and perceptions of both groups toward each other.

In Canada, Irish anti-Chinese opposition was not confined to British Columbia and politicians. Chapter 5 also argues that Irish immigrants in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec were a considerable force behind attempts by the Canadian labor movement to restrict Chinese

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8. Notable works include Chang, Pacific Connections; Lake and Reynolds, Drawing the Global Colour Line.

immigration to Canada. The central preoccupation of East Coast Irish Canadians was staving-off Chinese migration from the Pacific to their towns and cities and immigrant Irish labor leaders on both sides of the Canada-United States border were at the forefront of transnational movement aimed at restricting Chinese immigration to North America.

“An Hardy, and Industrious, as well as Ingenious Race of People”: A Dubliner, the Maritime Fur Trade, and Chinese in the Pacific Northwest

One of the earliest documented and most striking examples of Irish and Chinese cooperation revolved around the late eighteenth-century maritime fur trade and imperial rivalries in the Pacific Northwest. In 1788 the Irish-born explorer and fur-trader John Meares, described by eighteenth-century newspapers as “a native of Dublin” and the son of Charles Meares, who was once the Pursuivant of the Court of Exchequer in Ireland, brought the first Chinese to the Pacific Northwest as part of his plans to establish a fur trading station there and ultimately tap into China’s much-vaunted and lucrative fur market. 10 A group of merchants based in the East Indies who also invested capital in the voyage were, according to Meares, “desirous of opening a trade with the North West Coast of America, for supplying the Chinese market with furs and ginseng.” 11 Before sailing from China to the Pacific Northwest, Meares hired fifty Chinese “handicraft-men” and sailors to accompany him aboard the ship he commanded, the Felice, and remarked in his memoir that a “much greater number of Chinese solicited to enter into this


service than could be received.”12 The other vessel that comprised this expedition, the *Iphigenia*, contained a crew of forty Chinese and European artisans. “The Chinese were, on this occasion, shipped as an experiment,” Meares noted in his memoir, as “they have been generally esteemed an hardy, and industrious, as well as ingenious race of people; they live on fish and rice, and, requiring but low wages, it was a matter also of economical consideration to employ them.”13 In other words, the Chinese who sailed with Meares to the Pacific Northwest and worked under him did so of their own volition.

John Meares and his Chinese crew were pioneers in the formation of the British Empire in the Northwest Coast of North America. After the *Felice* anchored at Nootka Sound and was shortly followed by the *Iphigenia*, the Chinese helped Meares construct one of the first non-indigenous fur-trading forts in the Pacific Northwest. Moreover, they launched the first vessel built by Europeans and Chinese on the Northwest Coast of North America, the schooner *North-West America*, along with the support of First Nation people.14 Meares was sufficiently impressed with the Chinese that when his fur trading company sent two additional ships from China to Nootka Sound the following year, the crew consisted of almost seventy Chinese.15 “If hereafter trading posts should be established on the American coast,” Meares wrote in his journal, “a colony of these [Chinese] men would be a very important acquisition.”16 He hoped the Chinese would form the nucleus of a permanent fort settlement at Nootka Sound that would serve as a springboard for a fur-trading empire in the Pacific. This ambition was quashed when a Spanish


expedition led by Esteban José Martínez seized some of his ships and crew, which triggered the Nootka Crisis between Britain and Spain.  

Although the fort built by Dubliner John Meares and his mostly Chinese crew was short-lived, it was an important stepping-stone in efforts by the British Empire to stake out a claim to territory in the Pacific Northwest and ultimately the crown colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia. Captain James Cook explored the Pacific Northwest a decade earlier but the first to build a settlement there in the interests of the British Empire were John Meares and his Chinese crew. In the Nootka Sound Convention signed by the British and Spanish on October 1790, an agreement that peacefully resolved the crisis in Britain’s favor, the Spanish conceded navigation and trade rights to the British Empire in parts of the Pacific Northwest and returned to Meares his confiscated property. The fate of the Chinese crew is unclear although after Meares returned to London he mentioned in a memorial to British Home Secretary William Grenville that Martínez “compelled them to enter into the service of Spain,” specifically to work in the mines in the Pacific Northwest. Although a positive relationship existed between Dubliner John Meares and the Chinese in British Columbia during the fur-trade era, an imperial servant of the British Empire born in County Down, Ireland, Arthur Edward Kennedy, was one of the most outspoken advocates of racial equality for the Chinese during British Columbia’s gold rush era.

“An Orderly and Industrious People”: Governor Kennedy and Racial Equality for the Chinese in the British Empire

During the Fraser Canyon and Cariboo gold rushes in the 1850s and 1860s the Chinese presence was for the most part tolerated by other immigrant groups. In contrast to gold rush

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17. For more on Esteban José Martínez and the Nootka Crisis, see Freeman M. Tovell, *At the Far Reaches of Empire: The Life of Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008); Meares, *Authentic Copy of the Memorial to the Right Honourable William Wyndham Grenville*, passim.

California, in British Columbia the Chinese experienced relatively little violence and were granted equal protection before the law. One of the most ardent champions of racial equality for the Chinese was Arthur E. Kennedy, who served as Governor of Vancouver Island between 1864 and 1866. Kennedy’s career spanned other parts of the British Empire where he also came into direct contact with the Chinese, most notably as Governor of Western Australia (1855-62), Hong Kong (1872-77), and Queensland (1877-83). One area of agreement between Kennedy, an Anglican involved in the business of empire-building, and numerous Irish nationalists hostile to the British Empire and the Protestant Ascendancy, was a commitment to racial equality and the exercising of a tradition of Irish anti-racism most forcefully articulated in the nineteenth-century by “the Liberator,” Daniel O’Connell. There is a significant body of literature on Irish racism in North America during the nineteenth century but less prevalent are studies of Irish anti-racism in the United States, Canada, and other parts of the world. A germane example of the latter within the context of nineteenth-century Irish international migration, and more specifically relations between the Irish and Chinese in the Pacific world, is Arthur Kennedy.

When the Chinese community learned that Kennedy was making his way toward Vancouver Island to assume the position of governor in 1864, they donated funds to his welcome reception. Some of Victoria’s leading merchants, Chang Tsoo, Tong Kee, Lee Chong, and Tong Fat, also met with Governor Kennedy in April 1864 and presented him with an address on behalf of the Chinese in the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia. They were eager to secure his support so that the discrimination, unjust laws, and violence aimed at the Chinese in

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California would not be transplanted to the British colonies in the Pacific Northwest. The merchants had direct experience or connections with California and most Chinese in the colonies were cognizant of California’s less than welcoming climate toward the Chinese. Tai Soong and Company, managed by Tong Kee in Victoria, also operated in San Francisco. Kwong Lee and Company, supervised by Lee Chong and Tong Fat in Victoria, had its headquarters in San Francisco. Yang Wo Sang and Company, overseen by Chang Tsoo in Victoria, was a branch of a San Francisco company that he owned. The merchants informed Governor Kennedy that they resided in Victoria since the Frazer Canyon gold rush and estimated that the Chinese population of both colonies was at least 2,000. Approximately 300 to 400 resided on Vancouver Island and the remainder, who mostly worked in the mining industry, were based in British Columbia. They were optimistic about the future of the Chinese community in the colonies. Besides the more hospitable climate vis-à-vis California, the merchants cited the colonies’ abundant natural resources and favorable trade policies within the British Empire and as such informed Kennedy that they envisioned a “Canton” taking root in a prosperous Victoria.

Kennedy was an ally of the Chinese in this endeavor and he shared their vision of a multicultural and multiracial society existing on the fringes of the British Empire. He told the Chinese merchants that it was his intention, as a representative of the British government, “to render equal justice to people of every nationality in her dominions … that the Chinese population in this colony would be protected in their lives and property as well as any other of her subjects.” Kennedy’s personal views reveal an admiration for the Chinese beyond his subscription to the British Empire’s official policy of equality for all imperial subjects. He informed the Chinese merchants that he “always found the Chinese an orderly and industrious


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people” and it was his hope that “they would keep up the same good reputation in this colony.”

Kennedy essentially envisioned a colony where racially and culturally disparate settler-peoples lived and worked side by side without discrimination and enjoyed equality before the law.

A transnational Irish migrant who circulated the globe as an imperial servant for the British Empire, Kennedy was well acquainted with the Chinese given both he and they traveled through similar and well-worn migration and trade routes. Educated at Trinity College, Dublin, Kennedy enlisted in an Irish infantry regiment of the British Army in 1827 and served for almost two decades in parts of the world ranging from Corfu to British North America. Returning to Ireland during the Great Famine, Kennedy administered poor relief in County Clare on behalf of the Poor Law Commission. Kennedy’s reflections on his time in County Clare during the famine relief mission, where he earned a reputation for compassion and support for downtrodden peoples, offer a glimpse into his character. When discussing his experience with Lord Carnarvon at Highclere Castle another guest who was present, the Irish writer William Butler, heard him say “that there were days in that western county [of Clare] when I came back from some scene of eviction so maddened by the sights of hunger and misery I had seen in the day’s work that I felt disposed to take the gun from behind the door and shoot the first landlord I met.” After the famine he spent much of the remainder of his life as a colonial administrator for the British Empire. Almost all of these positions involved exposure to the Chinese, which may have helped him transcend what W. E. B. DuBois later termed “this new religion of whiteness,” namely the ideology of white supremacy that was enveloping the world.

25. Ibid.


The spirit of goodwill between Kennedy and the Chinese was not confined to British Columbia but rather existed in other parts of the world where Kennedy served as a colonial governor for the British Empire. In Canada and Australia, Kennedy was a minority voice in terms of his advocacy of tolerance and racial equality for the Chinese but in Hong Kong, where the Chinese considered him one of their best governors, his stance was not atypical. In the nineteenth century, half of the twelve governors of Hong Kong were Irish-born. From a Chinese perspective, Kennedy stands alongside Richard Graves McDonnell and John Pope Hennessy as the most popular governors. 29 After Kennedy’s death in 1883, the foreign and Chinese communities in Hong Kong agreed to erect a statue in his honor in the Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens (fig. 5.1). At a meeting attended by foreigners and between thirty and forty prominent Chinese in Hong Kong City Hall in July 1883 to consider an appropriate memorial for Kennedy, Sir Kai Ho (何神啟 He Shenqi), the Hong Kong barrister, physician, and mentor to Sun Yat-sen, made an address on behalf of the Chinese community. Kai Ho stated that although Kennedy left Hong Kong in 1877 “his memory was still green in the minds of everyone who had lived under his benignant and wise administration.” He furthermore remarked that the Chinese felt “they had lost one of the best men that the English Government had ever sent to rule over a Colony” and that the Chinese community in Hong Kong was generally in favor of a memorial dedicated to Kennedy. 30

In the Australian colony of Queensland, where Kennedy served as governor between 1877 and 1883, he was one of the most outspoken advocates of racial equality for the Chinese.

29. The Irish-born governors were Henry Pottinger, Richard Graves MacDonnell, Arthur Kennedy, John Pope Hennessy, George Bowen, and Henry Arthur Blake. On the popularity of MacDonnell and Hennessy among the Chinese community in Hong Kong, see Hong Kong Telegraph, July 21, 1883, p. 3, col. 1-2, as cited in Solomon Bard, Voices From the Past: Hong Kong, 1842-1918 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2002), 64.

30. While a statue of Kennedy was erected in the Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens, the Japanese removed the statue when they occupied Hong Kong during World War II and it was never recovered. “A Statue to Sir Arthur Kennedy in Hong Kong,” Straits Times (Singapore), July 26, 1883, p. 7, col. 1-2; Bard, Voices From the Past, 64-65.
After Queensland passed Chinese exclusion and immigration restriction laws the Chinese hoped Kennedy would help them stem a growing tide of anti-Chinese sentiment. 31 When Kennedy visited the Queensland port of Cooktown in 1881, which was home to a significant Chinese population after the nearby Palmer River gold rush commenced in 1873, he was welcomed and presented with an address by the Chinese community. They proclaimed that they had “feelings of the most profound respect” for Kennedy and, cognizant of his positive reputation as the Governor of Hong Kong, viewed him as a possible ally in their struggle for equality in a colony.

increasingly hostile to their interests. “[M]any of us recall, with pleasure, the remembrance of your Excellency’s mild and beneficent rule when Governor of Her Majesty’s Colony of Hongkong,” the Chinese told Kennedy, “and we pray the Great Ruler of Heaven to grant your Excellency, many happy and prosperous days.” As was the case with the Chinese in British Columbia, who maintained that “[u]s believing success will come in obeying rulers” and “so few of us have been chastised for breaking Kingdom rule,” the Chinese at Cooktown also assured Kennedy that they were law-abiding. For example, they informed Kennedy that they, “in common with the great body of our countrymen, endeavour so to conduct ourselves as to live comfortably with the laws and ordinances of the Realm.” Besides presenting themselves as orderly, the Chinese in Cooktown, and especially those who were naturalized British subjects, assured Kennedy that Queen Victoria “had no subjects more loyal and devoted.” Similarly, the Chinese in British Columbia also promised Kennedy “dutiful loyalty” to the crown.32

Kennedy reassured the Chinese that he was opposed to the Chinese exclusion and immigration restriction laws passed by the Queensland legislature, which he described as unjust and detrimental to the best interests of the colony. “I look back with great regret on the repressive measures which some people thought proper to introduce here,” Kennedy informed the Chinese, and “I believe such measures to be suicidal as regards the interests of Cooktown, and of the colony.” Based on his experience of living among the Chinese for five years while serving as Governor of Hong Kong, where “in no town or colony was there ever exhibited greater respect for the laws, or better peace and order,” Kennedy opined that the Chinese were a desirable group of immigrants who belonged in the colony of Queensland. For example, he remarked that “I consider the Chinese to be an honest, industrious, and law-abiding race, and would like to see them settled here. They may be unpopular, but, so long as they respect the laws, they are entitled to protection.” Kennedy’s views were also based on his intimate encounters with the Chinese.

over a nine-year period when, except for “a lady’s maid,” all of his servants were Chinese men. “I can safely affirm that there is no better regulated family in the land than mine. They observe the laws and are good subjects in every way. I have been all over the world, and have had servants from all nationalities, but I consider the Chinese the best.”

Overall, Governor Kennedy’s public rhetoric and actions reveal that he saw no contradiction between a Chinese presence in the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia on the one hand and his personal interests or that of the British Empire on the other. A champion of equality and justice for the Chinese, he eschewed the ideology of white supremacy then prevalent in the white settler societies of North America and Australia. As far as Kennedy was concerned, there was ample room for a Canton to grow in conjunction with a Dublin or Belfast in the colonies of the Pacific Northwest. Representatives of the Chinese community such as merchants Chang Tsao, Tong Kee, Lee Chong, and Tong Fat, judging from their communication with Governor Kennedy, were also positive about the prospects of Chinese, Irish, and other settlers coexisting in British Columbia. Reinforcing these sanguine sentiments was an environment where the Irish played an integral role in upholding law and order in the Colony of British Columbia including extending to the Chinese justice and equal rights before the law.

“A Body of Men Peculiarly Distinguished for Efficiency”:
Irish Police, Chinese Gold Miners, and Law and Order in British Columbia

The discovery of gold along the Thompson, Fraser, and Columbia rivers attracted some 20,000 to 30,000 miners from around the world and acted as a catalyst for the proclamation of the new Crown Colony of British Columbia on August 2, 1858. The majority of white miners who


34. This broad estimate of 20,000 to 30,000 miners is based on official government statistics. See R. E. Gosnell, The Year Book of British Columbia and Manual of Provincial Information, To Which is Added a Chapter Containing Much Special Information Respecting the Canadian Yukon and Northern Territory Generally (Victoria, BC: Librarian Legislative Assembly and Secretary Bureau Statistics, 1897), 200. Most authorities cite figures that lie in the range of 20,000 to 30,000.
flocked to Vancouver Island and British Columbia in the 1850s and 1860s did not share Governor Kennedy’s stance toward the Chinese. They generally denied or attempted to restrict Chinese access to rich placer gold deposits, which was also the case in California and the Australian colonies. While Kennedy viewed the Chinese as compatible with British empire-building, many white miners considered the Chinese a threat to their economic interests on the gold rush frontier in the Pacific Northwest and the Australian colonies. Despite the distaste many white miners in British Columbia harbored toward the Chinese, for the most part the Chinese presence in the goldfields was grudgingly tolerated and the level of interracial violence was comparatively low. In a history of Vancouver Island and British Columbia published in 1865 by Matthew Macfie, a “five years resident in Victoria,” he remarked that the Chinese “always keep at a respectful distance from the whites, and are content with such small returns as may be yielded by abandoned ‘claims,’ from which the whites have already taken the cream.”

That the Chinese were “content” with this state of affairs in British Columbia is questionable. After all, it was their experience or knowledge of anti-Chinese violence on the gold rush frontiers in California or the Australian colonies that predisposed them to working abandoned claims in order to avoid sparking or exacerbating conflict with white miners. The Chinese approach to mining and their separation from white miner encampments by “a respectful distance” only partially explains why the level of violence directed toward the Chinese by white miners in British Columbia paled in comparison to California, where mining camps were also largely segregated along racial lines.

A major reason for the relatively low level of interracial violence was that the gold mining districts in British Columbia had a competent police force, most notably in the form of


Men from Ireland, many with an Irish Constabulary or a British military background, were indispensable to the establishment of this police force and played a crucial role in policing British Columbia’s colonial-era gold rush frontier. There is little consensus over the extent to which the “Irish model” of policing was exactly replicated in the other colonies of the British Empire, but the policing experience that the Irish brought with them from Ireland or other parts of the British Empire helped them excel professionally in remote outposts such as British Columbia and the Australian colonies and their policing skills and knowledge were highly valued by colonial officials. The gold commissioner, also known as a stipendiary magistrate and justice of the peace, was responsible for executing a range of duties including ensuring access to the goldfields, collecting miners’ licenses, recording gold claims, settling disputes over mining claims, and maintaining peace among miners. Chinese miners benefited from the presence of Irish police who by and large extended to all miners, no matter their race or nationality, equal protection under the law. For helping uphold the rule of law, which was central to the British Empire’s control over its colonies, the Irish were rewarded with tangible benefits such as career opportunities in the British Colonial Service.

The Fraser Canyon gold rush presented the Colonial Office in London and the first Governor of the Colony of British Columbia, James Douglas, with the arduous task of maintaining law and order and extracting revenue from the thousands of miners on British Columbia’s gold rush frontier. In a despatch from Colonial Secretary Edward Bulwer-Lytton to Governor Douglas, the Secretary wrote that “nothing is so important to the peace and progress of

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the Colony as a well-organized and effective Police.” The preferred model for policing the gold mining frontier in British Columbia, which existed in one form or another in numerous other British colonies, was the Irish Constabulary. “It is by the establishment of this Civil Constabulary, with a sufficient staff of Stipendiary Magistrates, that I would wish the Colonists to co-operate with the Government in the requisite protection of life and property,” the Secretary informed Douglas. “Hence I have sent to you the most experienced and trustworthy person I could select amongst the Irish Constabulary (a body of men peculiarly distinguished for efficiency) to serve as Inspector of the Police,” the Secretary continued, “and to carry out your Instructions for the formation of a civil force of that character.”39 That person was Irish-born Chartres Brew, who was appointed as British Columbia’s first gold commissioner and who remained the most important police official in the first decade after the establishment of the British Columbia police force. Born in County Clare, Ireland, in 1815, Brew joined the British Legion in 1835, entered the Irish Constabulary in 1840, was seconded to the Commissariat Department after the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854, and was promoted to Assistant Commissary-General in 1856. After resigning from the latter position he served as a Constabulary Inspector in County Cork, Ireland, in 1857. The following year Colonial Secretary Lytton arranged for Brew to help Governor Douglas organize a reliable police force in British Columbia. Governor Douglas initially recruited magistrates and constables from British Columbia’s mining population but as Brew pointed out soon after his arrival in the colony, they were “nearly all a worthless set of loungers.”40 Brew and Douglas eventually agreed that a force of 150 men drawn from the Irish Constabulary would be an efficacious way of upholding law and order although the British government balked at the idea given the financial costs associated with deploying and


maintaining such a force. “The most that we can do is, to supply you with suitable and well-recommended public officers,” Lytton wrote in a despatch to Douglas, “whose experience and capability will enable them to assist you in raising a force in the Colony itself, capable of preserving order, and causing the law to be obeyed.”

Although a large police force with men from the Irish Constabulary constituting its core was a request that never materialized, a small group of highly competent gold commissioners and constables were relatively successful at bringing law and order to British Columbia. As a result, Chinese miners experienced less violence than was the case in other gold mining frontiers such as California. The goldfields in British Columbia were divided into administrative districts and each was assigned a gold commissioner who had magisterial powers and the authority to appoint up to six constables. There were six districts by the end of 1859 and as miners discovered and laid claim to new gold mines additional districts were created including gold commissioners and constables assigned to oversee them. Brew’s first assignment after Douglas appointed him chief gold commissioner in January 1859 was to quell a disturbance at Yale. The three constables appointed to accompany him, Thomas Elwyn, John Carmichael “Paddy” Haynes, and William George Cox, were all Irish-born and later served as gold commissioners in various gold mining districts. Other prominent gold commissioners with an Irish background were Andrew Elliott, Peter O’Reilly, William H. Fitzgerald, John Boles Gaggin, Arthur W. Vowell, and John H. Sullivan.

A prominent example of an Irish-born immigrant policing the frontier and extending to the Chinese equal protection before the law was William H. Fitzgerald. When rich gold deposits


were discovered in the Omineca region, Fitzgerald was sent there to supervise the newly created
gold district. As Chinese moved into the area Fitzgerald helped keep the peace between them and
other miners. In a letter from Fitzgerald to Henry M. Ball, the gold commissioner at Cariboo, on
October 24, 1870, he wrote that at “Germansen Creek an attempt was made to drive off the
fifteen Chinese miners who are located there; but on my arrival I established them in their claims,
and they have not been molested since.” Fitzgerald, for his competent service, was eventually
promoted to the position of gold commissioner in the Omineca District. Another example is when
Thomas Elwyn resolved a dispute between Chinese miners and the Shuswap Nation. In August
1860 the Shuswap plundered a Chinese mining camp in the Cayoosh District, where Elwyn was
stationed as gold commissioner. When a raiding party of Shuswap returned to the mining camp
the Chinese, armed with rifles on this occasion, opened fire and killed four Shuswap and
wounded several others. Elwyn along with Constable Robert J. Flynn and two deputies quelled
the disturbance and arrested two Shuswap for the murder of two Chinese miners.45

Irish gold commissioners and constables were integral to the consolidation of the British
Empire in the Pacific Northwest but the Colony of British Columbia was by no means their first
or last destination. Their life trajectories, which involved shuttling between two or more receiving
societies and across manifold political entities such as nation-states, dominions, or colonial
empire, underscores the variegated nature of the process of people moving from one place to the
next and the connectivity between their place of origin and the various spaces they inhabited. One
of the main arguments for Chinese exclusion and immigration restriction in British Columbia, as
well as the United States and Australia, was that the Chinese were “sojourners” who had little
intention of becoming permanent settlers. However, the Irish who came to British Columbia were

44. Ibid., 48-49; “Omineca,” *Daily British Colonist and Victoria Chronicle* (Victoria, BC),
December 4, 1870, p. 3, col. 3.

45. “Letter from Port Douglas: The Indian and Chinese Fight,” *Daily British Colonist* (Victoria,
BC), September 12, 1860, p. 3, col. 2; “Copy of a Despatch from Governor Douglas, C.B., to his Grace the
Duke of Newcastle,” no. 13, October 9, 1860, in *Papers Relative to the Affairs of British Columbia, Part IV*
no more inclined to become permanent settlers than were the Chinese. Take, for example, Andrew C. Elliott. Described in one obituary as a “native of Dublin” and by Lord Dufferin as “a Dublin lawyer of respectable, but I should say of no more than respectable ability,” Elliott emigrated from Ireland to British Columbia in 1859. Soon after his arrival he served in a variety of positions including county court judge for the Yale and Hope districts, gold commissioner and stipendiary magistrate for the Lillooet District, high sheriff of British Columbia, and police magistrate of Victoria before becoming the forth Premier of British Columbia. Punctuating Elliott’s residence in British Columbia were trips to Ireland and California and after he died in San Francisco on April 9, 1889, his body was transported to British Columbia for a requiem celebration at St. Andrew’s Roman Catholic Cathedral followed by burial at Ross Bay Cemetery. William George Cox, a former Dublin banker, also ended the last years of his life in San Francisco, having spent some time in New York before migrating to British Columbia during the Fraser Canon gold rush. There are countless more examples of Irish circulating the Anglophone world as opposed to permanently settling in any one politically defined territory.

The connection to place of origin is exemplified in John H. Sullivan. A gold commissioner in British Columbia’s Cassiar District, Sullivan planned a round trip to Ireland in 1875. He set out from the port of Victoria on November 4 aboard the SS Pacific, which serviced the Victoria-Puget Sound-San Francisco run after the Cassiar gold rush commenced in 1872, but perished at sea when the Pacific sank off Cape Flattery. One of the worst shipwrecks in the history of the Pacific Northwest, there were only two survivors among more than two hundred

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crew and passengers. The *Daily British Colonist* reported that Sullivan was “on his way to Ireland to visit his mother whom he had not seen for many years” and after tragedy struck and his body was discovered by First Nation peoples at Beechy Bay, on his possession were a number of items including a watch, chain, and pocket diary. His final diary entry read as follows: “Left Victoria for old Ireland on Thursday, 4th, about noon. Passed Cape Flattery about 4 p.m. Some of the miners drunk; some ladies sick; feel sorry at temporarily leaving a country in which I have lived so long; spent last evening at dear old Hillside.” Information related to the *Pacific* tragedy is one window into a world where the Irish and Chinese, often in search of wealth or employment opportunities, migrated side by side in the waters of the Pacific Rim. “Thirty-five Chinamen in the steerage and six Chinamen in the cabin,” reported the *New York Herald*, was the total number of Chinese aboard the *Pacific* with Sullivan and countless other Irish and the “treasure in private hands amounted to $100,000.” Although some of the forty-one Chinese managed to make their way into lifeboats attached to the sinking *Pacific*, they “were pulled out and thrown screaming into the sea to make room for white passengers,” leaving little chance for Chinese survivors. Anti-Chinese violence was widespread along the Pacific Coast of North America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but an empire of multiculturalism and racial inclusion largely prevailed in British Columbia during the Fraser Canyon and Cariboo gold rush era.


was partly due to tolerant colonial governors such as Kennedy and the many Irish gold commissioners who upheld a system of law and order predicated on equality for all inhabitants. This empire of inclusion, however, quickly gave way to one of racial exclusion and hostility toward Chinese immigrants after British Columbia joined Confederation in 1871. Irish-born immigrants are key to understanding this shift from multiculturalism to racial exclusivism.

**Irish Politicians, the Origins of a White British Columbia, and the Chinese Struggle for Equality**

While Irish fur traders, governors, and gold commissioners coexisted or cooperated in the main with Chinese artisans, merchants, or gold miners, these positive relations largely dissipated after British Columbia entered Confederation in 1871. As part of the transition process from colony to province, British Columbia attained responsible government and this granted provincial authorities greater political autonomy including the power to pass various forms of anti-Chinese legislation.\(^5\) Irish-born politicians took advantage of this new political climate by agitating the “Chinese question” to project themselves into positions of power. Between the early 1870s and the passage of the Chinese head tax in 1885, British Columbia’s political elite were the main driving force behind a campaign for Chinese exclusion and immigration restriction.\(^5\) The most vociferous opponent of the Chinese among these politicians was Irish-born Arthur Bunster. As a member of the Legislative Council (1871) and Legislative Assembly (1871-74) of British Columbia and a Member of the Canadian Parliament (1874-82), Bunster proposed numerous Chinese exclusion and immigration restriction bills. Notorious for agitating the “Chinese question” in Ottawa and the first politician to propose a Chinese exclusion law in the Canadian

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Parliament, Bunster spearheaded efforts aimed at nationalizing the “Chinese question.” Bunster was one of numerous Irish-born politicians in British Columbia who, comparable to Irish politicians in the United States, cast the Chinese as racially inferior, perpetuated negative Chinese stereotypes, scapegoated the Chinese for much of their society’s woes, and established or consolidated their positions of political power at the expense of Chinese immigrants. Joining Bunster on his crusade to forge a white British Columbia were three other Irish-born politicians, John Foster McCreight, George Anthony Walkem, and Andrew Charles Elliott. In their capacity as premiers of British Columbia, they led four out of five provincial governments between 1871 and 1882. Devoid of Governor Arthur Kennedy’s cooperative and tolerant stance toward the Chinese, their administrations passed numerous Chinese exclusion laws. By the 1870s a resolute anti-Chinese stance was a prerequisite for success at the highest levels of political office in British Columbia and men from Anglo-Irish backgrounds had no qualms about publicly demonizing the Chinese for political gain. McCreight, Walkem, Elliott, and Bunster were archenemies of the Chinese and by the late 1870s a thorn in the side of Qing diplomats whose job it was to protect the Chinese in British Columbia.

With the support of Chinese diplomats based in London and Washington, DC, the Chinese in British Columbia mobilized in defense of their interests and adopted a variety of measures designed to challenge their enemies, protest discrimination, and stem assaults on their civil rights. Many of the anti-Chinese bills proposed by Bunster and the McCreight, Walkem, and Elliott administrations initially lacked widespread support beyond British Columbia and failed to materialize largely because they ran afoul of the British North America Act, which

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56. On Bunster as the most ardent critic of the Chinese in the early phase of Canada’s anti-Chinese movement, see also Wickberg, ed., *From China to Canada*, 44.

57. Breaking up the Irish-born monopoly on the premiership for less than one year and two months was the Nova Scotia-born Amor De Cosmos, who served as premier between December 23, 1872, and February 9, 1874.

granted the Dominion government sole jurisdiction over immigration regulation, but also partly because the Chinese mounted successful opposition. Significantly, however, the anti-Chinese movement in British Columbia in the 1870s and early 1880s helped lay the foundations for a society that privileged whites and subordinated other racial groups such as the Chinese and First Nation peoples, paved the way for an era of mass anti-Chinese opposition, and set a precedent for the eventual enactment of nationwide Chinese immigration restriction legislation. In other words, Irish immigrants who furthered their political ambitions by embracing white supremacy are key to understanding Canada’s early anti-Chinese movement, which gave rise to race-based immigration restriction laws, resulted in a racially circumscribed democracy, and caused friction in relations between the British Empire and the Chinese Empire.

Bunster’s anti-Chinese crusade commenced before British Columbia joined Confederation. On January 26, 1871, as a representative of Nanaimo in the colony’s Legislative Council, he proposed a bill that would impose an annual fifty-dollar per capita tax “on all Chinamen engaged in any occupation in this colony.” Although politicians on Vancouver Island entertained similar measures in the 1860s, these were sporadic attempts to impose a discriminatory tax on the Chinese whereas Bunster was the first politician to mount a steadfast campaign for Chinese exclusion. As the Toronto Daily Mail remarked with hindsight in 1889, for “nearly a decade a burly, bushy-whiskered member from the Pacific coast, rejoicing in the name of Bunster, endeavoured to impress upon the assembled wisdom the necessity for excluding or taxing the Chinese.” Bunster, to justify his motion in the Legislative Council, claimed that the Chinese in British Columbia avoided paying their fair share of taxes and were responsible for most of the colony’s crime. Moreover, he scapegoated the Chinese for the spread of disease at a


60. For earlier attempts to impose a discriminatory tax on the Chinese, see “The Meeting at the Assembly Hall,” British Colonist (Victoria, BC), March 6, 1860, p. 3, col. 2; “House of Assembly,” Daily British Colonist (Victoria, BC), May 19, 1865, p. 3, col. 3.

time of heightened international fears over the spread of leprosy and the belief among many in the West that leprosy was indigenous to parts of Asia such as China and that the Chinese were hereditary carriers of the disease. In conjunction with a discriminatory tax on the Chinese, Bunster recommended their racial segregation. “I want to see the Chinaman kept to himself and foul diseases kept away from the white people” and to support this he claimed that it was “only two years ago that the small-pox was brought in by them and killed many white people.” Bunster furthermore alleged that because ninety percent of Chinese in British Columbia worked for the prominent Victoria merchant Kwong Lee and the remainder for “Sing Sing or some other Sing,” most could eschew paying taxes.

The Irish in the United States often cast the Chinese as racially inferior by representing them as subordinate to blacks whereas Bunster did the same by depicting the Chinese in less favorable light to First Nation peoples. “Talk about the Indians being dirty!,” Bunster asserted, “when I drive my wagon along the Esquimalt road past the [Chinese] hovels the stench is enough to knock me off my seat … part of this tax may go to keep them clean and the balance to educate them.” Although many representatives in the Legislative Council shared Bunster’s prejudices toward the Chinese, the majority opposed his head tax motion. Edward G. Alston declared it “unjust, impolitic, and impossible” while others such as Thomas B. Humphreys, although agreeing with Bunster’s assertion that the Chinese circumvented paying taxes, viewed them as “industrious and frugal and in some respects valuable.” Bunster on the other hand sensed the political opportunities that lay behind manipulating the “Chinese question” in British Columbia. He asserted that “outside pressure” demanded a head tax on the Chinese and that this was “going to be a test question at the next election—see if it ain’t.”

62. Leung, Leprosy in China, 140-42.
64. Ibid.
gain and in this respect Arthur Bunster was on a par with Denis Kearney in California. Born in Queen’s County, Ireland (known today as County Laois), and educated at Trinity College, Dublin, Bunster spent part of his life living in Hawaii, Australia, British Columbia, and California. Although it was unlikely that Bunster circulated multiple white settler societies to directly partake in anti-Chinese movements, he was influenced by debates and legislation on the “Chinese question” in other parts of the world beyond British Columbia. For example, as a justification for his proposed Chinese head tax bill, Bunster invoked the enactment of similar legislation in California and Australia. Ultimately he withdrew the motion upon the advice of Attorney-General George Phillippo, who informed him that Governor Anthony Musgrave was proscribed from approving legislation in this form because it contravened the British government’s principle of racial equality. The Dominion government, however, as part of the terms of joining Confederation, granted British Columbia representative and responsible government while also promising to build a transcontinental railroad that linked Eastern and Western Canada. The former provided a legitimate platform for politicians to introduce Chinese exclusion legislation whereas the latter, dependent on an influx of thousands of Chinese migrant workers for successful completion, exacerbated anti-Chinese opposition in British Columbia.

In session one of the First Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, Bunster introduced the first Chinese exclusion law in Canadian history to receive royal ascent. Known as “The Registration of Births, Deaths, and Marriages Act, 1872,” this law prohibited the Chinese and First Nation peoples from British Columbia’s civil registration process and signaled that Bunster and the majority of his fellow legislators who backed the bill were earnest about creating a society where the white man was predominant and other racial groups such as the Chinese and

65. For more on Bunster’s background and travels to Hawaii and Australia, see his interview with the Toronto World in the Daily British Colonist. “Mr. Bunster, M.P., in Toronto,” Daily British Colonist (Victoria, BC), December 29, 1880, p. 3, col. 3-4. On his residence in California, see “A Peculiar Death,” San Francisco Chronicle, October 9, 1891, p. 3, col. 6.

First Nation peoples were subordinate. 67 When the bill reached the floor of the Legislative Assembly Bunster asserted that “it would be a great benefit to the whole province” and in agreement with him was the Irish-born Attorney General and first Premier of the province of British Columbia, John McCreight. In a letter for the attention of the Anglo-Irish Governor General of Canada, John Young, McCreight stated that it “appears to be a useful Act, the want of which has long been felt in British Columbia, and can fairly lay claim to Her Majesty’s assent.” 68

In the same session of the Legislative Assembly the representative for Nanaimo, the Canadian-born John Robson, introduced two Chinese exclusion bills. One proposed that an annual fifty-dollar per capita tax be placed on all Chinese in British Columbia, which was little different from Bunster’s Chinese head tax motion in the colonial Legislative Council, and the other called for a prohibition on the employment of Chinese on all public works in British Columbia. 69 “It should be the aim of legislation to encourage a class of population most beneficial,” Robson argued in terms of the head tax bill, “and the Chinese were the most undesirable class.” Although McCreight agreed with Robson on this point he opposed the bill because he recognized that it was unconstitutional under the British North America Act and thus had little chance of receiving royal assent. 70 McCreight opposed the public works bill for the

67. Also known as “An Act respecting the Registration of Births, Deaths, and Marriages in the Province of British Columbia,” this bill was introduced by Bunster on February 28, 1872, passed in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia on April 5, 1872, and received royal assent on April 11, 1872. See “Registration,” Daily British Colonist and Victoria Chronicle (Victoria, BC), February 29, 1872, p. 3, col. 5; Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of British Columbia. From the 15th February to the 11th April, 1872, vol. 1 (Victoria, BC: Richard Wolfenden, 1872), 17, 64; “An Act respecting the Registration of Births, Deaths, and Marriages in the Province of British Columbia,” Statutes of the Province of British Columbia (Victoria, BC: Richard Wolfenden, 1872), 71-75.

68. “Reports of Mr. Attorney-General McCreight,” Sessional Papers of the Dominion of Canada, vol. 9, fourth session of the third Parliament, session 1877 (Ottowa: MacLean, Roger, 1877), 165.


same reason and because he believed it added grist to the mill of those in Ottawa who opposed the construction of Canada’s transcontinental railroad.\textsuperscript{71}

British Columbia was not the first white settler colony where McCreight dealt with the Chinese in an official capacity. One of many well-educated, professionally talented, and highly mobile men of Anglo-Irish background who circulated the Pacific world in the second half of the nineteenth century, McCreight encountered the Chinese in Australia after he migrated there from Ireland at the height of the Victorian gold rush.\textsuperscript{72} Born into a prominent family in Caledon, County Tyrone, in 1827, his father James McCreight was a Church of Ireland clergyman and his mother, Elizabeth Foster, was the daughter of William Foster, a Church of Ireland Bishop and brother of the last speaker in the Irish House of Commons, John Foster.\textsuperscript{73} Although admitted to the Irish Bar in 1852, McCreight decided to relocate to the Colony of Victoria the following year, where he had family connections that were beneficial from a career standpoint, such as Victoria’s Colonial Secretary, John Leslie Fitzgerald Vesey Foster, and Attorney General, William Foster Stawell. McCreight’s privileged upbringing and his relatively high social status is a further example of how Irish anti-Chinese agitation in Pacific Rim white settler societies was not confined to the working-class. After admission to the Melbourne bar in 1853, McCreight practiced law in Victoria and served as a Crown Prosecutor for several districts including cases that involved the Chinese.\textsuperscript{74} At the Ballarat Court of General Sessions, for example, McCreight prosecuted Ah Yun for assaulting a woman named Mary Ann May.\textsuperscript{75} In 1860 he arrived in the


\textsuperscript{73} Johnson, “John Foster McCreight,” 10.

\textsuperscript{74} “New Appointments,” \textit{Argus} (Melbourne), July 21, 1855, p. 5, col. 7.

\textsuperscript{75} “The Chinese, and English Females,” \textit{Age} (Melbourne), April 20, 1858, p. 5, col. 5.
Colony of Vancouver Island via San Francisco. Based in British Columbia for more than thirty years and despite converting to Roman Catholicism in 1883, a potential liability in a province dominated by Protestants and with a tradition of anti-Catholicism, McCreight had a successful career until he retired from the bench in 1897. Soon thereafter he returned to a number of European countries including Ireland and ultimately England where he died in 1913.76

During McCreight’s tenure as premier, the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia also passed the “Qualification and Registration of Voters Act, 1871,” which was designed to disenfranchise the Chinese and First Nation peoples by banning them from registering to vote.77 Out of the numerous Chinese exclusion bills proposed in the 1870s, this piece of legislation was one of the most detrimental to the future prospects of the Chinese community in British Columbia. Once the Chinese were politically disenfranchised they were less capable of holding politicians accountable for their actions and it hindered their ability to stave off the introduction or passage of unwelcome exclusion and immigration restriction legislation. While McCreight favored political exclusion of the Chinese, he expressed concerns that this bill might contravene the British North America Act. Nevertheless, the Anglo-Irish Governor General, Lord Dufferin, later approved a report from the Department of Justice stating “that the legislature of British Columbia have authority to legislate in their own discretion as to parties by whom the right of franchise in respect of the legislative assembly may be exercised.”78 The bill became law during the administration of Irish-born Premier George Anthony Walkem.79 Similar to McCreight,

76. Jackman, Portraits of the Premiers, 12-13; Loo, “John Foster McCreight,” 682.
78. W. E. Hodgins, Correspondence, Reports of the Ministers of Justice and Orders in Council upon the Subject of Dominion and Provincial Legislation 1867-1895 (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1896), 1011-12.
Walkem’s legal opinion that the bill was “wholly unconstitutional” contrasted with his “private opinion” that the Chinese should be denied the right to vote. 80

Walkem was born in Newry, Ireland, in 1834. His mother, Mary Ann Boomer, was the daughter of George Boomer from Lisburn in County Down and they were descendants of a Huguenot family who settled in the northern part of Ireland at the end of the seventeenth century. Of English descent on the paternal side, his father, Charles Walkem, was working on the Irish Ordnance Survey for the Royal Engineers when he married Mary Boomer. In the 1840s the Walkem family emigrated to Canada, where George Walkem attended McGill College in Montreal. The Cariboo gold rush lured him to British Columbia after graduation. 81 Discontent with a loophole in the “Qualification and Registration of Voters Act, 1871,” which permitted previously registered Chinese the right to vote, Walkem introduced a more stringent bill in the Legislative Assembly. 82 Assented to on April 22, 1875, it mandated that “No Chinaman or Indian shall have his name placed on the Register of Voters for any Electoral District, or be entitled to vote at any election of a Member to serve in the Legislative Assembly of this Province” and that the names of all Chinese be removed from British Columbia’s voters lists by June 1, 1875. 83 Thus, by the time the second general election arrived the law stipulated that the Chinese in British Columbia were not permitted to vote in provincial elections.

Total Chinese political disenfranchisement came to fruition under the administration of former Dublin lawyer Andrew Elliott. With the support of Walkem, now the leader of the political opposition, Elliott’s administration passed a piece of legislation whereby “No Chinese or


82. “Evening Session,” Daily British Colonist (Victoria, BC), April 20, 1875, p. 3, col. 3; Roy, A White Man’s Province, 45.

Indians shall be entitled to vote at any municipal election for the election of a Mayor or Councillor.\textsuperscript{84} Thus, in addition to provincial and federal elections, the Chinese were legally excluded from voting at the municipal level. In other words, the Chinese and First Nation peoples, who together greatly exceeded the white settler population in British Columbia, were disenfranchised by a white minority and a political administration led by Irish-born men of Anglo-Irish background.\textsuperscript{85} Having stripped the Chinese of all voting rights, Elliott set his sights on checking Chinese immigration to British Columbia and prohibiting the employment of Chinese laborers on public works. Without debate, his administration passed a resolution stating that “it is expedient for the Government to take some steps at as early a day as possible to prevent this Province being over-run with a Chinese population to the injury of the settled population of the country.” Reminiscent of Chinese invasion metaphors used by politicians in the United States, the resolution also proclaimed that “unless precautionary measures were at once taken the Mongolian would swarm about our ears like bees.”\textsuperscript{86} Over the next several years, politicians in British Columbia took numerous “measures” to restrict Chinese immigration but to no avail since the power to regulate immigration ultimately lay with the Dominion and Imperial governments. With the threat of political reprisal from potential Chinese voters eliminated, however, they were given extra latitude to agitate the “Chinese question” for political gain.

In the run up to the provincial election of 1878, Elliott and several other candidates styled themselves as champions of Chinese exclusion and immigration restriction as part of their strategy to secure more votes.\textsuperscript{87} “It has always been the practice of this Government,” Elliott declared in his election address, “to discourage the employment of Chinese labor on public

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{84} “An Act to amend the ‘Municipality Act, 1872,’ and Amendments thereto,” Statutes of the Province of British Columbia (Victoria, BC: Richard Wolfenden, 1876), 1-4; “Municipality Bill,” Daily British Colonist (Victoria, BC), April 26, 1876, p. 3, col. 1.
  \item \textsuperscript{85} According to the 1881 Canadian census, out of a total population of 49,459 there were 25,661 “Indians,” 4,350 “Chinese,” and 19,448 “whites and others.” See Ward, White Canada Forever, 170.
  \item \textsuperscript{86} “The Chinese Question,” Daily British Colonist (Victoria, BC), May 10, 1876, p. 3, col. 3.
  \item \textsuperscript{87} See, for example, Daily British Colonist (Victoria, BC), May 22, 1878, supp., p. 1.
\end{itemize}
works, and it shall be my aim to promote such legislation as may tend to check the increase of Chinese immigration.”

The Victoria-based newspaper, the Daily British Colonist, endorsed Elliott for the upcoming provincial election and affirmed his anti-Chinese credentials. “Mr. Elliott … stands pledged to do his utmost to restrict Chinese immigration and to prevent the employment of Chinamen in public works,” declared one editorial, and it furthermore noted that “to his efforts it is due that Chinamen are no longer permitted to vote.”

Despite Elliot’s best efforts, his Irish-born rival, Walkem, was swept into power for a second time.

Walkem, who had trumpeted the slogan of “fight Canada, fight Mackenzie policy” during the election, wasted little time executing his campaign pledge to settle the “Chinese question” in British Columbia. In session one of the third provincial Legislative Assembly, the Walkem administration unanimously passed a bill barring contractors from employing Chinese labor on all public works in British Columbia and “in the event of their doing so the Government will not be responsible for payment of Contract.”

This predated a similar clause inserted into the California Constitution of 1879, largely the handiwork of Denis Kearney and his Workingmen’s Party of California, which stated that “No Chinese shall be employed on any State, county, municipal, or other public work, except in punishment for crime.”

Walkem’s policies were strongly influenced by the anti-Chinese rhetoric and exclusion laws in California. He cited California’s ability “not only to restrict Chinese immigration but to drive out those Mongolians who had already gained a foot-hold.” Walkem wanted the Chinese excluded from all forms of employment


89. “Faithful to the City,” Daily British Colonist (Victoria, BC), May 22, 1878, supp., p. 3, col. 1.


except “the most menial positions,” otherwise “in the course of time they will so degrade the laboring classes that it will be impossible for white men to compete with them.”

More controversial from the perspective of the Chinese community in British Columbia was a Chinese Tax Act bill introduced by Walkem in the Legislative Assembly that required all Chinese over twelve years of age to pay a ten dollars license fee every three months. Although skeptical about the likelihood of Ottawa assenting to the bill, Walkem informed members of the Legislative Assembly that “it was, at least, the duty of the House to make an earnest effort to restrict and remedy an existing evil.” When his administration began enforcing this law it provoked strong opposition from the Chinese in British Columbia and elicited protests from Chinese diplomats based in London and Washington, DC. On September 16, 1878, Walkem visited Victoria’s Chinatown to personally oversee the enforcement of the Chinese Tax Act. The Chinese, however, refused to comply. After the goods of Sam Gee, On Hing, Tai Yune, and other Chinese merchants were seized by the tax collector, Noah Shakespeare, the local Daily British Colonist reported that “Chinatown was in a state of commotion” and as a mark of protest Chinese merchants “put up their shutters and suspended business.” The next day all the Chinese in Victoria went on strike. Chinese merchants refused to sell their wares “to any white person” and Chinese laundry workers suspended their labor. One Chinese domestic servant who went on strike, described as “a Chinaman who for many years has been employed by a well known citizen,” told his boss tongue-in-cheek that “to sweep out his house” he would now have to solicit

96. “Putting on the Screws—Mr. Walkem Visits Chinatown,” Daily British Colonist (Victoria, BC), September 17, 1878, p. 3, col. 4.
help from Premier Walkem. Moreover, the leading Chinese merchants in Victoria requested that the Chinese on mainland British Columbia also refuse white people their labor. 97

Besides strikes and boycotts, the Chinese community in British Columbia resorted to the courts, sent petitions to influential authorities such as the Governor General of Canada, and solicited the support of Chinese diplomats as part of their strategic arsenal for undermining discriminatory laws. Tai Sing, one of the Chinese merchants whose goods was seized, challenged the constitutionality of Walkem’s Chinese Tax Act on the grounds that it was *ultra vires* the provincial assembly to regulate trade and commerce and interfere with aliens. The Chinese in the United States often invoked the Burlingame Treaty in their struggle against exclusion and immigration restriction laws whereas the Chinese in British Columbia turned to treaties signed between Britain and China. Tai Sing, for instance, argued that Walkem’s tax interfered “with the powers and duties of the Dominion Government in performing the obligations of Canada as a part of the British Empire, arising under treaties between Great Britain and China.” The courts agreed. In *Tai Sing v. John Maguire*, British Columbia Supreme Court Justice John Hamilton Gray ruled in favor of Tai Sing that the Chinese Tax Act was “unconstitutional and void.” Gray also underscored the foreign relations ramifications of Walkem’s Chinese Tax Act, specifically that its intention “to drive the Chinese from the country” interfered with international treaties signed by the British Empire and “its practical effect would operate as an absolute prohibition of intercourse with the Chinese.” 98

Victoria’s Chinese merchants sent Dufferin a petition protesting against Walkem’s Chinese Tax Act. They described it as “oppressive” because it was a flat tax, applied to children over twelve years of age, and was aimed exclusively at the Chinese. From a foreign relations perspective, the merchants maintained “that such a tax is inconsistent with, and repugnant to, the


treaties existing between Her Majesty the Queen and the Emperor of China."99 A group of Chinese merchants and laborers in Victoria also sent petitions to the most influential Chinese diplomats in North America and Europe, respectively, Chen Lanbin and Guo Songtao (郭嵩燾). Guo, based at the Chinese Embassy in London, was the first Chinese Minister to Britain and France. These merchants and laborers described Walkem’s bill as an “oppressive tax” and pleaded with Chen and Guo to take appropriate action on their behalf. The Chinese in British Columbia stipulated that they were not seeking special privileges but rather fairness and a level playing field vis-à-vis other immigrant groups. “We do not aim at any extra favourable treatment from the British government,” they wrote to Minister Guo in their petition, but rather “[w]hat we hope for is that we may be so fortunate as to receive the same kind of treatment as the people of other nations do.” In a letter to Britain’s Foreign Secretary, the Marquis of Salisbury, Minister Guo attached the petition and appealed to the British Empire’s ideal of multicultural imperial citizenship by reminding the Foreign Secretary “that in the British colonies the people of different countries are always treated without any partiality whatever.”100 The Foreign Secretary forwarded the letter and petition to the Governor General, who disallowed the Chinese head tax and therefore granted the Chinese a victory against the Walkem administration.101

“The Great Anti-Pigtail Champion”:
Arthur Bunster, Chinese Exclusion, and the Roots of a White Canada Policy

Whereas Irish-born politicians McCreight, Elliott, and Walkem were at the forefront of the anti-Chinese movement in British Columbia, it was an MP for Vancouver Island (1874-82)

99. The petitioners were listed as Sing Lee Cham, Wing Chong and Co., Wo Chin and Co., Tai Loon and Co., Kwong Kong Sing, Hie Lee, Tai Yum, Dong Song and Co., Tay Chong Yuen, Kong Lee and Co. See “Petition of Chinese Merchants to His Excellency the Governor General,” Hodgins, Correspondence, 1061-62.

100. The petitioners were described in a letter from Guo Songtao to Britain’s Foreign Secretary, the Marquis of Salisbury, as Kwang li Tai, Yuan Lung, Sciang Tai Suou Chung, Tai-chang Yuan, and Sin Yee. See “The Chinese Minister to the Marquis of Salisbury,” Hodgins, Correspondence, 1064-65.

101. “Report of the Honourable the Minister of Justice, approved by His Excellency the Governor General in Council on the 28th October, 1879,” Hodgins, Correspondence, 1067.
with “a rich Irish brogue” and “the accent of the men of Leinster,” Arthur Bunster, who initiated
the campaign for Chinese exclusion and immigration restriction legislation at the federal level.102
Known in Ottawa as “the great anti-pigtail champion,” Bunster was the most outspoken critic and
unwavering opponent of the Chinese in the House of Commons until he lost his seat in the federal
election of 1882.103 Whereas the California Irish, particularly Eugene Casserly, Philip Roach, and
Denis Kearney, played a major role in nationalizing the “Chinese question” in the United States,
Bunster spearheaded similar efforts in Canada. Collectively, these Irish-born politicians were a
major force behind a transnational movement aimed at restricting further Chinese immigration
while simultaneously forging racially restricted democracies wherein the Chinese were rendered
outside the boundaries of national belonging.

The first attempt to secure Chinese exclusion legislation in the Canadian Parliament was
in March 1878, when Bunster proposed a motion asking the government to insert a clause in all
CPR construction contracts “that no man wearing his hair longer than five and one-half inches
shall be deemed eligible for employment on said work.” Given that almost all Chinese men who
arrived in Canada during the nineteenth century wore a queue as a sign of submission to the Qing
dynasty, Prime Minister Mackenzie rightly pointed out in his opposition to the motion that it was
“aimed, doubtless, at the exclusion of Chinese labor.”104 Although Bunster’s proposed bill
focused narrowly on the issue of Chinese labor and the CPR, the arguments and debate that
revolved around it afforded him the opportunity to convey his thoughts more broadly on the
“Chinese question” and, with the support of other Irish-born MPs, essentially kick-start a fervent
campaign for Chinese exclusion and immigration restriction in the Canadian Parliament. Bunster

102. “The Member for Vancouver,” Daily British Colonist (Victoria, BC), April 18, 1875, p. 3,
col. 3; “Mr. Bunster, M.P., in Toronto,” Daily British Colonist (Victoria, BC), December 29, 1880, p. 3,
col. 3-4.

103. “The Member For Vancouver,” Daily British Colonist (Victoria, BC), March 25, 1874, p. 3,
col. 3.

described Chinese immigration to Canada as a “worse than worthless element into any civilized
country” and in support of his pro-Chinese exclusion policies he cast the Chinese as a threat to
white families, white manhood, a white Canada, and other white settler societies. Bunster told his
fellow MPs that the Chinese “introduced many evils which it was impossible adequately to
describe in this House…. and which gave cause for serious reflection to every father of a family
as to the difficulties of guarding against them.” Recognizing that the “Chinese question” was not
a priority for MPs representing the eastern provinces, Bunster told them that the opposite was the
case in British Columbia where “every white man took it seriously to heart” and warned them that
“the time was not far distant when it would force itself on their attention.” Bunster proclaimed
that “Canadians should take measures to protect themselves against the introduction of a
population so detestable, and prevent their manhood from degenerating.”

Although Denis Kearney was not mentioned by name, Bunster was keenly aware of the
“large mass meetings” fomented by Kearney in San Francisco and he expressed anti-Chinese
solidarity with Sinophobes south of the Canadian border. “We do not want to be imposed upon by
a race,” Bunster told the House on a separate occasion, “that has been denounced by our
American neighbors from stem to stern.”105 Inspired by California’s movement to abolish the
Burlingame Treaty and South Australia’s decision to impose a tax on Chinese immigrants “in
defiance of the Mother Country,” Bunster proclaimed to the House of Commons that it was “the
duty of the Government to endeavour to do away with the treaty which existed between it and this
[Chinese] race.” He believed that the annulment of treaties between the British Empire and the

Third Session-Fourth Parliament. Comprising the Period from the Second Day of February, 1881, to the
Twenty-First Day of March, 1881 (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger, 1881), 11:1013.
Chinese Empire, which would pave the way for Chinese immigration restriction legislation, was necessary “in order to maintain our own race in its vigour and manhood.”\textsuperscript{106}

The California Irish, in their justifications for Chinese exclusion, often argued that Chinese immigration undermined the ideal of building a white settler society because it forced white settlers out of California or dissuaded other potential white settlers from moving there. Similarly, Bunster told the House of Commons that “crowds of [white] emigrants were leaving their shore for the want of suitable partners—of English ladies, Scotch lassies, or buxom Irish girls—whose places had been filled by these worse than worthless [Chinese] people.”\textsuperscript{107} Chinese men, however, were not supplanting European women in the workplace because there was a severe shortage of female labor in British Columbia. By the late 1860s Chinese men were performing much of the work traditionally reserved for women such as domestic service.\textsuperscript{108} The following year Bunster renewed his efforts in the Canadian Parliament to abolish treaties between Britain and China, which he believed “stood in the way of the removal of this obnoxious race.” He proposed that Britain send a commissioner to China to negotiate with the Chinese government a modification of treaties related to immigration, a course of action the United States took the following year when President Hayes sent a commission to China to negotiate what became the Angell Treaty, which modified the Burlingame Treaty and allowed the US government to regulate Chinese immigration.\textsuperscript{109} Irish involvement in efforts to abrogate the Burlingame Treaty engendered considerable friction in US-China relations whereas their attempts to sabotage


\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{108} Adele Perry, \textit{On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871} (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2001), 141.

international treaties that granted Chinese mobility rights within the British Empire undermined diplomatic relations between London and Beijing.

Seconding Bunster’s proposed motion linking hair length with the right to employment on the CPR was another Irish-born MP, Joshua Spencer Thompson, who served Cariboo in the House of Commons between 1872 and 1880. Born in Belfast in 1828, Thompson emigrated from Ireland to British Columbia during the Fraser Canyon gold rush in 1858 and emerged as one of Cariboo’s most vocal supporters of Confederation and the construction of the CPR. He was also an avid supporter of Chinese immigration restriction after Bunster first injected the issue into national politics in 1878.  

“If it were possible to adopt any means which would prevent a large immigration of Chinese into British Columbia,” Thompson told the House after seconding Bunster’s motion, “it would be desirable.” This was especially the case, he argued, considering the Chinese encroached on “white labour” and “worked for less wages than white people.” In saying this, unlike Bunster whose worldview vis-à-vis the “Chinese question” was consistently Manichean since he entered politics, Thompson acknowledged that the Chinese in British Columbia were “useful in some cases” and that it was the “evil” of Chinese immigration “to any large extent” that he opposed. The following year, however, Thompson’s anti-Chinese opposition stiffened and his attitude toward the Chinese was not unlike that of Sinophobic demagogues such as Bunster and Kearney. When a motion on the appointment of a select committee to investigate the “Chinese question” was proposed in the House of Commons, Thompson advanced the view “that Chinese immigration to the Pacific coast was a curse to the Dominion and to the world at large.” He argued that if the Chinese were given the opportunity to


gain a foothold on the Pacific Coast their presence would spread “from the plains of the North-West to Ontario, Quebec and the Maritime Provinces.” Thompson called for Chinese exclusion so that power, status, and respectability was the exclusive preserve of white settlers in Canada. “Was it right that such a race should be encouraged to come along us and be allowed the privileges of whites” Thompson asked his fellow MPs, or “that the corrupting and blighting influence of the Chinese should be allowed to overwhelm the land, and every good and glorious thing it possessed?” Thompson appealed to the racial anxieties of his fellow MPs by underscoring the potential threat Chinese immigration posed to upholding white supremacy in North America. “If this evil was allowed to go on unchecked,” he warned, “in time it would subvert the whole white race on this continent.” Comparable to many Irish in the United States and the British Empire in Australia and Canada, Thompson believed the “Chinese question” transcended national boundaries and its resolution therefore required a transnational response. He maintained that “from British Columbia to Arizona, every white man felt that Chinese were a nuisance and a curse, and that getting rid of them, by any means, was an end that must be accomplished. If they did not get rid of the Chinese, the Chinese would get rid of them.” Similarly, Bunster considered the Chinese a threat to white Anglophone supremacy in the British colonial world. “The Chinese question,” he argued, was “of interest to the white English-speaking race; it had attracted great attention in Australia, and in all British colonies, who, with the people of British Columbia, viewed with great suspicion and alarm the danger which threatened us from the incursion of a surplus population of 400,000,000 of people in China.”

Canada’s first potential Chinese exclusion law at the federal level, motioned by Bunster and seconded by Thompson, encountered a wall of resistance in the House of Commons with Prime Minister Mackenzie leading the opposition. Mackenzie argued that the bill “was one unprecedented in its character and altogether unprecedented in its spirit, and at variance with

those tolerant laws which afforded employment and an asylum to all who came into our country, irrespective of colour, hair or anything else.” Mackenzie’s speech likely elicited much amusement in the House of Commons when he pointed out that if the proposed bill were enforced Thompson and Bunster would be barred from employment on the CPR given their hair length.113 Bunster had a relatively long and thick beard in 1879 (fig. 5.2) and he was described by the Hamilton Times in 1875 as “average height … powerful frame…. complexion is dark, and his hair and whiskers, which are abundant, black.”114 Trumpeting the British ideal of multicultural imperial citizenship, Mackenzie asserted that the Chinese in Canada who hailed from the Crown Colony of Hong Kong were entitled to the same constitutional rights as Bunster, Thompson, or any other subject of the British Empire. Ultimately, the motion was negatived on division.115

Although Bunster and Kearney hailed from different counties in Ireland and their backgrounds were dissimilar in terms of religion and socioeconomic status, their radical stance on the “Chinese question” and style of racial demagoguery were strikingly similar. Among the foremost anti-Chinese political agitators of their day, they pulled no punches when it came to vilifying the Chinese and their overt racism and coarse locution garnered them widespread attention and much opprobrium. Bunster was known as a “rough diamond” and “the most rugged of Western members” in the House of Commons who “does not try to find tropes and figures in which to convey his thoughts. He uses the plainest English.”116 Kearney was mocked for his unrefined diction and both men spoke with distinguishable Irish brogues that also drew attention


and comment. To garner power and influence, Bunster and Kearney thundered populist slogans
and fueled anxieties over “cheap Chinese labor” and the “evils” of Chinese immigration. Before
groups of workers, Bunster inveighed against the “snob-aristocracy” while Kearney railed against
the “shoddy aristocracy.” Differentiating them from the vast majority of Irish in North America
was their endorsement of violence against the Chinese. Bunster told a Toronto World reporter that
“I want you to kill these slant-eyed heathen Chinee [sic]” and he informed the Select Committee
on Chinese Labor and Immigration that he advised his son to “thrash a Chinaman that insults you,
when you can; and he has done it.” As someone who made a fortune smuggling opium,

117. “Public Meeting,” Daily British Colonist (Victoria, BC), November 11, 1879, p. 3, col. 1-3;

118. The interview was printed in the Daily British Colonist. See “Mr. Bunster, M.P., in Toronto,”
Daily British Colonist (Victoria, BC), December 29, 1880, p. 3, col. 3-4; Journals of the House of
Commons of the Dominion of Canada. From the 13th February to the 15th May, 1879. Being the 1st
Session of the 4th Parliament of Canada. Appendix no. 4, Report of the Select Committee on Chinese Labor
and Immigration to the House of Commons on the 14th of May, 1879 (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger, 1879),
13:5.
tobacco, and liquor into Hawaii and used part of this wealth to purchase a brewery and gristmill in British Columbia, economic motives hardly account for Bunster’s unrelenting antipathy toward the Chinese. Bunster and Kearney were political opportunists par excellence when it came to agitating the “Chinese question” for personal gain. There was also a strong racial dimension to their anti-Chinese polemics. In their arguments for Chinese exclusion and immigration restriction, they cast the Chinese as racially inferior and lumped them together with other racially subordinate groups such as First Nation peoples and blacks. “They are slaves in every sense of the word,” Bunster described the Chinese in an interview with the *Toronto World*, and “I tell you they are as much slaves as the negroes were in the South before the war.”

Bunster’s anti-Chinese rhetoric and agitation failed to diminish following the defeat of his railroad bill, the first Chinese exclusion motion proposed in the Canadian Parliament. When the House established a Select Committee on Chinese Immigration and Labor, wherein Bunster and six other witnesses were invited to testify, the “rough diamond” was the only one who unreservedly advocated Chinese exclusion. Bunster cast the Chinese presence in Canada as “a very bad effect on the moral character of the white children” and “the greatest curse which a father or a mother of a family had to contend with in the bringing up of their children.” Although he portrayed Chinese men as effeminate in the sense that they performed domestic service duties “a white man is not supposed to do,” juxtaposed with this relatively benign image was one of Chinese men as sexual threats to white women. This was notably the case with the male Chinese domestic servants who had access to the most intimate quarters of the home. Referring to a stage performance that he witnessed at the Bella Union Theatre in San Francisco by the Irish


121. Ibid., 2.
comedian and actor Joseph Murphy, who performed minstrelsy, Irish comedy, and impersonations of the Chinese, Bunster told the Select Committee that “the lady of the house wants to take a bath” and the Chinese “will think nothing of going and scrubbing the woman of the house in a bath tub.” This, according to Bunster’s recollection, was a far from enjoyable experience for the mistress.122

By December 1880, it seemed Bunster had tired of lobbying for Chinese exclusion. He told one reporter that “I did my best to drive them out—but government has admitted them, and there is no more use talking.”123 Months later, however, he returned to his old ways with renewed vigor and led the way in opposition to Chinese naturalization rights in the House of Commons. When a “Naturalization and Aliens” bill was introduced for debate in March 1881, which proposed to give Chinese the same naturalization rights as other immigrants, Bunster expressed dismay with Prime Minster Macdonald’s support for it. The bill, Macdonald asserted, “proposes to do the heathen Chinee [sic] the honor of treating him like any other foreigner who comes into the country and desires to be a good subject of Queen Victoria.” Chinese naturalization ran counter to Bunster’s vision of a society dominated by white settlers on Canada’s Pacific Coast. “We desire to prevent Chinese from coming into British Columbia,” Bunster told the House, and “want only white people to settle our lands. The Chinese do not even lay their bones in our Province after spending their lives there.” Another threat to this vision was the potential for amalgamation between the white and Chinese races. One month prior to the naturalization debate, Bunster called on the House to pass a rice tax bill. This was another discriminatory law aimed at the Chinese since rice was one of the main staples in their diet. In defense of the bill, Bunster linked Chinese exclusion and segregation with preservation and purity of the white race. “If our children go to school with half breeds and Mongolians,” Bunster argued before the House, “it


makes bad blood.” Speaking for himself and on behalf of white settlers in British Columbia, Bunster told his fellow MPs that “our people should not be compelled to mix with these Chinese, in either our schools or our churches.” He furthermore asserted that “we do not wish to deteriorate our race by any mixture with them.”

Joining Bunster in the crusade to bar Chinese from working on the CPR was Premier Walkem. On December 31, 1879, Walkem embarked on a special “mission” from Victoria to Ottawa with authority from the Executive Council of British Columbia to negotiate various matters with the Dominion Government including the insertion of a clause in all railway contracts prohibiting the employment of Chinese workers. In a letter to the Secretary of State for Canada, James Cox Aikins, the Executive Council of British Columbia wrote that railways should be built in a way that provided employment and encouraged settlement of “as many families of our own kindred races as possible” and not “an alien, non-assimilating race.” Walkem echoed this message in meetings with Macdonald and other MPs in Ottawa but his Chinese exclusion efforts fell on deaf ears. While Macdonald also harbored racial prejudice toward the Chinese and subscribed to a white Canada policy, his desire for Chinese exclusion and immigration restriction was tempered by his recognition that Chinese labor was key to building the CPR. For now, at


least, his government refused to meddle with the Chinese men hired to oversee the arduous task of constructing the CPR.

Andrew Onderdonk, the chief contractor tasked with constructing the most difficult and treacherous section of the CPR, westward through the Rocky Mountains, faced another major obstacle when he arrived in British Columbia: insufficient manpower. To help overcome these roadblocks he followed the example set by CPRR contractors who recruited a mostly Chinese workforce when faced with seemingly insurmountable barriers such as the rugged Sierra Nevada. Between when construction began in 1881 and the last spike was driven at Craigellachie on November 7, 1885, Onderdonk employed approximately 15,000 Chinese workers. By 1881, when most white settlers in British Columbia recognized that Chinese labor was necessary to construct the CPR, Bunster stubbornly insisted on an exclusively white labor force. Comparable to Eugene Casserly, who opposed the construction of America’s transcontinental railroad under circumstances that resulted in Chinese labor supplanting white labor, Bunster prioritized solving the “Chinese question” over constructing the CPR. “There is not a British Columbian but would say,” Bunster proclaimed in the House, “‘keep the Canadian Pacific Railway; let us keep out of Confederation if we can thereby keep the Chinese out of the country and preserve our internal rights and arrangements as we had them before the Union.”

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129. For more on the construction of the CPR, see Pierre Berton, The Last Spike: The Great Railway 1881-1885 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971; repr., Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2011); Hugh A. Dempsey, ed., The CPR West: The Iron Road and the Making of a Nation (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1984). There is no consensus on the total number of Chinese employed on the CPR. Most authorities estimate a few thousand shy of or more than 15,000. See Roy, A White Man’s Province, x-xi; Berton, The Last Spike, 204; Ward, White Canada Forever, 36; Canada, Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration: Report and Evidence (Ottawa: By order of the Commission, 1885), viii.

In the United States Philip Roach persuaded the Democratic and Republican parties to insert an anti-Chinese plank in their national political platforms whereas in Canada Bunster was on the front lines of nationalizing the “Chinese question” and especially in the House of Commons, where he warned MPs that they would have to do likewise for political survival. “I have spoken of the Chinese question, year in and year out,” he told the House on May 12, 1882, “and I can safely say that no Government in Canada can stand unless they make the Chinese question a plank in their platform.” He pointed out that the Canadian government needed to help the white settlers “of the Pacific Province in preventing the Chinese from landing on our shores” and he commended the actions of the United States, and California in particular, as “a good precedent” for how to advance this exclusionist policy.  

That same day in the House of Commons, Macdonald publicly declared his predilection for an Aryan Canada. He expressed the belief that the Chinese were “an alien race in every sense, that would not and could not be expected to assimilate with our Arian [sic] population.” In saying this, he distinguished between temporary migration and permanent settlement and had, for the time being, little objection to the former given his cognizance that Chinese labor was essential to building the CPR. As Macdonald counseled his fellow MPs, “if you wish to have the railway finished within any reasonable time, there must be no such step against Chinese labor…. At present it is simply a question of alternatives—either you must have this labor or you cannot have the railway.”

Once the railroad neared completion, however, Macdonald moved one step closer to his vision of an Aryan Canada and fulfilled his promise to impose federal restrictions on Chinese immigration when his administration passed the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885.


The arrival of thousands of Chinese workers to commence construction on the CPR in the early 1880s marked the beginning of a concerted campaign by workers and labor leaders for Chinese immigration restriction legislation.\(^{133}\) An influential figure in this process was Irish-born Daniel John O’Donoghue (1844-1907), who was known to contemporaries and is recognized by many today as the “father of the Canadian labor movement.” Born in County Kerry, Ireland, O’Donoghue immigrated to Canada with his family in 1852. By the early 1870s he had established himself as a leader of the labor movement in Ottawa and within the first national central labor body, the Canadian Labor Union (1872-78). In 1874 O’Donoghue was elected to represent Ottawa in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which was the first time an independent labor candidate served in a Canadian provincial legislature.\(^{134}\) After O’Donoghue lost his seat in the 1879 election he settled in Toronto, a city that was key to early developments in the Canadian labor movement and where O’Donoghue soon emerged as the most influential labor leader.\(^{135}\)

In August 1881 delegates from various unions in Toronto came together to form the Toronto Trades and Labor Council (TTLC). By May 1882 the TTLC had 6,000 members and twenty-one affiliate unions.\(^{136}\) Since its inception, the TTLC adopted a Chinese exclusion platform, specifically the “prohibition of Chinamen on all public contracts, and the limitation of

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Chinese emigration.”137 At a meeting of the TTLC on January 21, 1883, when O’Donoghue served as the council’s secretary, he warned white workers and labor leaders about what he termed “the evils of Chinese labour to the various trades on the Pacific Coast.”138 After O’Donoghue was appointed to the TTLC’s legislative committee in May 1883, he dominated the council’s agenda through the early twentieth century and ensured that Chinese exclusion was a top priority for the TTLC.139 Less than two months after O’Donoghue’s appointment to the legislative committee, it recommended “a proper agitation throughout the country on the Chinese question so as to get legislation on the next meeting of parliament bearing on this question.” The legislative committee also recommended that it was necessary “to print and circulate in all centers of industry throughout the Dominion the evils attending the introduction of Chinese in the Country so as to get an intelligent view by the working classes.”140 When the Knights of Labor started to organize in Canada in the early 1880s, O’Donoghue served as the main point of contact for Terence Powderly. Both labor leaders penned countless letters to each other over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries including correspondence addressing the issue of Chinese immigration. In October 1901 Powderly wrote a letter to O’Donoghue, who was then affiliated with the Canadian Department of Labor, advising that the Canadian government should pass more stringent legislation similar to America’s Chinese Exclusion Act to help prevent the Chinese from arriving in the United States from Canada.141


140. Toronto Trades and Labor Council [hereafter TTLC], Minutes, June 1, 1883, pp. 101-2. Library and Archives Canada, MG 28, I 44. See also “Imported Mechanics,” Globe (Toronto), June 4, 1883, p. 6, col. 3.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries numerous Irish labor leaders crossed the Canada-United States border to campaign for labor reform and Chinese immigration restriction. Powderly visited Toronto in 1884, 1889, and 1891 and other Irish American Knights traveled to Canada including Leonora Barry, T. B. Barry, and Thomas McGuire. Irish American labor leaders such as Richard Powers, who was President of the Lake Seamen’s Union and a member of the FOTLU, attended the one-year anniversary celebration of the establishment of the TTLC and spoke alongside O’Donoghue and other TTLC and Knights of Labor leaders. Powers was a proponent of Chinese exclusion and supported the Chinese immigration restriction resolution adopted by the FOTLU in November 1881.

Many of the Irish Knights including Powers, Powderly, and O’Donoghue had strong Irish and Catholic identities and were fervent Irish nationalists. The Irish National Land League, a political organization dedicated to land reform and the overthrow of landlordism in Ireland, elected Powderly second vice president at its first convention in January 1881 and the Scranton branch elected him president in 1880. He was also active in Clan na Gael, a secret society dedicated to the liberation of Ireland though violent struggle. Powderly underscored the deep connections between the Knights of Labor and Irish nationalism in his autobiography. When reflecting on the links between the Land League and his involvement in the nationwide labor movement in the early 1880s he wrote:

The Knights of Labor were then working secretly, and, as many members were Irish or sympathizers with the struggle of the Irish people for land reform, they invited me to visit cities and towns throughout the country for the purpose of speaking at Land League

142. Kealey, Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 194.


meetings. I accepted as many invitations as I could and when the public, or Land League, meeting would be over a secret meeting of Knights of Labor would follow.\textsuperscript{146}

At many of these meetings Powderly not only championed the cause of Ireland and labor but also Chinese exclusion. In an exchange of letters between Powderly and O’Donoghue, both men confirmed their strong Catholic identity when O’Donoghue noted that “[l]ike as you speak of yourself, I know I am not everything I would like to be in the detail of Catholic practice yet in all essentials and in broad extract I am Catholic to the core and will die so with God’s help.”\textsuperscript{147} As part of the struggle to liberate Ireland many Irish championed oppressed peoples around the world, especially those under British rule, but Irish Americans and Irish Canadians typically did not extend this solidarity and anti-imperial logic to the Chinese in North America. Instead, the anti-Chinese movement in Canada united Green Irish Catholics and Orange Irish Protestants. In the case of Toronto, which was known as the “Belfast of North America” because outbreaks of sectarian violence between Irish Catholics and Protestants were not uncommon, Irish on both sides of this religious divide found common ground on a range of issues including the movement to restrict Chinese immigration to North America.\textsuperscript{148}

O’Donoghue and the legislative committee of the TTLC were also instrumental in establishing the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada (TLCC, 1883-1956), which was the first long-standing national central federation of trade unions. “Chinese immigration” was reported by the Standing Orders Committee as the first order of business at the inaugural TLCC held at Dufferin Hall in Toronto on December 26-28, 1883, which was attended by forty-eight delegates.

\textsuperscript{146} Carman, David, and Guthrie, eds., \textit{The Path I Trod}, 179.

\textsuperscript{147} D. J. O’Donoghue to T. V. Powderly, October 27, 1884, \textit{Papers of Terence Vincent Powderly}, Series 1: The Knights of Labor 1864-1924, box 12.

representing mostly Toronto-based trade unions and local assemblies of the Knights of Labor.\textsuperscript{149} John Rooney, a member of the Toronto-based Knights of Labor DA 2622, moved a resolution “[t]hat the future welfare of the working-people of this country requires the prohibition of further importation of Chinese labor,” which was unanimously adopted.\textsuperscript{150} O’Donoghue told delegates he subscribed to the aphorism that “an ounce of prevention was better than a pound of cure” and that he “wished to stop the progress to the eastward of these [Chinese] people.” The tendency of Irish labor leaders to link rats, an inferior standard of living, and the loss of jobs with Chinese immigrants was not confined to the East Coast of the United States. Irish Canadian Michael O’Halloran, also a member of DA 2622, called for a boycott of the Chinese in Toronto and argued that “if the people of Toronto gave their work to white laborers, the Chinese would soon be starved out, even although there were plenty of rats and stray cats in the city.”\textsuperscript{151}

In March 1884 the legislative committee of the TTLC, with O’Donoghue as chairman, proposed that the TTLC assist representatives from British Columbia to lay the “Chinese question” before the Dominion Parliament and “to take such steps as they deem necessary to assist in stopping the landing of Chinese in this Dominion.”\textsuperscript{152} The following month, the legislative committee also reported that it prepared a circular and petition opposing “the introduction of Chinese into this Dominion,” which were sent to several unions in Toronto.\textsuperscript{153} Anti-Chinese opposition was not confined to a coterie of labor leaders. On October 1, 1884, workers affiliated with an array of labor organizations including several branches of the Knights of Labor took to the streets of Hamilton, Ontario, to demonstrate against Chinese immigration and express anti-Chinese solidarity with workers in British Columbia. The banners included “the

\textsuperscript{149} Proceedings of the Canadian Labor Congress, Held in Toronto on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, December 26th, 27th, and 28th, 1883 (Toronto: Roddy and Nurse, 1884), 11.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., December 27, 1883, 11.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., December 27, 1883, 18.

\textsuperscript{152} TTLC, Minutes, March 21, 1884, p. 26.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., April 4, 1884, p. 28.
Chinese must go” and “to the manly men of Europe, welcome.” One of the resolutions adopted called on the federal government “to send back all the Chinese now in Canada or enforce such a poll tax as will drive them hence.” On October 3 the Legislative Council proposed that the TTLC “take energetic action on the importation of Chinese cooly [sic] labor into this Dominion and bring weight to bear through all organized bodies upon the next meeting of parliament so as to get some legislation to prevent a further influx of this most obnoxious labor.”

Irish Canadian labor leaders and newspaper editors also expressed sympathy with the anti-Chinese movement in the United States and used events south of the border to justify their arguments that the Chinese were inferior, morally bankrupt, and alien. For example, when the New York Irish were waging a war on Chinese laundries in the early 1880s, Henry Joseph Cloran, a labor leader and editor of Montreal’s Irish Catholic organs, the Daily Post and the True Witness and Catholic Chronicle, publicized the alleged dangers of Chinese immigration to North America. “The evil of Chinaism has taken deep root in the American metropolis,” Cloran wrote in the True Witness and Catholic Chronicle, “and the poison of the unholy importation is creating painful havoc among the youthful and virtuous portions of the population.” Cloran observed that when “heathens” such as the Chinese arrived in New York they brought with them “opium dens and disreputable houses,” which engendered a “vast den of corruption and immorality” and neighborhoods where the “most horrible practices are carried on, and scenes which are a disgrace to civilization are daily witnessed in this plague spot.” Born in Montreal to Irish immigrant parents, Cloran was a prominent figure in the late nineteenth-century Irish Canadian community. He served as president of a number of Irish associations such as the St. Patrick’s Society, Shamrock Lacrosse Club, Montreal Branch of the Irish National League, and the Catholic Young

155. TTLC, Minutes, October 3, 1884, p. 52-53.
Men’s Society. He was also a delegate to the Irish National Convention at Chicago in 1886 and chairman of the organization that received Charles Stuart Parnell, Michael Davit and other prominent Irish leaders who visited Canada in the 1880s. A champion of working-class Irish Canadians, Cloran was one of the founders of the staunchly anti-Chinese Montreal Trades and Labor Council. 157 “The Canadian people will rue the day when these heathens were invited into the country on account of their cheap labor,” Cloran warned his readership, “just as the curse of American fathers and mothers has gone forth against them for the ruin and degradation they have brought to virtuous and Christian homes.” Although acknowledging that Prime Minister John MacDonald promised to halt Chinese immigration to Canada after the Canadian Pacific Railroad was built, Cloran asked his readers: “Will it not then be too late? Will Sir John guarantee that the evil will not take root and spread beyond redemption?” 158

On June 5, 1885, the legislative committee of the TTLC recommended that resolutions passed at an anti-Chinese meeting in Victoria, British Columbia, be sent to all labor unions in Canada for adoption and that the workers there receive assistance “to fight with success the importation of a class of people who will throw a blight over the whole country if not stopped.” At a meeting of the TTLC in June 1885, O’Donoghue seconded a motion that the TTLC support a resolution proclaiming “hearty sympathy with the people of British Columbia in their justifiable efforts to restrict the further importation of Chinese under contract system into that Province and will use every possible and legitimate means at its command to aid them to that end.” This resolution was also sent to the Mayor of Victoria, Robert Paterson Rithet. 159 Other Irish Canadian members of the Knights of Labor, Irish National League, and Montreal Trades and Labor Council


159. TTLC, Minutes, June 5, 1885, p. 90.
such as William Keys also lobbied for Chinese exclusion.\textsuperscript{160} Keys was part of a committee that sent to Matthew Hamilton Gault, the Irish-born MP for Montreal West, resolutions adopted by the Trades and Labor Council of Montreal. One resolution read that “while viewing with alarm the stubborn attitude of the Government in refusing the citizens of British Columbia their just demands, this Body will hold the members of the Dominion Government personally, and politically, responsible for any rioting or bloodshed that may follow the refusal of the just demands of the people of British Columbia.”\textsuperscript{161}

Exclusionists scored a major victory when the federal government introduced the Chinese Head Tax of 1885 but Irish labor leaders such as Daniel O’Donoghue strove to secure more stringent Chinese immigration restriction legislation and fend off attempts to reverse Canada’s Chinese exclusion laws. On March 5, 1886, the Legislative Committee recommended that a petition be sent to the Dominion government “in the interests of British Columbia to raise the Tax on imported Chinese to $100.00 and no return certificates to be granted.”\textsuperscript{162} At the seventh annual session of the TLCC held in Quebec in 1891, O’Donoghue seconded a memorial from the Trades and Labor Council of Vancouver stating that the “continual arrival of those undesirable immigrants is but the thin end of the wedge to the ultimate degradation and ruin of the dignity of white labor on the Pacific coast of our fair Dominion.”\textsuperscript{163} O’Donoghue also moved a motion that “this Congress requests of the Dominion Government the passage of such legislation as will have


\textsuperscript{162} TTLC, Minutes, March 5, 1886, p. 28.


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the effect of prohibiting the importation into Canada of Chinese labor and of preventing the further admission, under any circumstances, of any of this undesirable class of immigrants.”

Protestant clergy were among the few voices that openly challenged the anti-Chinese movement in Canada and they advocated inclusion rather than exclusion of Chinese immigrants. Beginning with Methodists in 1885 and Presbyterians in 1892, these denominations organized Chinese missions in Canada with the goal of converting Chinese immigrants to their version of Christianity. At the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Canada held in London, Ontario, in June 1895, a Committee on Chinese Immigration adopted the following resolution: “That a Committee be appointed to wait upon the Government with the request that the legislation discriminating against the Chinese be repealed, and that legislation on the subject be along the lines suggested by the Royal Commission of 1884.” George Monro Grant, the Principal of Queen’s College in Kingston, Ontario, and a former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, supported the recommendations put forth by the Committee but ran into a wall of opposition from labor leaders, most notably Daniel O’Donoghue.

O’Donoghue, in his capacity as Secretary of the TTLC, wrote a memorial to the Secretary of State for Canada, Walter Humphries Montague, on July 24, 1895, stating that the TTLC memorialized the Governor General of Canada, John Hamilton-Gordon, and the Canadian government “protesting against any change in the existing law respecting the immigration of Chinese into the Dominion of Canada.” Basically, the TTLC was opposed to any amendment or modification in the law that would “render more easy or general the influx of Chinese into Canada, experience having fully demonstrated that these undesirable people do not assimilate with the people of America and are, where congregated in any number, a menace to law, morality.

164. Ibid., 14.
and the best interests of the people as a whole.”

Included in the memorial to John Hamilton-Campbell was a seventeen-page report that O’Donoghue and the TTLC sent to Reverend Grant. The TTLC report cited evidence from numerous individuals and government reports in Canada and the United States such as the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration and the California Senate Special Committee on Chinese Immigration to underscore “the baneful and immoral results always incidental to the presence of Chinese in large numbers in the United States and in Canada.” The TTLC report accused Reverend Grant of overlooking this evidence in addition to the resolution adopted at the annual session of the TLCC in September 1892, which read:

That this Congress, after careful consideration of the subject in all its phases, declares the admission of Chinese a menace and undeniable danger to the moral, social, political and material interests of Canada, and should be totally prohibited; and that as the presence of those already in Canada, as a general rule, entails extra and special expense on the whole people of such Provinces as they sojourn here in large numbers a special poll tax of $100 be imposed on each and every Chinese person after a given date, and that each one be obliged to register at a named date and place, so that each one’s place of abode may be ascertained when necessary; that the poll tax referred to be payable into funds of the municipality in which the Chinese person is living at a given time of the year.

O’Donoghue concluded his letter to Hamilton-Gordon by stating that “Reverend Principal Grant and the majority of his Godly brethren” ignored copious amounts of evidence supporting Chinese exclusion. He then stated that the TTLC was memorializing the Dominion Government to protest “most vigorously against any modification thereof by or through which the further advent of Chinese into this country may be encouraged or rendered easier than is the case at present.”

O’Donoghue also worked in unison with other Catholic Irish-born Canadian labor leaders such as David A. Carey to advance the campaign for Chinese exclusion. In his capacity as


168. “Memorial from Trades and Labour Council, Toronto, protesting against any change in the existing law respecting the immigration of Chinese into the Dominion of Canada,” July 24, 1895, Library and Archives Canada, Department of the Secretary of State of Canada fonds, RG20, vol. 1122, file 2955.
President of the Trades and Labor Congress, Carey was a strong advocate for Chinese
immigration restriction legislation. In his annual address to officers and delegates at the TTLC
convention in Hamilton, Ontario, in 1897, he noted that despite numerous appeals over the years
to the Dominion Parliament for effective Chinese immigration restriction legislation

the government of the country is not yet convinced of the necessity of protecting the
workers of the West from that undesirable class of emigrants, the Chinese. For years the
Congress has kept this question before the government and the people, and while the
progress has been slow, converts have been made who believe with organized labor that
the continued importation of these people to British Columbia will be felt in the Eastern
Province, and if not stamped out at once our country will be honey combed with a people
whose habits, to say the least, are not such that Canadians will feel proud of. I would
therefore urge that special attention be given this question, so that the long sought
legislation may be brought about…. 170

O’Donoghue, who was Chairman of the Committee on the President’s Address and Executive
Committee, reported that the “committee approves of the President’s remarks on the necessity for
further restrictions on that undesirable class of immigrants, the Chinese, and concurs in his view
that special efforts should be made to bring about the long-sought legislation.”171

“The Chinese Must Not Come”:
The Irish Canadian Press and the “Chinese Question”

The Irish Canadian press and labor newspapers owned or edited by Irish immigrants in
Canada offer additional insights into the position of Irish Canadians on the “Chinese question.”
The Irish Canadian, established in Toronto by Irish-born Patrick Boyle, was the most widely
circulated newspaper among Catholics in Ontario by 1892 and served as an organ of the

169. See, for example, Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Session of the Trades and Labor
Congress of Canada, Held at Hamilton, Ont. On Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday,
September 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, and 17th, 1897 (Toronto: Thomas G. Soole, 1897), 7; Proceedings of the
Fourteenth Annual Session of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada Held at Winnipeg, Man, On
Friday, Saturday, Monday and Tuesday, September 16th, 17th, 19th and 20th, 1898 (Toronto: Thomas G.
Soole, 1898), 6.

170. Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Session of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada,
Held at Hamilton, Ont. On Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, September 13th, 14th,
15th, 16th, and 17th, 1897 (Toronto: Thomas G. Soole, 1897), 7.

171. Ibid., 20.
Hibernian Benevolent Society of Canada, which was an ethno-religious fraternal organization that represented mostly the working-class Catholic Irish in Canada. In the aftermath of the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which was a major catalyst in provoking Irish Canadian workers and labor leaders to mount a concerted campaign for the enactment of similar legislation in Canada, the Irish Canadian stipulated that Chinese exclusion was justified and necessary. “If it is to be a question between Caucasian and Mongolian,” Boyle wrote in one editorial, “the Mongolian will have to stay at home.” To reinforce this point, Boyle wrote that “if countless thousands of the Caucasian race must labor, and live by the fruits of their industry, what is to become of them face to face with such competitors as the Mongolians? The white man must go down in such an unequal struggle, while the Chinaman will increase and multiply and grow fat on fare that would turn sensitive stomachs.”

Boyle’s editorials underscore a common theme that appeared in Irish Canadian and Irish American newspapers in the late nineteenth century, namely the irreconcilable interests of Irish and Chinese workers and the resultant necessity for Chinese exclusion. “It is a pity that such legislation should be deemed necessary in a free country,” Boyle wrote in the year prior to the passage of the Chinese Head Tax of 1885, “but as it is a choice between the Caucasian and the Mongolian, there is nothing for it but self-protection. Any other policy would be suicidal.” The “yellow peril” imagery and potential for innumerable Chinese workers to migrate east of the Rocky Mountains, which was a common theme in Irish American newspapers, were also apparent in the Irish Canadian. “If the people of the Dominion did not look to this serious matter in time,” Boyle wrote, “the Chinese would soon get a foot-hold in the North-West, and thence they would sweep down in swarms till they filled the great cities of the Dominion, and played havoc among the artizan classes, whose means of livelihood they would destroy as effectually as they had done


wherever they have been permitted to land.” Boyle maintained that the Chinese were sojourners who undermined standards of living, invested little in their host societies, and undermined the ideal of a white settler society. “Working for wages on which the people of other countries would starve,” Boyle explained, the Chinese “keep out the class that would come to stay; and when they gather up sufficient money to carry them back to China, they leave like locusts, after having devoured the substance found in the place of their temporary abode.” In terms similar to many of his fellow Irish immigrants in North America, Boyle cast the Chinese as an inferior and alien race and a threat to the economic well-being of white workers. Specifically, he claimed that the Chinese were “filthy in their habits, isolated, ruinous to the white man in the competition of labor, and without a particle of the qualification necessary to citizenship.”

Newspapers more narrowly focused on labor reform and controlled by Irish Canadians such as the Toronto-based Trades Union Advocate, were even more steadfast in their opposition to Chinese immigration. Edited and owned by the Irish-born printer Eugene Donovan, the Trades Union Advocate was an organ of the TTLC and was renamed the Wage-Worker when it became the first official newspaper of the Knights of Labor in Canada. The Trades Union Advocate described the Chinese as a threat to white settlers in North America and beyond. As Donovan wrote in one editorial, the “Mongolian and Caucasian civilization are irreconcilably opposed. One or the other must die” and he went so far as to characterize Chinese immigration as “the most menacing question of the nineteenth century.” The tendency of Irish American labor newspapers to cast the Chinese as a threat to the livelihood of white workers is also reflected in the Trades Union Advocate. “Workingmen, if you love your wives and little ones, and want to keep a roof over their heads,” Donovan wrote, “then at once agitate for the abolition of Chinese


175. First printed on May 4, 1882, the Trades Union Advocate was renamed the Wage-Worker on March 15, 1883.

Expressing concern that countless numbers of Chinese workers would migrate east from British Columbia, one of the major slogans advanced by the *Trades Union Advocate* was that “the Chinese must not come!” Donovan’s newspaper also expressed sympathy with the Pacific Coast catchphrase “the Chinese must go!” and proclaimed anti-Chinese solidarity with workers and labor union on the Pacific Slope including the League of Deliverance headed by the Irish-born labor leader Frank Roney in San Francisco.

Besides embracing the slogan “the Chinese must not come!” the *Trades Union Advocate* agitated for Chinese exclusion and directed scathing attacks at Canadian politicians for failing to protect white workers by not restricting Chinese immigration to Canada. In one editorial Donovan criticized Premier Mackenzie for blocking Arthur Bunster’s motion in the House of Commons to prohibit the employment of Chinese workers on the CPR and cited this example as evidence that politicians worked at cross-purposes to the interests of white workers in Canada. “Shall we allow them, without a protest,” Donovan asked his readers, “to pour into our shores now that the United States have put their foot down, and rob us and our children of the necessaries of life?” Even though a mere thirty-three Chinese resided in parts of Canada other than British Columbia in 1881 and only 219 Chinese resided east of the Rockies in 1891, Irish Canadian newspaper editors such as Donovan sensationalized the potential threat posed by Chinese immigrants to rally


workers around the campaign for Chinese exclusion. 181 “From the west we hear of encroachments by the Chinese,” Donovan asserted, “as our fellow workers in British Columbia are finding the almond-eyed labourers driving natives from the field in certain industries.” He called on Canada’s labor unions and workers to “convince our legislators that we mean business” and to entice readers into action he described the Chinese as “a vile race,” projected negative images of the Chinese as “rat-eating vermin,” and warned that Eastern Canada would share the same fate as Western Canada if they did not lobby for Chinese immigration restriction. 182 “The enemies are at your gates,” Donovan furthermore warned, “and unless you intend to fall into their hands … now is your time for action.” 183 Immediate agitation was necessary, Donovan proclaimed, to “stop an invasion of our land by the pestiferous creatures…. [b]efore our factories and workshops are swarming with these degraded specimens, and native labour crowded out, let us move in dead earnest, and protest until the immigration is abolished.” 184

Conclusion

British Columbia was in Canada what California was in the United States: the epicenter of the anti-Chinese movement. Moreover, Arthur Bunster was in the former what Denis Kearney was in the latter: the most notorious and vocal advocate of Chinese exclusion. Between the time when British Columbia joined Confederation in 1871 and when thousands of Chinese workers migrated there a decade later to help build the CPR, the foundations of a white Canada policy were set. In British Columbia numerous Chinese exclusion laws were passed under administrations led by Irish-born premiers. Most detrimental to the future prospects of the

181. Roy, A White Man’s Province, 62.


Chinese community in British Columbia, where the vast majority of Chinese lived in the
nineteenth century, was their disenfranchisement under the administrations of Elliott and
Walkem. At the federal level Bunster initiated the movement for Chinese immigration restriction.
This is not to say that all Irish in British Columbia were anti-Chinese or that the Irish were the
only ethnic group that opposed the Chinese. It does underscore, however, that politically
ambitious Irish immigrants are key to comprehending the origins of Chinese exclusion in Canada
and their involvement in Canada’s anti-Chinese movement generated friction between British
Columbia and Ottawa and gave rise to protests from Chinese diplomats and Chinese Canadians.

Irish-born politicians moved to the forefront of British Columbia’s anti-Chinese
movement in the 1870s but this was not predetermined or inevitable. In pre-Confederation British
Columbia there existed a spirit of toleration, cooperation, and coexistence between the Irish and
Chinese. At times the Irish in the British Empire were the most outspoken advocates of a
multicultural imperial citizenship. Arthur Kennedy, the Governor of Vancouver Island and
Queensland, was a transnational advocate for Chinese equality and civil rights. After British
Columbia entered Confederation in 1871, however, an ideology of white supremacy superseded
multicultural imperial idealism. The autonomy conferred to British Columbia as part of its
transition from colony to province was a watershed in terms of relations between the Irish and
Chinese. Under a new system of responsible government, Irish politicians inflamed the “Chinese
question” for political gain. Highly educated, skilled, and relatively affluent, these Irish political
elite did have a choice when it came to the future direction of British Columbia but they
nonetheless chose white supremacy and exclusion over inclusion of the Chinese. Politically
ambitious, they demonized the Chinese as part of their thirst for power. Ultimately, they share
responsibility for the creation of race-based hierarchies of power, privilege, and status in British
Columbia that were favorable to a white settler minority.

East of the Canadian Rockies, Irish immigrants were at the forefront of the labor
movement’s efforts to restrict Chinese immigration into Canada and along with their Irish
American counterparts helped create a transnational labor alliance aimed at stemming Chinese immigration to North America. Whereas numerous Irish on the Pacific Coast insisted that “the Chinese must go!” many Irish Canadian workers and labor leaders east of the Rocky Mountains were in general agreement that “the Chinese must not come!” that is to say the Chinese must not migrate east in greater numbers.
CHAPTER 6

ALLIES AND ENEMIES:
SINO-IRISH RELATIONS AND THE ORIGINS OF THE WHITE AUSTRALIA POLICY

After six self-governing British colonies united to form the Commonwealth of Australia on January 1, 1901, one of the first acts of the newly constituted Federal Parliament was to pass the Immigration Restriction Act 1901.¹ This piece of legislation, which was the foundation of what became popularly known as the White Australia Policy, excluded non-white immigration to Australia and was largely the result of half a century of anti-Chinese agitation designed to restrict Chinese immigration to Australia. Chapter 6 argues that in Australia during the second half of the nineteenth century Irish immigrants were at times the foremost enemies of the Chinese, they were a significant force behind the anti-Chinese movement, and they helped uphold white supremacy and construct a national identity that was officially white by 1901. Before mass Chinese migration to Australia began in 1853, it was an Irish-born member of the New South Wales Legislative Council, Henry Grattan Douglass, who attempted to introduce Australia’s first Chinese immigration restriction legislation in 1851. Over the next five decades Irish Australians were often in the vanguard of campaigns for Chinese exclusion and immigration restriction. Irish immigrants spearheaded Australia’s most notorious anti-Chinese goldfield riot and led one of the largest and most controversial anti-Chinese urban rallies in Australian history. Irish involvement in Australia’s politics of Chinese exclusion, which involved placing limits on the rights and mobility of Chinese immigrants including those who were British citizens, complicated the triangular relationship between Britain, China, and the Australian colonies.

The literature on the anti-Chinese movement in Australia and the Chinese Australian community is enormous but no study has thoroughly examined Chinese and Irish interactions in colonial Australia or the relationship between Irish immigrants and the origins of the White

¹. The six colonies were New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania, Western Australia, and South Australia.
Australia Policy.\(^2\) This is no minor oversight given that from the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 to after the First World War, the Irish were the second largest immigrant group in Australia behind the English.\(^3\) Similarly, work on the Irish in Australia is immense yet largely overlooked is the Irish and Chinese interethnic and interracial dynamic in the pre-Federation era.\(^4\)

In her pioneering *History of the White Australia Policy*, Myra Willard notes that “the preservation of a British-Australian nationality” was the main driving force behind the adoption of the White Australia Policy.\(^5\) However, Irish Catholics, who constituted the bulk of the Irish population in Australia, were for much of the nineteenth century considered a threat to this ideal British-Australian identity. Many Anglo-Saxon Protestants, the dominant group in the Australian colonies, considered Irish Catholics inferior “outsiders.”\(^6\) Joint enmity toward the British Empire by many Chinese and Catholic Irish and their shared experience of prejudice in colonial Australia failed to translate into substantive solidarity between both groups. Instead, the Catholic Irish

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joined the Protestant Irish and other white settlers in efforts to restrict Chinese immigration to Australia’s goldfields, towns, and cities in the half century leading up to the passage of the 
*Immigration Restriction Act 1901.*

The Irish in Australia were not homogenous in terms of their stance on the “Chinese question” or their interactions with the Chinese. Although racial hostility and intense economic competition largely defined Sino-Irish relations in the Australian colonies, a few Irish were among the greatest allies of the Chinese and the most outspoken advocates of Chinese racial equality. Irish gold commissioners and police were on the front lines of upholding law and order in the goldfields of Victoria and New South Wales. Without this Irish police presence, the Chinese would have faced untold numbers of additional riots and bloodshed. Moreover, when there were outbreaks of violence, Irish police were often key agents in aiding the Chinese to secure justice. Marriages between Chinese men and Irish women, which occurred on the East Coast of the United States, were also a part of colonial life in Australia. While these instances of interracial cooperation and solidarity were rare, they nonetheless reinforce the findings in other parts of this dissertation that not all of the global Irish were racially hostile toward the Chinese and some were committed to a civic pluralism broad enough to encompass Chinese immigrants.

**Henry Douglass, Chinese Exclusion, and the Roots of the White Australia Policy**

Prior to the mid-nineteenth century the vast majority of Irish and Chinese in Australia were unfree laborers. The Irish represented roughly one-quarter of the more than 160,000 convicts transported to the Australian colonies between 1788 and 1856.7 Approximately eighteen Chinese had settled in Australia before roughly 3,500 indentured Chinese laborers arrived in the

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colony of New South Wales between 1847-53. After the onset of the New South Wales and Victoria gold rushes in 1851, however, unfree labor quickly gave way to a flow of predominantly free labor migration. The search for gold was the primary force that drew close to 100,000 Irish and more than 50,000 Chinese to the Australian colonies in the 1850s. While the Irish were the second largest immigrant group in Australia during the second half of the nineteenth century, the Chinese were during this time the largest non-European immigrant group.

Several months before Philip Roach launched a scathing attack on Chinese immigration to the United States by introducing a minority report in the California State Legislature on March 1852, Irish-born Henry Grattan Douglass had already voiced major anti-Chinese political opposition in the Parliament of New South Wales when he proposed a Chinese immigration restriction bill on November 1851. This marked a shift in the reception given to Chinese immigrants in New South Wales just as Roach’s report did in California. The first wave of Chinese to arrive in New South Wales, like the “China boys” in San Francisco, were welcomed by groups who stood to benefit most from their labor. In particular, elite landholding pastoralists favored Chinese migration to help resolve labor shortages in their industry after the abolishment of convict transportation in 1840. While the initial shiploads of Chinese to arrive were received with little opposition, Douglass’ bill ignited for the first time a vigorous debate over the “Chinese question” that persisted through the second half of the nineteenth century and culminated in the White Australia Policy in 1901. Born in Dublin in 1790, Douglass immigrated to Sydney in


1821 after he received a doctorate in medicine from Trinity College, Dublin, and was elected to the Royal Irish Academy. Before Douglass took his seat in the Legislative Council in 1851, he served as director of Sydney Hospital and played a prominent role in the establishment of the University of Sydney. While Philip Roach was the most long-standing proponent of Chinese exclusion in nineteenth-century California, Douglass was the most consistent opponent of Chinese immigration to New South Wales during the gold rush era. An Anglo-Irish liberal, Douglass’ ardent Sinophobia and desire to exclude Chinese immigrants show that Irish anti-Chinese opposition in Australia was not confined to Catholics or the working-class.

On November 18, 1851, Douglass expressed concerns to the Colonial Secretary, Edward D. Thomson, that a “Chinese slave trade” was taking root in New South Wales and that he intended to place before the Legislative Council “a bill to limit the further immigration of Chinese into this colony.” Although Douglass was greeted with laughter by the pastoralists who dominated the Legislative Council, three days later he nonetheless proposed to introduce “a Bill to regulate Immigration from China.” In support of the bill, Douglass argued that Chinese immigration would result in “the absolute ruin of the colony.” Douglass, mirroring Roach and other Irish in California, wanted to preserve New South Wales for white settlers of European descent. “What man,” Douglass asked, “would emigrate to these colonies, if it was known to him that he would be associated with, and his labour was to come into competition with, that of these[Chinese] Pagans.” If Chinese immigration continued, Douglass argued, it would “shut the door to emigration to these colonies from the United Kingdom.” Douglass, like many Irish in California, wanted to attract white settlers but exclude Chinese immigrants. While Roach viewed

in *Legacies of White Australia: Race, Culture and Nation*, eds. Laksiri Jayasuriya, David Walker and Jan Gothard (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2003), 16-17.


Table 6.1. Irish and Chinese Population of New South Wales, 1856-1901

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<th>1856</th>
<th>1861</th>
<th>1871</th>
<th>1881</th>
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<tr>
<td>Irish-born</td>
<td>46,107</td>
<td>54,829</td>
<td>62,943</td>
<td>69,192</td>
<td>75,051</td>
<td>59,945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese-born</td>
<td>1,850</td>
<td>12,988</td>
<td>7,220</td>
<td>10,205</td>
<td>13,157</td>
<td>9,993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish-born in total New South Wales population (%)</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese-born in total New South Wales population (%)</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
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</table>


the Chinese as inassimilable and unfit for citizenship, Douglass likewise insisted that the Chinese “did not and could not understand the habits, manners, religion, or laws of the colony.” Douglass’ opposition toward Chinese immigration was not confined to indentured laborers, who represented but a small fraction of the more than 60,000 Chinese who entered New South Wales under the credit-ticket system by 1889.14 Faced with stiff opposition from pastoralists in the Legislative Council in 1851, Douglass was forced to withdraw his motion without debate. Most critical of his bill was William Charles Wentworth, who based his opposition primarily on the claim that the “British empire was at amity with the Chinese empire, and … any limitation of the right of the Chinese to visit these shores would be a breach of the treaty of amity existing between these nations.”15 While it is questionable whether the British and Chinese Empires were “at amity” after the former forced the latter to sign the humiliating Treaty of Nanjing that ended the Opium War in 1842, Wentworth correctly foresaw the negative impact Australia’s anti-Chinese movement would have on relations between the British Empire and the Chinese Empire and the metropole and the Australian colonies. Until his retirement from politics in 1861, which was the year the


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Parliament of New South Wales passed Chinese immigration restriction legislation for the first time, Douglass lobbied for Chinese exclusion and served as chairman of the Select Committee that considered a Chinese immigration regulation bill in 1858.16

The Sydney Freeman’s Journal, which emerged as one of Australia’s most widely read Catholic Irish newspapers after it was established by the Irish-born Catholic priest John McEncroe in 1850, sided with Douglass’ attempt to restrict Chinese immigration to New South Wales and denounced the pastoralists for importing a “depraved and heathen class of [Chinese] shepherds.” Although the Freeman’s Journal did not speak directly for its mostly Catholic Irish readers, it is nonetheless one window into their general stance on the “Chinese question” in Australia. Moreover, as an important source of information for many readers, the Freeman’s Journal likely influenced their attitudes, perceptions, or actions toward Chinese immigrants. In a similar vein to Douglass, the Freeman’s Journal characterized the Chinese as racially inferior to white settlers of European descent and criticized the pastoralists for favoring the passage of “vile and vicious Asians” to the colony over “our countrymen” and “Christian white men.” Describing the Chinese as “disgusting pagans,” “foreign barbarians,” and “idolatrous savages,” the Freeman’s Journal advocated a halt to the immigration of “the degraded class of Coolies or Chinese amongst us.”17 Calls for Chinese immigration restriction fell on deaf ears in the colonial parliament until outbreaks of anti-Chinese goldfield violence became far too serious for policymakers to ignore.

“Roll Up Roll Up—No Chinese”:
The Irish and Chinese on the Burrangong Goldfields

The most infamous anti-Chinese riot and one of the largest civil disorders in Australian history transpired on June 30, 1861. Although examined by numerous historians, the nature and


17. “Chinese and Other Heathen Immigration,” Freeman’s Journal (Sydney), December 4, 1851, p. 8, col. 3-4, p. 9, col. 1.
extent of Irish involvement in this incident has received minimal exploration. While the rioters were primarily of European descent, there is evidence to suggest that the Irish perpetrated and inflamed some of the worst excesses of the riot. On the other hand, Irish gold commissioners and police were at the forefront of attempts to quell the riot and secure justice for its Chinese victims. Many of the rioters were affiliated with the Miners’ Protective League (MPL), which was headed by Irish-born James Torpy, and the beginning and end point of the riot was Tipperary Gully, which was home to a predominantly Irish immigrant community during the gold rush era.

Moreover, the most notorious symbol of the riot and arguably of the White Australia Policy, a banner (fig. 6.1) painted with the five stars of the Southern Cross superimposed over a St. Andrew’s Cross in the center and the slogan “Roll Up Roll Up—No Chinese” around the perimeter, was carried by Irish-born T. F. McCarthy, who was Chairman of the Lambing Flat Riot Committee.

Around ten in the morning on June 30, 1861, approximately 1,000 miners and storekeepers formed a procession at Tipperary Gully with the intention of marching toward Lambing Flat to drive the Chinese out of the goldfields. At the head of the procession were a brass band and a number of placards including the “Roll Up Roll Up—No Chinese” banner held by McCarthy. A few of the rioters were armed with guns and many carried tomahawks or

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19. Tipperary is a county in Ireland.

“shillelaghs of a most murderous appearance.” The mob swelled to between 2,000 and 3,000 when it reached Lambing Flat, where rioters unleashed indiscriminate attacks against the Chinese. Several Chinese had their queues cut off and many had their possessions destroyed or confiscated and approximately forty tents were set ablaze at the Chinese camp in Sawpit Gully. Afterwards, the procession marched roughly six miles to a larger Chinese camp at Back Creek, where the greatest destruction and most brutal attacks took place. One onlooker, James McCulloch Henley, witnessed an armed mob approaching Back Creek carrying Irish (“green flag with a harp”) and American (“stripes and stars”) flags in addition to the “Roll Up Roll Up—No Chinese” banner. Sergeant Thomas Smith saw “a green and white flag, with the words ‘No Chinese; roll up, roll up,’” which was presumably an Irish flag, and sergeant James Condell heard this group of rioters yell “down with the Chinese.” The Chinese camp was razed to the ground and tents that stretched half a mile across the goldfield were set on fire. Most of the approximately 1,200 Chinese at Back Creek fled before the procession reached their camp but the rioters chased them down on horseback and many were rounded up, robbed and assaulted with whips and bludgeons, and their property set alight. According to eyewitness reports, some Chinese suffered gunshot wounds, broken backs, dismembered ears, and lost eyes. Most Chinese were able to take refuge on the property of a local landowner, James Roberts, who provided them with food and shelter until it was safe to return to the diggings or flee the area. In the wake of the riot the procession returned to Tipperary Gully via Lambing Flat to the sound of cheering, gunshots, and a band playing Garryowen, an Irish quickstep and drinking tune. Fixed to one of the banners were several Chinese queues including one with a sizable piece of scalp attached. One “native of the colony” wrote in a letter published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that “I myself saw one man, an Irishman, in his hurry to cut off a tail, cut all the skin off the back of the poor [Chinese] fellow’s head.”

21. My description of the riot is based on correspondent reports, eye-witness accounts, and court proceedings that appeared in the following newspapers: “Lambing Flat,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 2,
McCarthy provided his nephew, Alfred Bennett, with an oral account of the riot, which was subsequently published in the *Young Witness and Burrangong Argus*. McCarthy expressed the viewpoint that he and the other rioters drove the Chinese out of the diggings because they wanted to preserve the goldfields for white miners. Both white supremacy and economic motives were at the heart of their actions. Those who participated in the riot on June 30, 1861, according to McCarthy, “were out for the benefit of the whole body of white people on the field, as against the threatened invasions of the yellow man in the person of John Chinaman.” McCarthy maintained that the decision to drive the Chinese out of the goldfields and lobby for Chinese immigration restriction legislation was justified because the Chinese “presence in such large numbers was rapidly becoming a positive danger to the peace and the prosperity of the goldfields.” Specifically, he claimed that the Chinese encroached on the scarce water supplies of white miners, employed procuresses to trap young girls in their camps, and instead of prospecting for gold they encroached on the findings “of the industrious miners who had gone to the trouble of exploring the locality.” McCarthy scapegoated the Chinese for outbreaks of interracial conflict in the goldfields while insisting “it goes without saying that the celestials always came off second best when there was anything doing in the fighting line.” He also contended that because the Chinese invariably involved the police in disputes or violent clashes with adversaries and told lies in court to secure criminal convictions, miners quipped that “the average Chinkie could easily swear a hole through an iron pot.” These negative claims about the Chinese provided miners with a set of justifications, however questionable, to forcibly eliminate Chinese competition from the goldfields. Violence and intimidation were central to this process. As McCarthy recollected,

when miners encountered a Chinese bathing in a water hole used for domestic purposes, they “tied him in the middle with a rope and then sea-sawed him backwards and forwards until the man was nearly dead.”

Chinese gold miners resisted attempts by white miners to drive them out of the goldfields and their perspectives can be gleaned from letters, newspaper reports, and government documents. In the wake of the riot on June 30, 1861, the Chinese community at Lambing Flat asked their interpreter, James McCulloch Henley, to send a letter to John Young, the Anglo-Irish Governor of New South Wales, detailing the hardships suffered by the Chinese community because of frequent “roll ups” and appealing for justice and more adequate police protection. The letter asked that the Chinese receive the “fair play” and equal treatment accorded to other immigrant groups and invoked Anglo-Chinese treaties that granted the Chinese equality and freedom of movement within the British Empire. Chinese miners also lodged compensation claims with the Legislative Assembly for losses sustained during the riot. Most of the 1,568 claimants were Chinese and the total amount of claims amounted to more than £40,000.

While many of those indicted and forced to stand trial for the riot on June 30 were of Irish descent, the gold commissioners responsible for upholding law and order and the police tasked with arresting or testifying against the rioters were primarily Irish. Most of the police in the goldfields in New South Wales and Victoria were Irish-born. In New South Wales, the percentage of the police force that was Irish-born was 61.4 percent between 1851 and 1862, 66.7

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percent in 1865, and 59.6 percent in 1872. In Victoria, the police force was 60 percent Irish-born in 1872 and 82 percent Irish-born by 1874. After peace was restored at Lambing Flat and surrounding environs, which enabled the police to arrest three men in connection with the riot on June 30, Tipperary Gully was the scene of further unrest. On the night of July 14 approximately 1,000 miners, many armed with guns and headed by a brass band, marched from Tipperary Gully to the police camp where the prisoners were held. The miners shouted “roll up” and “release the prisoners.” Armed conflict between the miners and authorities ensued, which resulted in casualties on both sides and the death of one miner. The vastly outnumbered troopers and foot police, who were praised by the press for their “cool determined bravery,” were forced to retreat with the gold commissioners to the town of Yass before their camp was burned to the ground.

The gold commissioners on duty at Lambing Flat during the riot on June 30, 1861, George O’Malley Clarke and James J. Lynch, were of Irish descent. Although suspended from their duties by the government “in consequence of their want of decision and judgement in dealing with the rioters on the Lambing Flat goldfields” and because their dispatches “contained nothing explanatory to guide the government,” by August 1861 they were reinstated and tasked with prosecuting the rioters. Irish police stationed at Burrangong who witnessed the riot, sergeant James Condell and constables John Flanagan and Daniel Murphy, played a prominent role in efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice. Condell and Flanagan testified against the rioters in a police court presided over by O’Malley Clarke, Lynch, and Robert H. Fitzsimmons.


and in trials subsequently held at the Goulburn Circuit Court. Condell witnessed Patrick Day, Charles Coyle, Robert McBride, and William Tomalty destroy Chinese property but because of insufficient police backup he waited until after the riot to arrest some of these defendants. Condell noted that the riot was “calculated to inspire terror” even though “the Chinese offered no provocation.” Flanagan, who corroborated the testimony provided by Condell, stated that he saw Day, Coyle, and Tomalty among the procession that carried the “Roll Up Roll Up—No Chinese” banner. Despite efforts by the police to secure justice for the Chinese, juries acquitted all but two men forced to stand trial. William Spicer, one of the leaders of the anti-Chinese movement, was convicted for the riot on June 30 and Claremont Own was convicted for the attack on the police camp on July 14. Condell, who was born in Ireland and arrived in Victoria in 1859, was acquainted with Coyle in County Donegal, Ireland, when he served in the Irish Constabulary. Condell noted that Coyle arrived in Australia with a group of “Donegallers,” who had a reputation for violence and territoriality on the New South Wales gold rush frontier.29

It is not unreasonable to suggest that on the Burrangong goldfields the Donegallers deployed forms of oath-bound secret society traditions of violence and terror, which were rooted in rural Ireland between the 1760s and the Great Famine. The memoir of Mark J. Hammond, an Australian gold miner who worked side by side with the Donegallers and witnessed the riots at Lambing Flat, provides some insights into this group of gold miners from Northwest Ireland. When Hammond arrived at Chance Gully about one month after the discovery of rich gold deposits there, the area was monopolized by Donegallers and other miners were reluctant to help him stake out a claim to excess ground because they “feared the Donegallers … who carried terror with them wherever they went.” Hammond eventually established a mining claim at the

foot of Chance Gully and while he was able to work in close proximity to the Donegallers “without one single demur,” this was not the case with the Chinese and other gold miners. The “Donegallers,” wrote Hammond, “not only brutally illtreated the Chinese but they were always ready to mistreat others. They moved about at night in gangs, and if they had a set on anyone they would single him out for attack. They always seemed to have a particular dislike for the Australian-born native, and never lost a chance to abuse him.”

The Yass Courier reported that a group of miners on the Burrangong goldfields were “bound together by a secret oath,” which required each “to the best of his power and ability, do all he can to keep the Chinese from intruding on the diggings, and help at every call all those who take part against the Chinese, whatever consequences may ensue.” Those bound by oath were expected, upon hearing the rally cry “roll up,” to cease all work on the diggings to join the “roll up” against the Chinese and those who refused were forbidden to return to their claims in the goldfields.

The presence of oath-bound secret organizations, violence, and territoriality on the Burrangong goldfields resembles patterns of behavior by the Irish in rural Ireland and by Irish immigrants in other parts of the world such as North America. Kerby Miller notes that “through social pressure, intimidation, and violence,” secret organizations in Ireland composed of peasants and farmers such as the Whiteboys, Hearts of Steel, Ribbonmen, Rockites, Thrashers, and Molly Maguires, “sought to substitute their own rules of proper conduct for those of the state.”

Irish immigrants transplanted these secret society traditions from rural Ireland to various parts of the world, albeit in a modified form designed to meet specific local circumstances. For example, research by Kevin Kenny shows that a secret oath-bound organization of Irish coal miners active


32. Miller, Emigrants and Exiles, 61.
in Pennsylvania’s anthracite coal region during the 1860s and 1870s, the Molly Maguires, responded to oppression and exploitation from mining companies through forms of violent protest that had their origins in rural Ireland. Most of the Molly Maguires in Pennsylvania originated from the same county as the Donegallers and both displayed similar patterns of behavior in their respective environments. Kenny notes that in nineteenth-century America immigrants from west Donegal typically congregated in isolated settlements and, unlike most people in Ireland or the Irish overseas, a majority of them spoke the Irish language, which helped give rise to “enclaves of a transplanted Irish regional identity with its own specific forms of language and culture.” Their relative alienation and cultural distinctiveness placed them at odds with government authorities and other miners and immigrant groups including Irish who originated from different parts of Ireland. These traits correspond with descriptions of the Donegallers in gold rush New South Wales. Furthermore, Hammond’s memoir and newspaper reports also reveal that the Donegallers’ strong proclivity for territoriality, intimidation, and violence resulted in the colonial authorities threatening to remove them from the Burrangong goldfields. However, the tactics deployed by the Molly Maguires in the coalfields of Pennsylvania and by the Donegallers on the Burrangong goldfields were not representative of all Irish immigrants in the United States and Australia, respectively. As Hammond noted in his memoir when referring to the Irish on the Burrangong goldfields, “some of the Irish in the field were second to none for their good behavior, and detested the acts of violence indulged in by their countrymen.”

Many miners involved in the bloody riot on June 30, 1861, were members of the MPL, of which the Anglo-Irish miner and hotelkeeper James Torpy was the mastermind. Born in County

34. Ibid., 26-27, 36-37.
Cork, Ireland, and educated at Trinity College, Dublin, Torpy immigrated to Australia during the
gold rushes in the early 1850s. After striking it rich in the goldfields he established the
Cosmopolitan Hotel in Tipperary Gully, emerged as the leader of the MPL, and was one of the
principal figures in the anti-Chinese movement on the Burrangong goldfields. Following the
expulsion of approximately 1,500 Chinese from the diggings at Little Spring Creek and
Blackguard Gully on January 27, 1861, and after threatening to set alight the gold commissioner’s
barracks if he refused to release one prisoner arrested in connection with this riot, miners took
steps “to extract a pledge from nearly all the Europeans on the gold-field to resist the Chinese
working on the diggings.” Four days later they held a meeting at Lambing Flat on premises
owned by an Irish storekeeper, Thomas Walsh, for the purpose of forming a MPL. Whereas
Walsh briefly served as chairman of the MPL and other anti-Chinese leaders such as William
Spicer, Charles Stuart, and Donald Cameron were also involved in the MPL, Torpy wrote the
MPL’s manifesto and was chairman of the MPL for most of its existence. Later in Torpy’s career,
as a member for Orange (1889-94) in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, he admitted to
his fellow MPs that “I was the originator of the anti-Chinese movement. I was the person who
wrote the manifesto of the league.” Torpy disclaimed involvement in anti-Chinese goldfield riots
and insisted that the MPL was “a strictly constitutional association.” However, Torpy’s
incendiary anti-Chinese speeches and the manifesto of the MPL that he penned did little to
diminishing miners’ vitriolic outbursts against the Chinese. “We invite men of all nations, except
Chinamen, to enroll themselves as members of the League,” declared the MPL manifesto, and it

Centre of Biography, Australian National University, accessed November 3, 2015,
http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/torpy-james-4736/text7863. For an obituary of Torpy, see “Death of Mr.
James Torpy,” Sydney Morning Herald, June 23, 1903, p. 4, col. 7. For an overview of his life and career,
see “An Irish-Australian with an Ideal,” Land (Sydney), October 19, 1934, p. 16.


39. New South Wales Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, March 14, 1894 (Sydney:
Charles Potter, 1894), 1544.

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furthermore called on them to “drive the moon-faced barbarians away” and take action against the “many serious injuries that Europeans have sustained from the presence of such vast masses of the Chinese upon the different goldfields of the colony.” The manifesto scapegoated the “incursions of a swarm of Mongolian locusts” for many of the miners’ woes and called for a halt to “this abominable race into the country” and the “importation of such hordes of a hostile race, whose habits and customs are repugnant to all civilized men, and who are tainted with a terrible and dangerous disease.” Invoking visions of white supremacy in Australia, Torpy’s manifesto called

upon every man whose spirit yearns for equality, fraternity and glorious liberty. Let us then unite, organise, and go hand in hand in our grand struggle for the advancement of our race—let us lift up our voices and exclaim, ‘Fairplay for all,’ in one grand harmonious shout that will be echoed from the north to the south, from the east to the west, until the deafening sound is responded to by an acknowledgement of our rights as free born men, the descendants of the patriots of the old world.40

With white miners increasingly determined and capable of excluding Chinese miners from the Burrangong goldfields, the colonial government sent extra police and the military to restore order and help the Chinese return to the diggings. When Premier Charles Cowper arrived at Burrangong from Sydney to investigate conditions and speak with miners, he discovered the MPL manifesto “stuck to every gum tree.”41 In the largest meeting held at Spring Creek on March 9, Copwer advised approximately 2,000 miners to address their grievances through constitutional rather than extralegal means. Torpy, in his capacity as chairman of the MPL, urged Cowper to “use his great influence in preventing the return of the Chinese upon these gold-fields.” Although Torpy recognized that “the Mongolians were justified by law to come here to dig,” he maintained that “the great law of self-preservation urged upon us the imperative necessity of keeping them at

40. Miner and General Advertiser (Lambing Flat, NSW), March 6, 1861, cited in Communist Review 6, no. 7 (July 1939): 413-15.

41. Curthoys, “‘Men of All Nations, except Chinamen,’” 111.
a distance from us.”⁴² Under military protection white miners were powerless to prevent Chinese miners from taking up their diggings again. However, soon after the departure of the military that was stationed at Lambing Flat between March and the end of May, which left Irish gold commissioners O’Malley Clark and Lynch with a small force of roughly twenty police to uphold law and order, tensions between Chinese and white gold miners escalated into the bloody riot on June 30, 1861.⁴³ In the wake of the attack on the Burrangong police station on June 14, much to the consternation of the MPL, the colonial government declared martial law and once-again dispatched troops from Sydney to restore order.⁴⁴ In July Torpy held meetings at his Cosmopolitan Hotel in Tipperary Gully for the purpose of providing support to miners adversely impacted in clashes with colonial forces and to mount further efforts aimed at ridding Chinese miners from the goldfields. Torpy was one of two delegates chosen to proceed to Sydney to present Governor John Young with a petition on “the Chinese question, and the present state of affairs on this gold-field.” The “women of Burrangong” also sent a petition to Governor Young, which stated “that the presence of Chinamen amongst the community is the sole cause of the disturbance at Burrangong” and asked him “to adopt such measures as will rid them of a race who were in every way undesirable to mix with Europeans.”⁴⁵

When Torpy arrived in Sydney Governor Young refused to receive him, the miners’ petition was rejected, and the police arrested and charged him with unlawful assembly and destruction of Chinese property during the Lambing Flat Riot on June 30. Torpy denied the charges, was released on bail, and his case eventually dismissed because the prosecution was unable to secure a witness. Snubbed by the government, Torpy decided to appeal to the people of


⁴³. Curthoys, “‘Men of All Nations, except Chinamen,’” 112.


⁴⁵. “Lambing Flat,” Empire (Sydney), July 25, 1861, p. 4, col. 5-6; “The Affair at Lambing Flat,” Empire (Sydney), July 30, 1861, p. 4, col. 5-6, p. 5, col. 1.
Sydney to support Chinese exclusion from the Burrangong goldfields and restrict Chinese immigration to New South Wales. At a mass meeting held at the Sydney Mechanics’ School of Arts, which was one of the first mass anti-Chinese meetings in the city and was attended by several prominent politicians, Torpy asserted that “there was an unconquerable antipathy between the European and Chinese miners of this colony.” He furthermore proclaimed that the white miners “must either give up the gold-field to those Mongolians or hold possession of it to their exclusion, and they determined to oppose the admission of the Chinese. Self-Preservation was the first law of nature.” Describing the Chinese as alien in their work habits, language, and “everything else,” Torpy alleged that the Chinese wasted scarce water in the goldfields and rather than developing the goldfields they “were a species of jackall [sic] that hung upon the skirts of European miners.”

Although critics of the anti-Chinese demonstrations in Sydney such as the Sydney Morning Herald accused Torpy of “sedition” and censured him for using his Cosmopolitan Hotel as a headquarters for people involved in riotous acts, he received a heroes welcome upon his return to Lambing Flat and was greeted with “enthusiastic cheering” when he briefed miners about his mission to Sydney at a meeting held near Chance Gully. Torpy explained that his decision to appeal directly to the people of Sydney “will do more to hasten the solution of the Chinese question—will do more to rid this colony of the great Chinese incubus” than could the premier or governor of New South Wales. Torpy informed his multinational audience, which included “the countrymen of Wallace, of Washington, of Cromwell, of O’Connell, and Garibaldi” in addition to indigenous people from the Australia and immigrants of African descent, that although different in many respects they were at least “united on one question—that the Chinese we will not have—that the Chinese never can and never will amalgamate with any of these

nations; that their disgusting and degrading habits are opposed to civilisation and the progress of the colony.” As far as Torpy was concerned, the Chinese occupied the lowest rank on Australia’s racial hierarchy. Men of all these nations and backgrounds “can agree, can amalgamate, and harmonize,” Torpy explained to his audience, but “they cannot mingle or associate with these leprous Mongols.” Besides castigating the Chinese as disease-carriers and racially inferior, Torpy claimed that the Chinese were an “an element of obstruction and of discord, and their presence is insulting to their women, and tends to vitiate and contaminate their children.” Besides denouncing the Chinese, Torpy called on the miners to donate funds so that they could hire the best lawyers in Australia to defend the rioters who faced trial in the Goulburn Circuit Court for the “roll up” on June 30.47

Irish immigrants led the movement to drive Chinese miners out of the Burragong goldfields whereas Irish politicians were a major force behind attempts to secure Chinese immigration restriction legislation in the Parliament of New South Wales. Most notable in this regard, besides Henry Grattan Douglass, was Daniel Henry Deniehy. Although retired from politics after representing Argyle and East Macquarie in the Legislative Assembly between 1857 and 1860, Deniehy temporarily reentered the political spotlight when he joined Torpy at the anti-Chinese demonstrations in Sydney to campaign for Chinese exclusion. Deniehy, described by the Irish Australian politician William B. Dalley at a St. Patrick’s Day banquet in Sydney in 1882 as “the most gifted Irish-Australian of our history…. who might have easily occupied the highest places among the most gifted and honoured of modern Irishmen,” consistently opposed Chinese immigration to New South Wales since the Chinese first began to arrive in significant numbers.

47. *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 7, 1861, p. 4, col. 2-4. For Torpy’s rebuttal to the *Sydney Morning Herald* and more on what he considered to be the “evils arising from the presence of masses of Chinese on the same gold-field with Europeans,” see “The Chinese Question,” *Empire* (Sydney), August 10, 1861, p. 8, col. 1-2; “Lambing Flat,” *Empire* (Sydney), August 30, 1861, p. 8, col. 2-4; “Lambing Flat,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 30, p. 5, col. 5-6; *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 21, 1861, p. 5, col. 6-7.
during the Australian gold rushes in the early 1850s. In the New South Wales Constitution debate of 1853, when Deniehy famously derided William Charles Wentworth’s proposal to establish an upper house of hereditary peers along the lines of the British House of Lords as “a bunyip aristocracy,” he also maintained that the colony should be closed to “bamboozled coolies and kidnapped Chinamen.” Following Deniehy’s election to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly as a member for Argyle in 1857, he told his constituents that so long as the Parker government controlled immigration policy and “could supply themselves with Coolies and Chinamen, and set up the mosque and the pagoda in their streets,” a racially exclusive colony remained elusive. During his tenure in the Legislative Assembly, Deniehy was an ardent advocate of Chinese exclusion. According to Daniel O’Connor, the Irish-born politician who represented West Sydney (1877-91) in the Parliament on New South Wales, when a Chinese immigration restriction bill was proposed in the Legislative Assembly in 1858 it “found its ablest and most intelligent as well as logical supporter in Daniel Henry Deniehy.” In support of the bill, Deniehy told his fellow MPs that the colony of New South Wales was “threatened by an influx of barbarians—men of low social and mental development, and given to vices unfit to be named by Christians,” and he furthermore asserted that if Chinese immigration continued unabated “it would impart to this country a barbarous aspect, and the colonial descent would be of an inferior caste.” Deniehy also expressed support for a complete prohibition of Chinese immigration and maintained that there was “no more injustice in preventing the landing of a


number of barbarians who would not only lower and demoralise, but also threaten the safety of
the country than … in preventing the ‘running’ of a cargo of contraband opium or brandy.”

Deniehy continued to lobby for Chinese exclusion inside and outside the Legislative
Assembly until the colonial parliament passed Chinese immigration restriction legislation in
1861. Deniehy and other Irish Australians are central to understanding the racial construction of
the Chinese as alien, which in turn exacerbated the anti-Chinese movement in the Australian
colonies. Warning about the dangers of amalgamation between Chinese and whites, Deniehy
asserted that intermarriage between Europeans and “a stationary race like the Mongolian” would
give rise to “an inferior caste, a thing which every statesman should look on with horror.”
Repeatedly referring to the Chinese as “barbarians” and underscoring the threats posed by a
Chinese “invasion” of the Australian colonies, Deniehy appealed to history in support of his
arguments for a Chinese immigration restriction bill. He told his fellow MPs that “from the
earliest times the most powerful nations have been overthrown by migrations of inferior races.”
Furthermore, he described the Chinese as “a race of barbarians of a far lower stamp than the
negro race” and given the legacy of black and white race relations in the United States and the
near unraveling of the Union as a result of slavery and the Civil War, he argued that they posed a
great threat to liberal institutions and prosperity in the colonies.

The Sydney Freeman’s Journal also supported the Chinese immigration restriction bill
and reinforced conceptions of the Chinese as an inferior race. One editorial maintained that “if by
possibility an inferior race, such as the Chinese unquestionably are, should so keep pouring in
upon our shores as to endanger the future form and nature of our social institutions as a British
community, that legislation on the subject should then be prohibitory.” Like Deniehy, the
Freeman’s Journal opposed an “admixture” of white settlers with “an inferior race—aliens in the

52. “Chinese Immigration Bill,” Sydney Morning Herald, April 10, 1858, p. 3, col. 3-5.
53. “Mr. Deniehy at West Maitland,” Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser
(NSW), June 23, 1859, p. 2, col. 3-4; “Chinese Immigration Regulation Bill,” Empire (Sydney), June 15,
profoundest meaning of the word … men whose difference from ourselves is deep, almost as the
principle of life.” While the “fusion of other European races with Saxon or Celtic blood improve
the intellectual and physical character of a nation,” the editorial elaborated, “the engrafting of a
Chinese branch on our national stock would only lead to the melancholy results,” most notably
the development of “a deep and broad stratum of an inferior caste” such as that which existed in
the United States and certain Caribbean islands.54 In saying this, the Freeman’s Journal deplored
violence as a solution to the “Chinese question.” Describing the Lambing Flat rioters as the
“Australian ‘Know Nothings,’” one editorial denounced their actions as “worthy [of] the darkest
ages of barbarism, and cannot for a moment bear the test of Christian consideration, or
philosophical enquiry.” Whereas amalgamation between the “Caucasian race and the small-eyed
Tartar” was disturbing to white settlers in Australia, the editorial furthermore noted, “we are
really disposed to think a Christianized, intelligent Chinamen is, at the least, quite on a par with a
heathen, animal Briton.”55

That Deniehy appeared on stage with Torpy, the former a Catholic and the latter a
Protestant, at the anti-Chinese demonstrations in Sydney after his retirement from politics
underscores his determination to exclude the Chinese from New South Wales and shows that the
“Chinese question” fostered collaboration between Irish Catholics and Protestants. Deniehy told
his audience in Sydney that during his time in the Legislative Assembly he “most vigorously,
perseveringly, and persistently seconded every attempt to suppress” Chinese immigration. These
actions were justified, Deniehy argued, because he believed it necessary “to preserve the
population of this country in its European character … to preserve it from the presence of a race
of barbarians.” Deniehy told his audience that an ideal settler colony consisted of “a population
from England, Ireland, Scotland, France, Germany, and other European nations…. Men with your


own feelings, your own country, religion, and sympathy in constitution.” As far as Deniehy was concerned, the Chinese were and always would be considered outside the realm of national belonging. “They may be naturalized; universal suffrage may be extended to them,” Deniehy asserted, “but they will still be debased.” Deniehy was one of eight men chosen to form a deputation to present the government with anti-Chinese resolutions.

Although pastoralists were powerful enough to reject numerous Chinese immigration restriction bills introduced in the colonial parliament as far back as the bill proposed by Henry Grattan Douglass in 1851, the riots in June and July 1861 coupled with the anti-Chinese demonstrations in Sydney prompted both houses in the parliament to pass the Chinese Immigrants Regulation and Restriction Act of 1861, which limited ships to one Chinese passenger per ten tons of tonnage and imposed on the Chinese a £10 landing tax. Moreover, the passage of a Goldfields Regulation Bill allowed gold commissioners to segregate Chinese and white miners into separate goldfields. These pieces of legislation, combined with the last major gold rush in late 1861 and early 1862, resulted in a decline in the New South Wales Chinese population from approximately 14,000 in 1861 to 7,000 a decade later, which in turn helped diminish friction between Chinese and other miners on the Burrangong goldfields. Torpy claimed that “Europeans and Chinese could never agree and work upon the same gold-fields … cannot live together on peaceable terms” whereas evidence from the goldfields in Victoria indicates that Irish and Chinese gold miners were sometimes able to transcend interracial friction.

56. “Public Meeting on Chinese Immigration,” Empire (Sydney), August 1, 1861, p. 5, col. 1-5.
and work side by side. Furthermore, Irish police were indispensable to the desire of government authorities to uphold law and order on the Victoria gold rush frontier including the prevention of major outbreaks of violence between Chinese and other miners.

Coexistence, Expulsion, and Peacekeeping: The Irish and Chinese on the Victoria Goldfields

While the Donegallers were notorious for their clannishness, violence, and territoriality on the Burrangong goldfields, other groups of Irish gold miners such as the “Tipperary mob” had a similar reputation on the Victoria goldfields. Otherwise known as the “Tipperaries,” “Tips,” “Tipperary men,” and “Tipperary boys,” they were hostile to Chinese and Euro-American immigrant gold miners including Irish from other parts of Ireland. The Tipperary boys were primarily concerned with securing their fortunes on the Victoria goldfields and to achieve this they often used violent and extralegal means. One Argus journalist described the Tipperaries as “a set of fellows who bully weak diggers out of rich claims, and prefer making their living by the use of fists and sticks, to more honest employment with the pick and shovel.” The journalist furthermore noted that they clustered in gangs on the diggings and brought “terror and animosity to persons of a more peaceable persuasion.” At Watson’s Hill and Black Hill one onlooker witnessed the Tipperary mob and “some whitewashed Irish Yankees” drive Scottish and Chinese gold miners off their claims. The Chinese were physically assaulted and various kinds of “opprobrious names” were hurled in their direction. The Tipperary boys, specifically their predilection for violence, were not representative of most Irish gold miners on the Victoria goldfields. As one Argus correspondent noted, the Tipperary boys’ “disturbances of the public

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61. “Serious Affrays at Maryborough,” Argus (Melbourne), June 20, 1855, p. 5, col. 2-3.


63. “The Late Row at Brown’s Diggings,” Bendigo Advertiser (VIC), September 25, 1856, p. 3, col. 3.
peace are quite unsupported by the rest of their countrymen, who are amongst the most active of those banded together to suppress their forcible occupation of other people’s claims.” For example, when the Tipperary boys used violence to resolve a dispute over mining claims at Maryborough, thousands of miners, including Irish immigrants, banded together to form a mutual protection society.  

However, the Tipperary boys and most other Irish gold miners were hostile toward the Chinese.

Although most Irish on the Victoria goldfields did not operate in the same vein as the Tipperary boys, violent clashes between Irish and Chinese gold miners were not uncommon. The Chinese were not shy about using force or the judicial system to defend their interests when confronted with Irish aggression, intimidation, and violence in the goldfields. After a “Donnybrook-fair row” between Irish and Chinese gold miners at Spring Creek in December 1856, two Irish and one Chinese named A Tou appeared in court. The Irish complainants asserted that they occupied what they considered an abandoned part of the goldfield. A Tou, on the other hand, claimed that he owned a mining lease on this piece of land and told the court that he asked the gold commissioner to arbitrate the dispute. Instead, one of the Irish miners assaulted A Tou, who subsequently “floored both his opponents.” The brawl attracted a crowd of Chinese and European miners and a violent battle that involved the use of “shillelaghs, pick-handles, legs of windlasses, shovels, and stones” ensued between the former and latter groups and both sides suffered serious injuries in the fracas. Ultimately, the judge dismissed the case because A Tou was the owner of the disputed mining lease.

Irish and Chinese gold miners also exchanged violent blows at Pegleg Gully in August 1857. Four Chinese, A’Loo, A’Tin, Sinick, and Patches, appeared in court when Thomas Young, a native of County Kerry, Ireland, and part owner of a puddling mill near the Chinese camp at Pegleg Gully, charged them with assault. After Young and another Kerry native used pegs to lay

64. “Serious Affrays at Maryborough,” Argus (Melbourne), June 20, 1855, p. 5, col. 2-3.

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claim to land already occupied by Chinese gold miners, “to their astonishment” the Chinese removed the pegs and ordered them to depart from the diggings. An exchange of words escalated into a violent clash between the Kerrymen and Chinese. Young told the court that he suffered a gash to the forearm from a pick used by one of his Chinese attackers and that he “was plunged sure overhead and ears in a mighty deep sludge by the haythens.” Sim Hong, on the other hand, testified that Young was the aggressor and that he smashed a pick across Ah’Hing’s head. When a vengeful Young returned to the Chinese camp with support from a larger group of miners, the Chinese were able to repulse their attackers. The case was dismissed on account of the Kerrymen trespassing on Chinese claims and taking the law into their own hands.66

When Chinese gold miners took up claims in Tipperary Gully at Bendigo, which was a predominantly Irish mining camp during the Victorian gold rush, their claims were jumped and

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they were expelled from the area. James Bonwick, an English gold miner who lived in Bendigo during the gold rush, noted in 1852 that most Irish congregated at one camp, Tipperary Gully, and during a short stay there he observed that “an Irish row near our tent consisted of families, conspicuous for their order, cleanliness, kindheartedness, and happiness.” The Irish spread out to other goldfields over the course of the 1850s and 1860s and non-Irish gold miners moved into Tipperary Gully but this patch of goldfield remained majority Irish.67 In August 1857 the Chinese Protector at Bendigo, Frederick C. Standish, received resolutions signed by 154 miners from Tipperary and Kangaroo gullies calling for the expulsion of Chinese gold miners and threatening to remove them by force if necessary. One resolution warned that “the large number of Chinese scattered promiscuously amongst the white miners, will lead to serious consequences, as the miners look on the Chinese as a treacherous, murderous, and robbing race.” Referring to the Buckland Riot that transpired one month prior, which was the most notorious anti-Chinese riot in Victoria’s history, the miners proclaimed they “shall be sorry to adopt the Buckland plan of expelling them, but in our own, our wives’, and children’s defence, we shall be compelled to do so.” Standish instructed the miners to use legal and peaceful means to address their grievances whereas the latter impatiently warned the former that if he did not soon remove the Chinese “we shall expel them ourselves.” Under duress and fearful of a race war, Standish relocated the Chinese to a new mining camp.68

Although violent clashes between Irish and Chinese gold miners were common on the Victoria goldfields and their respective mining camps were by and large segregated, primary sources other than newspapers and court records, which tend to focus on the negative or sensational aspects of Irish and Chinese encounters, reveal that there were instances when both


Table 6.2. Irish and Chinese Population of Victoria, 1854-1901

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1854</th>
<th>1857</th>
<th>1861</th>
<th>1871</th>
<th>1881</th>
<th>1891</th>
<th>1901</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irish-born</td>
<td>39,728</td>
<td>65,264</td>
<td>87,160</td>
<td>100,468</td>
<td>86,733</td>
<td>85,307</td>
<td>61,512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese-born</td>
<td>2,341</td>
<td>25,424</td>
<td>24,732</td>
<td>17,857</td>
<td>11,799</td>
<td>8,450</td>
<td>6,230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish-born in total Victoria population (%)</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese-born in total Victoria population (%)</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


groups worked side by side. Maps by government-appointed mining surveyors of Chinaman’s Gully and Irishtown in the Castlemaine Mining District show that the Irish and Chinese held mining leases in each others’ camps and adjacent to one another. In one section of Chinaman’s Gully (fig. 6.4.) in the Forest Creek Division, Irish and Chinese names and numbers, which indicate their mining leases, demonstrate that both groups worked in close proximity to one another. The corresponding numbers represent miners grouped into the same companies and who typically held mining leases spread across the goldfields. Toward the top of the map, Cassidy (3), Carmody (3), Molloy (4), and Murphy (4) are adjacent or close to a. cheong (8), Kitt Slen (10), Lo Cheoy (12), and a’Kit (12). In the middle, Hennessy (4) is next to Wha Moon (15), Joo’Pot (8), and a’Shecoo (8). At the bottom, McCarthy borders ah Sam (16). At New Year’s Flat and Bald Hill (fig. 6.5.), an area in the Fryer’s Creek Division known as Irishtown because of the conspicuous Irish presence there including a Catholic church that was built in 1865 to accommodate 400 people, the Chinese also held mining claims in close proximity to Irish gold miners. Nearby O’Gorman and Co., Simon Foley and Co., and O’Neill and Co. is Ching Hen and further south is Ap Poo and Wye Hing.69

Figure 6.4. Chinaman’s Gully, Golden Point Section of Forest Creek Division, Castlemaine Mining District (1859). Courtesy Energy and Earth Resources, Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, Victoria, Australia, accessed November 4, 2015, http://www.energyandresources.vic.gov.au. \(^70\)

\(^{70}\) Thanks to Mae Ngai for bringing this source to my attention.
Another facet of Irish and Chinese relations in Victoria, which was also apparent in New South Wales and other possessions of the British Empire, was the key role Irish immigrants played in preventing violent clashes between Chinese and other gold miners. As previously mentioned, the Victoria police force was 60 percent Irish-born in 1872 and 82 percent Irish-born by 1874. The police modus operandi on the Victorian gold rush frontier resembled the Irish Constabulary model of policing in rural Ireland and a sizeable number of the police force in
Victoria, which had a reputation as one of the most professional in the world, served in the Irish Constabulary. The Irish were on the front lines of keeping peace between the Chinese and other gold miners in Victoria and although they were unable to stave off or suppress every outbreak of violence due to insufficient numbers, the Chinese likely would have faced greater bloodshed at the hands of other miners were it not for the Irish police presence.

At the Buckland Riot in 1857, when American, Irish, British, and other miners drove the Chinese out of their mining camp, which resulted in the death of many Chinese and the burning and looting of their property, Irish police played a central role in suppressing the riot and bringing some of the rioters to justice. At one point the Irish constable Thomas Duffy stood alone between the rioters and the Chinese. Although Duffy did his best to maintain order, peace was not restored and the Chinese were not able to return to the diggings until the Senior Inspector of Police at Beechworth, Irish-born Robert O’Hara Burke, arrived at Buckland with a detachment of police under his command. O’Hara Burke was born in County Galway in 1821 and served in the Irish Constabulary before immigrating to Australia during the gold rush in 1853. He subsequently joined the newly established Victoria police force. O’Hara Burke, renowned for his leadership of the famous Burke and Wills expedition (1860-61), which was the first expedition to cross the Australia continent from south to north, skillfully quelled the Buckland Riot and was able to make several arrests without causing major conflict between government authorities and the rioters. Moreover, the testimony of constable Duffy at the trial of the Buckland rioters was crucial to securing convictions against some of those involved in the riot.


Besides the map (fig. 6.4) of the Golden Point diggings in the Castlemaine Mining District, which shows that Irish and Chinese gold miners coexisted in close proximity to one another, newspaper sources and court records indicate Irish police in this area were at the forefront of preventing major outbreaks of interracial violence. In July 1857 an Irish-born police constable, Thomas Cook, prevented an affray at Golden Point between Chinese and other gold miners from escalating into a major riot. A correspondent for the *Mount Alexander Mail* noted that Cook, who was the only constable present when hostilities broke out, “by his presence of mind, tact, and discretion, lives were probably saved, and the Chinese camp not destroyed.” As soon as Cook appeared at the scene of the impending riot, the reporter furthermore noted that he boldly placed himself in front of the mob, and instead of attempting to arrest any of the leaders, which would have been certain, in the then state of excitement, to have made matters worse, quietly, but firmly, placed himself between any Chinaman ill used and their would be aggressors. And from his appearing only to be anxious that none of the lives of the Chinese should be endangered, and having wisely refrained from threatening the mob with after consequences, a remarkable amount of deference was shown him.

Two natives of Bengal and an Englishman, William Green, were charged in the Castlemaine Police Court for breach of peace at Golden Point. While there were several Irish present when hostilities broke out between Chinese, European, and Bengalese gold miners, a newspaper correspondent noted that the Irish “did not take a prominent part in the affray.” Overall, the intervention by Cook likely saved Golden Point and Victoria from a repeat of the bloody Buckland Riot and the Chinese were able to return to their camp and mining claims.

In gold rush Victoria one of the most outspoken champions of racial equality for Chinese immigrants was the Irish-born barrister and author William Kelly. Born in County Sligo, Kelly


left Ireland in 1849 for the East Coast of the United States, traveled an overland route to join the California gold rush, and over the next decade visited the goldfields in Australia and British Columbia. He wrote about his experiences on the Victoria goldfields and while there penned several letters to the Melbourne *Argus* in which he staunchly defended the Chinese. In Kelly’s first letter written on July 1, 1856, which was titled “Chinese or no Chinese? That is the Question,” he insisted that it was unfair to exclude Chinese immigrants on racial grounds and argued that the most common justifications for Chinese exclusion were baseless. Kelly, based on his observations of the Chinese in California, Hawaii, and the Australian colonies, praised them “for their quiet, persevering habits of industry” and argued that Victoria stood to benefit from Chinese immigration. His public stance on the “Chinese question,” however, was deeply unpopular with his fellow Irish immigrants and other white settlers in Victoria, where anti-Chinese racial hostility ran deep by the mid-1850s. “I ventured to take the field as the advocate of these persecuted people,” Kelly wrote in his memoir, “which brought swarms of hornets about my ears.” In 1855 Victoria became the first Australian colony to pass Chinese immigration restriction legislation, which Kelly spoke out against as the “most unjust piece of legislation.”

Kelly also provides additional insights into the hostility that Chinese gold miners faced on the Victoria goldfields. For example, he noted that at Ballarat “the Chinese were regarded with undisguised enmity by the European diggers, and subjected to every species of injustice and cruelty…. The men and women insulted them; the children were encouraged in annoying them; and many instances could be adduced where they were ruthlessly driven from their claims as soon as the wash dirt showed any symptoms of richness.” Anti-Chinese racial hostility at Ballarat was so profound, Kelly argued, that the Chinese “almost ceased to be recognised as legitimate brethren of the great human family, regarded rather as unnatural in their origin, habits, 

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religion....”76 While Chinese miners often faced hostile conditions in the goldfields, anti-Chinese agitation in the cities provoked the greatest outcry from Chinese elites in Australia and caused the most serious friction in relations between China and Britain.

“Honest John” Harris, the Afghan Incident, and Triangular Relations between Britain, China, and the Australian Colonies

At Sydney Town Hall on May 3, 1888, the Irish-born Mayor of the city, “Honest John” Harris, chaired one of the largest and most controversial anti-Chinese rallies in Australian history, which in turn sparked one of Australia’s most lamentable anti-immigrant episodes. Some 5,000 people gathered inside and outside an overflowing Sydney Town Hall, where they demanded the prohibition of Chinese immigration and voiced opposition to the landing of Chinese aboard the Afghan, a steamship diverted to Sydney after its passengers were refused to disembark at Melbourne.77 Having chaired numerous other anti-Chinese meetings but failed to convince Whitehall to resolve the “Chinese question,” Harris told his audience that on this occasion they themselves should take steps necessary to restrict Chinese immigration to Australia. Yet again, an Irish immigrant spearheaded anti-Chinese agitation to the point of undermining diplomatic relations between their host society and Qing Empire. One resolution carried unanimously read that “the time has arrived when joint and decisive action should be taken by the various Australian Governments for totally prohibiting Chinese immigration, regardless of England’s treaty relations with China, and, if need be, without the sanction of the English government.” Another resolution unanimously adopted read that “this meeting emphatically condemns the continued influx of the Chinese, whether they be provided with English naturalisation papers or


not, as being fraught with peril to the rights and liberties of the Australian people." 78 The
disregard for Sino-British treaties, the circumscription of the rights of Chinese on the *Afghan* and
especially those who were naturalized British subjects, and the limitations placed on their
mobility within the British Empire also strained relations between London and Sydney.

Alongside Harris at Sydney Town Hall were numerous other Irish Australians including
many workers and prominent politicians and labor leaders. The “Chinese question” in New South
Wales, as was the case in other parts of the British Empire such as British Columbia, Ontario, and
Quebec, united groups of Irish historically hostile to one another, most notably Catholics and
Protestants. Catholic Irish Australian politicians such as Edward W. O’Sullivan and James P.
Garvan joined Harris, a Presbyterian born in County Derry, on the platform at Sydney Town
Hall. 79 O’Sullivan, born in Van Diemen’s Land to Irish immigrant parents, was a member of the
New South Wales Legislative Assembly between 1885-1910, edited the Sydney *Freeman’s
Journal* in 1898-99, and advocated the unity of the “Anglo-Celtic race.” 80 The forging of bonds
between the “Anglo” and “Celtic” inhabitants of Australia was in part accomplished through Irish
Catholics joining Anglo-Saxon Protestants in campaigns for Chinese exclusion. Garvan
emigrated from Ireland to Australia in 1847, where he became corresponding secretary of the
Irish National League, co-secretary of the Daniel O’Connell centenary celebrations, chairman of
the St. Patrick’s Day celebrations, and a member of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly


79. Martha Rutledge, “Harris, John (1838-1911),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National
3725/text5849.

Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, accessed November 10, 2015,
in 1880-94. In addition to his support for the anti-Chinese resolutions passed at Sydney Town Hall, Garvan called for a “direct prohibition” of Chinese immigrants and products from China.81

Prominent Catholic Irish Australian labor leaders in attendance included John R. Talbot and John D. Fitzgerald. Talbot, president of the Trades and Labor Council of Sydney, was born in County Cork, Ireland, in 1835 and immigrated to Australia in 1860. Fitzgerald, President of the Typographical Association of New South Wales and its delegate on the Trades and Labor Council, was born in New South Wales to Irish immigrant parents and edited the Sydney Freeman’s Journal in 1899-1904.82 Talbot moved a resolution in favor of Mayor Harris leading a deputation to present to the Premier of New South Wales, Henry Parkes, the anti-Chinese resolutions adopted at Sydney Town Hall. Occasionally, Irish anti-British and anti-Chinese sentiment went hand-in-hand. For example, in accepting Talbot’s resolution, Harris asserted that the white settlers of Australia “should defend their hearths and homes against the Chinese” and be prepared to unite and “stand shoulder to shoulder, and declare to England and the world that they were determined to defend their rights.”83 Harris then led thousands of people in a procession from Sydney Town Hall to Parliament House, where he and others forced their way into Parliament buildings and demanded an interview with the Premier. After Parkes refused to see anyone until the next morning, Harris delivered him a note stating that in “view of the probable arrival of the Afghan before daylight to-morrow I am requested by a public meeting, numbering at least 5,000 persons, to ask you to be good enough to state if precautions have been taken to


prevent the Chinese on board from landing.” Under pressure from Harris and the mob, Parkes wrote in response that “the necessary steps will be taken to prevent the landing of the Chinese passengers from the ship.” Upon hearing this, the crowd cheered for Harris and then dispersed. 84

The process of racializing Chinese immigrants as alien, inferior, and a threat to a white Australia encompassed not only Irish Australian politicians and newspaper editors but also labor leaders. The storming of Parliament buildings was the culmination of several anti-Chinese meetings chaired by Harris and supported by organized labor in New South Wales. On March 27, 1888, Harris chaired an anti-Chinese meeting at Sydney Town Hall, where resolutions were passed asking him to lead a deputation to present anti-Chinese resolutions to the Governor of New South Wales, Lord Carrington, and the Colonial Secretary, Lord Knutsford. The resolutions endorsed by labor leaders indicate that they considered the Chinese racially inferior and believed the Chinese posed an economic and political threat to white workers, which undermined the prospects of greater multiracial unionism in Australia. One resolution seconded by Talbot and supported by the Irish Australian labor leader and President of the Friendly Society of Operative Stonemasons of New South Wales, John Lennon, read that “the almost unrestricted influx of the Chinese into Australia will, if continued, threaten our political and social welfare; and that the time has arrived for the imposition of substantial and effective restrictions on their further introduction.” Talbot also told his audience that the issue of Chinese immigration to Australia “was one of self-preservation—whether they were to go, or whether the Chinese were to go—(cheers)—whether they were to receive their birthright of this fair land, the inheritance of their children, or whether they would hand it over to this alien race. (Cheers.)” The Chinese should be excluded, Talbot argued, because they “were making progress as against the white man.” Specifically, he noted that the they were “going about well-dressed and comfortable-looking, while the white man could be seen humping his swag and carrying his ‘billy’ in his hand looking for a day’s work.” The resolution presented by Harris to the Governor and Colonial Secretary

voiced a “strong objection to any action of the Government of China in the assistance or encouragment of Chinese immigration into Australia, and calls upon the House Government to maintain the right of the Australian Colonies to frame such laws as they may consider necessary to ensure on this continent the preponderance and supremacy of the British race.” Overall, many Irish Australians involved in the anti-Chinese movement were deeply invested in upholding white supremacy as a means to further enhance their political power and social standing.

The Chinese community in Australia, Chinese officials in Beijing, and representatives of the Qing government in London voiced strenuous objections to the Afghan incident and adopted measures designed to resolve the matter in a fair and just way. One of the most influential Chinese leaders in Australia at this time, Mei Quong Tart (梅光達 Mei Guangda), headed a deputation to meet with Premier Parkes on behalf of the Chinese Australian community and Chinese passengers refused entry into Sydney. Quong Tart stressed in the meeting with Parkes that the actions of the New South Wales authorities were at odds with treaties signed between Britain and China, especially given that many of the Chinese passengers refused entry were British subjects. He pointed out that some had families, homes, or businesses in Australia and insisted that at least those with bona fide naturalization papers and exemption certificates should be allowed to land. “Supposing … a British subject owning property in China, who, on returning from a visit to England, found that he was prohibited from entering Chinese territory,” Quong Tart reasoned with the Premier, “he would consider it a very great hardship, and that was what

85. Copy of Resolutions unanimously passed at a public meeting held in the Town Hall, Sydney, on Tuesday evening March 27th, 1888, the Mayor in the Chair [Enclosure], Lord Carrington (New South Wales) to Lord Knutsford, March 29, 1888, Correspondence Relating to Chinese Immigration, 16; “Anti-Chinese League of New South Wales,” Sydney Morning Herald, March 28, 1888, p. 7, col. 2-3.

86. Mei Quong Tart was more commonly referred to as Quong Tart. On the views and actions of Chinese Australians on the Afghan incident, see Huttenback, Racism and Empire, 109-10. For more on Mei Quong Tart, see Robert Travers, Australian Mandarin: The Life and Times of Quong Tart, rev. ed. (Rosenberg Publishing: Kenthurst, NSW, 2004).
they complained of here.”87 The Chinese aboard the *Afghan*, with the support of the Chinese community in Sydney, also appealed to the courts and scored a legal victory after the Supreme Court of New South Wales ruled that Chinese passengers who paid the poll tax and possessed exemption certificates or naturalization certificates should be permitted to land at Sydney.88

The *Afghan* incident also irritated Zongli Yamen officials in Beijing and elicited diplomatic protests from the Chinese Minister in London, Liu Ruifen (劉瑞芬).89 Liu wrote a letter of remonstrance to the British Prime Minister, the Marquis of Salisbury, stating that the treatment of Chinese passengers aboard the *Afghan* was in contravention of Sino-British treaties. The decision by colonial authorities to prohibit Chinese passengers from landing at Sydney was, according to Liu, “an act so illiberal, so invidious, and, because directed against Chinese subjects only, so contrary to international usage, and the spirit of the treaties from which the Colonists themselves, not less than the inhabitants of the mother country, derive so many advantages.”90 On May 16, 1888, Liu sent another strongly worded letter of protest to the British Prime Minister demanding compensation for any hardships or losses sustained by the Chinese on the *Afghan*, who he believed were treated in an illegal, unjust, arbitrary, and inhospitable manner. He also highlighted the hypocrisy of colonial legislation when he wrote that “however much the Colonial Governments may desire to escape the responsibilities imposed on them by the Anglo-Chinese treaties and the Law of Nations, they will scarcely venture to deny their obligation to respect the statutes which they themselves have enacted.”91 Although Liu did not specifically mention the


Irish in his diplomatic notes, the actions of Irish immigrants such as Mayor Harris nonetheless influenced anti-Chinese phenomena that adversely impacted the Chinese community in Australia, undermined Sino-British relations, and exacerbated tensions between London and Sydney. 1888 was the apogee of the anti-Chinese movement in Australia and Mayor Harris storming Parliament buildings and the subsequent Afghan incident represented the climax of that year’s anti-Chinese agitation and a low point in relations between Britain and China. These events set the tone for the Intercolonial Conference on the “Chinese Question” held in Sydney in June 1888, which resulted in the colonies of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, and Western Australia passing stringent Chinese immigration restriction legislation, which in turn served as a template for the Immigration Restriction Act 1901.92

“Fearless Championship of the Chinese”:
Cardinal Moran, the Catholic Church, and the Chinese in Australia

As six colonies inched closer to federation and the formal inauguration of the White Australia Policy in 1901, proponents of racial equality for Chinese immigrants were few and far between. While the Irish were at times both the greatest adversary and the greatest supporter of the Chinese during the Australian gold rushes of the 1850s and 1860s, a similar pattern prevailed between the 1870s and the passage of the Immigration Restriction Act 1901. One of the foremost champions of the Chinese community in Australia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the Irish-born Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal Patrick Francis Moran. Born in County Carlow in 1830, Moran arrived in Sydney in 1884 to take up his appointment as archbishop.93 At a time of heightened anti-Chinese agitation and the impending Intercolonial


Conference, Moran emerged as a leading pro-Chinese crusader among the white settler population in Australia and remained so until his death in 1911.

In an interview with a South Australian Advertiser reporter ten days after Mayor Harris led a deputation to Parliament House demanding Premier Parkes forbid the landing of Chinese passengers aboard the Afghan, Moran stated that the colonial government behaved in a “very arbitrary and unchristian spirit” when it singled out the Chinese for exclusion from Australia. Moran opined that many of the anti-Chinese grievances harbored by white settlers were “fictitious.” From his perspective, the Chinese were “models of industry and thrift, and many of our own race might with considerable advantage take a lesson from them in that respect.” While Moran acknowledged the right of the colonial government to regulate immigration, he objected to the racially discriminatory application of that prerogative. His championing of the rights of Chinese immigrants was not entirely altruistic, however, especially considering that he had visions of using Australia as a base for missionary efforts in China. If Chinese “civilisation could receive the impress of Christianity,” Moran told the South Australian Advertiser, “there is no doubt they would become one of the greatest powers and greatest peoples in the world.” Moran was not always pro-Chinese in his views and his volte-face likely stemmed, at least in part, from his zeal to expand the Catholic faith to China. A significant threat to these ambitions was a growing anti-Chinese movement in the Australian colonies.

As one of the few outspoken advocates of Chinese inclusion in late nineteenth-century Australia, Moran faced a barrage of criticism and ridicule. The Sydney Bulletin, notorious for its


anti-Chinese editorials and cartoons, dubbed him “the Chow’s Patron.” While Moran was visiting Ireland, Rome, and other parts of Europe in the months after his interview with the *South Australian Advertiser*, the *Bulletin* published a cartoon (fig. 6.6) by the English caricaturist Philip May lambasting and deriding the archbishop for his views on the Chinese. Moran is depicted sporting a queue hairstyle, a symbol commonly used by cartoonists in North America and Australia to represent a racialized Chinese otherness. On either side of Moran are two groups, each wearing Roman Catholic vestments. The group in front of Moran, exclusively Chinese, also have queue hairstyles whereas the group behind him represents those who dominate the Catholic Church in Australia, namely men of European origin. The cartoon and caption below it, titled “Cheap Chinese Labour: A Clerical View,” take aim at Moran’s views on Chinese labor, especially his description of Chinese workers, in contrast to their white unemployed critics, as “industrious.” Cognizant of Moran’s imminent departure from Europe, the cartoon shows him returning to Australia with a group of Chinese priests, much to the dismay of the clergymen in front of him. “Now, bhoys,” the cartoon caption writes in a parody of Moran, “clare out, o’ive brought wid me some chapee Chinese taytotal prastes.” By combining an Irish brogue with a Chinese queue, both symbols of otherness, the cartoon assigns the Irish and Chinese in Australia an “outsider” status and underscores the menaces posed to the “racial purity” of Australia by Moran’s attempts to breach the racial divide between white settlers and the Chinese.

Most Chinese in Australia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries likely would have singled out Moran as their greatest ally in their struggle for civil rights and genuine equality. For example, the Chinese community in Sydney rallied behind Moran when he contested the Federal Convention election in 1897. The *Chinese Australian Herald* (廣益華報

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Guangyi huabao), edited by Sun Johnson (孫俊臣 Sun Junchen) and the first Chinese-language newspaper to achieve nationwide circulation after its establishment in Sydney in 1894, endorsed Moran’s candidacy because he was one of the few voices in Australia that advocated racial equality for the Chinese.¹⁰¹ “Cardinal Moran demands our support and commands our admiration for his fearless championship of the Chinese,” wrote one Chinese Australian Herald editorial, which was in contrast to Australia’s “time-serving politicians” who embraced the “parrot cry of white loafers … envious of the industrious habits of our race.” The editorial furthermore noted that while most white settlers “either joined in hounding down the Chinese or have maintained a cowardly silence…. Cardinal Moran stood the one strong, just man, who dared to do what was right; a magnificent figure amidst thousands of sinister-looking opportunists.”¹⁰²

The Chinese endorsement of Moran did not escape the notice of their nemesis, the Bulletin, which published a cartoon (fig. 6.7) mocking Moran, the Catholic hierarchy, and the


¹⁰² “Federation,” Barrier Miner (Broken Hill, NSW) February 26, 1897, p. 2, col. 8; “The Chinese Bunch,” Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser (Coraki, NSW), March 5, 1897, p. 2, col. 8.
Chinese. The cartoonist, Livingston Hopkins (popularly known as “Hop”), took particular aim at Moran’s personal secretary, the Irish-born priest Denis F. O’Haran, who is labeled “Chief Secretary Li Hung O’Haran” and depicted wearing Chinese garb and a queue hairstyle. The cartoon also derides the Chinese for their decision to support Moran’s political ambitions on account of “his fearless championship of the Chinese.” Portrayed in the cartoon are two Chinese men, dressed in Western-style dress, speaking pidgin English and gibberish to O’Haran while the latter retorts that “[h]is Excellency the Eminence will have much pleasure in representing the Chinese interests in the Federal Convention.”103 The blending of Chinese and Catholic Irish characteristics seeks to convey, at least from the perspective of Hopkins or the Bulletin, that both groups occupied the same or a similar position on Australia’s social and racial hierarchies. However, many Irish resisted these comparisons by representing themselves as white “insiders” and the Chinese as racially inferior “outsiders.” The Chinese, on the other hand, considered themselves superior to the Irish or at least attempted to present an image of themselves as no less suitable colonists than Irish immigrants and little different in terms of their hopes and aspirations.

Figure 6.7. Denis F. O’Haran as “Li Hung O’Haran.”
From: Bulletin (Sydney), March 6, 1897, p. 15.

103. Bulletin (Sydney), March 6, 1897, p. 15.
For example, a pamphlet critical of the treatment of Chinese in Australia and penned by Chinese community leaders in Victoria, Lowe Kong Meng (劉光明 Liu Guangming), Cheong Cheok Hong (張卓雄 Zhang Zhuoxiong), Louis Ah Mouy (雷亞妺 Lei Yamo), wrote that the Chinese were “just as fond of money, and just as eager to earn as much as he can, as the most grasping of his competitors. There are Irishmen in this colony who have known what it was to work for four or five shillings a week in the island they came from; but when they emigrate to Victoria, they are not content to put up with lesser wages than they find other farm hands earning. And so it will be, after a very little time, with our own countrymen here.”

The Chinese also enlisted the support of Moran in social reform efforts designed to improve the image of the Chinese community in Australia, which they hoped would undermine the White Australia Policy. For example, when a group of Chinese merchants in Sydney formed the Anti-Opium League of New South Wales in 1905, they solicited Moran’s support to stamp out the opium scourge. Although Europeans and Americans consumed opium and amassed vast fortunes from the opium trade with China, the dominant image of the Chinese in North America and Australia was that the transmission and consumption of opium was confined exclusively or almost exclusively to them. Thomas Yee Hing (劉汝興 Liu Ruxing), the chair of the Anti-Opium League and president of the Chinese Empire Reform Association (保皇會 Baohuanghui), and other Chinese community leaders staged anti-opium demonstrations in Sydney. At one meeting Yee Hing urged Chinese in Australia to sign a petition calling on the

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federal government to halt the importation of opium.\footnote{Adelaide Chronicle, June 3, 1905, p. 35, col. 4; Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners’ Advocate (NSW), June 6, 1905, p. 4, col. 6.} Moran, in a letter penned to the Chinese Empire Reform Association, stated that “I am entirely with you in the anti-opium movement and you may rest assured the whole Catholic body will support it.”\footnote{“The Opium Curse,” Evening News (Sydney), June 8, 1905, p. 3, col. 5.}

Although Moran held considerable sway over the Catholic Church and its flock in Australia, many other Irish Catholics did not appreciate his interracial cooperation. Catholic newspapers entirely or partly established by Catholic priests, edited by Irish immigrants or men of Irish descent, and whose audiences were primarily Irish Catholics, championed the White Australia Policy. An editorial in Sydney’s Catholic Press worried that “an unrestricted Chinese immigration” to Australia might give rise to “a breed of half-castes, caring little … for Church or State” and therefore supported Chinese immigration restriction.\footnote{Catholic Press (Sydney), April 17, 1897, p. 6, col. 3.} An exposé of Sydney’s Chinatown by the Catholic Press, which it summed up as “a human hell,” likely undermined Moran’s attempts to rally Catholics behind the anti-opium movement or at least ran counter to efforts by the Chinese community in Sydney to improve its image.\footnote{“Chinatown in Sydney: A Human Hell,” Catholic Press (Sydney), January 12, 1905, p. 5.} “We should all like to get rid of the Chinese now in Australia,” wrote one editorial in Adelaide’s Southern Cross, “but that is practically an impossibility, although we can make sure that their ranks are not recruited from without.”\footnote{“A Federal Labor Party,” Southern Cross (Adelaide), April 26, 1901, p. 303, col. 2.} Although the “immigration of great hordes of Asiatics to Australia is perhaps a remote danger,” Sydney’s Freeman’s Journal wrote in 1897, “it must not be forgotten that events in the East are marching fast” and therefore it was necessary to adopt stringent immigration restriction legislation to “reimpose the colour line.” While the British government favored the “Natal formula” of immigration control, which involved subjecting prospective immigrants to a dictation test in a European language, the Freeman’s Journal maintained that this would not
suffice because the “intending immigrant” could circumvent the test and “swing back our doors to
his open sesame.” Unlike the Irish race, the *Freeman’s Journal* asserted, the “black or yellow
variety of humanity…. are held to be unfit for the art of self-government. And, unquestionably,
they are unfit.” More specifically, and in a way that explicitly subscribed to the ideal of a white
Australia, the editorial wrote that what “we object to are the habits, the modes of life, the morality
of these alien peoples. They are indigestible, or can only be assimilated with danger to the racial
purity which is summed up on the demand for a ‘White Australia.’”111 Melbourne’s *Advocate*
agreed when one editorial asserted that the paramount duty of the Australian government “is the
exclusion of inferior and alien races in order to maintain the purity of our own” race. To preserve
“racial purity” and forge a white Australia, the *Advocate* recommended adopting legislation
similar to the Chinese Exclusion Act passed by Congress in the United States. Britain’s
diplomatic relations with China (and Japan) was of secondary importance to the goal of a white
Australia, the *Advocate* argued, because “if we are to admit all immigrants with whose
Governments the Crown has diplomatic relations the 100 millions of Chinese and the forty
millions of Japanese hold us at their mercy. In this respect we may ask why Australia should pay
the whole cost of international amity between Great Britain and these nations?”112

**Conclusion**

The Catholic Irish, who were the largest minority immigrant group in nineteenth- and
eyear twentieth-century Australia, were both victims and perpetrators of anti-immigrant
sentiment. Many Anglo-Saxon Protestants, Australia’s dominant group, expressed racial
prejudice toward the Catholic Irish, subjected them to various forms of discrimination, and
viewed them as a threat to British-Australian institutions, values, and culture. At the same time,
many Catholic Irish were frequently the greatest enemies of other minority ethnic groups such as

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the Chinese. The “Chinese question” united Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants, two groups historically hostile to one another, and both of these groups joined Anglo-Saxon Protestants in the movement to curb Chinese immigration to Australia. Irish immigrants were at the forefront of the most notorious anti-Chinese goldfield riot and led the most controversial anti-Chinese urban rally in Australian history. The latter incident caused major discord in relations between Britain and China and engendered disharmony in relations between London and the Australian colonies. Ultimately, Irish anti-Chinese agitation and racial discourse helped solidify white supremacy in the Australian colonies and construct a national identity that was officially white by 1901.

Although the Irish are key to understanding the origins the White Australia Policy a few Irish such as William Kelly and Patrick Moran were among the greatest allies of the Chinese because, contrary to white settler majority sentiment, they championed Chinese racial equality. However, the predominant pattern in relations between the Irish and Chinese was racial conflict and fierce economic competition. Moreover, the Irish in Australia generally preferred to erect boundaries between themselves and the Chinese and confine Chinese immigrants to a racially subordinate status. As Sydney’s Irish-Australian summed up in a verse from the song “Fair Australia” (to the air of “The Lass o’ Gowrie”):

Always ours a gallant race,
And so renowned the world over,
Don’t mix with ours that Chinese face,
With disgrace they would us cover.
Do not bedaub this fair isle
With the image of these wretches vile;
Oh, leave us pure and free from guile
In our fair Australia.\(^\text{113}\)

\(^\text{113}\). “Fair Australia,” Irish-Australian, June 29, 1895, p. 3, col. 2.
CONCLUSION

In May 1902, Denis Kearney proclaimed before an audience of workers in California that he “invented” and popularized the slogan “the Chinese must go!” “I burned that phrase into the minds of men everywhere,” Kearney asserted, and it “was the yell that pierced its way into the heart of the republic. Congress took up the cry and Chinese immigration was stopped.” Kearney was referring to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and when reflecting on the decision by Congress to extend this legislation for another ten years on April 29, 1902, he opined that a “quarter of a century has come and gone and the soundness of our judgment has not been questioned.”

Although Kearney did not single-handedly bring about the Chinese Exclusion Act, this dissertation finds that he and other Irish Americans played a pivotal role in nationalizing the anti-Chinese movement in the United States. They were a major force behind the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act and caused significant friction in US-China relations. With respect to a growing body of scholarship that seeks to better comprehend the connections between immigration and American foreign relations, including the extent to which Irish Americans have influenced US diplomatic history, this study shows that Irish immigrants’ involvement in America’s politics of Chinese exclusion adversely impacted relations between the United States and China. Besides the familiar narrative of Kearney and the Workingmen’s Party of California, there has been little analysis or mention of the Irish in histories of US-China relations whereas this project demonstrates the centrality of Irish Americans to understanding the anti-Chinese movement in the United States and its ramifications for Sino-American relations. Reinforcing this argument are Chinese sources such as diplomatic cables and the diaries of Chinese diplomats and government officials, which reveal that many Chinese considered Irish immigrants their nemesis.

When situated within a broader comparative context, Irish involvement in the anti-Chinese movement in the United States and its attendant repercussions for US-China relations was by no means unique. In Australia and Canada, Irish immigrants were at the forefront of anti-Chinese movements that gave rise to Chinese immigration restriction legislation and undermined relations between the British Empire and the Chinese Empire. Their anti-Chinese activism also strained relations between the metropole and the colonies. “The Global Irish and Chinese” reveals that while the Irish and Chinese were central to US continental and extracontinental expansion and to British empire-building in Australia and Canada, the Irish were also often in the vanguard of a transnational Chinese immigration restriction movement that threatened to derail US and British imperial interests in China and the broader Pacific world.

There is little consensus among immigration historians and labor historians about the extent of cooperation and racial hostility between Irish immigrants and other ethnic groups. This dissertation shows that Irish relations with the Chinese were largely defined by conflict and economic competition. Many Irish embraced white supremacy and strove to deny the Chinese privileges that the former enjoyed such as the right to citizenship, vote, and hold political office. In North America and Australia, the attitudes, rhetoric, and actions of Irish immigrants ranging from politicians and gold miners to newspaper editors and Catholic clergy were strikingly similar and they agitated the “Chinese question” for personal gain. However, a few Irish transcended the racial divide to advocate a civic pluralism broad enough to encompass Chinese immigrants.

Scholars also continue to debate the degree of interracial unionism in North America during the Gilded Age. This study reveals that Irish workers and labor leaders were part of a transnational labor alliance aimed at restricting Chinese immigration to North America. East and West of the Rocky Mountains and on both sides of the Canada-United States border, Irish workers and labor leaders on the whole aligned themselves with other white groups in opposition to Chinese labor and Chinese immigration. There were exceptional cases of Irish and Chinese
labor solidarity, which suggests that greater interracial labor cooperation was a possibility, but Irish immigrants by and large chose racial exclusivism in the workplace.

While this dissertation sheds new light on the Irish and Chinese interethnic and interracial dynamic in Australia, Canada, and the United States and provides a brief overview of the Irish and Chinese who traveled to China under the American and British flags, there is little research on relations between the Irish and Chinese in other parts of the world. Although Irish and Chinese interactions were most heavily concentrated in North America and Australia during and after the mid-nineteenth century gold rushes in California, New South Wales, Victoria, and British Columbia, in the second half of the nineteenth century their relations extended to other parts of the world not covered in this dissertation and that are in need of further research such as South Africa, New Zealand, and Latin America. The attitudes and perceptions of the Irish in Ireland and Britain toward the Chinese are also in need of further exploration. Judging from Irish newspapers such as the Freeman’s Journal, Irish Times, Kildare Observer, and Nation, the anti-Chinese rhetoric in Ireland was little different to that among the Irish in North America and Australia.²

Overall, relations between the Irish and Chinese began in earnest in the late eighteenth century, long before the establishment of diplomatic relations between Ireland and China in 1979, and occurred in parts of the world beyond the territorial boundaries of the Irish and Chinese homelands. Contacts between the global Irish and Chinese had major ramifications for developments in America, Australia, and Canada, where the Irish are key to understanding anti-Chinese movements that gave rise to race-based immigration legislation and caused friction in the Qing Empire’s foreign relations with the United States and the British Empire.

## APPENDIX: CHINESE NAMES, PLACES, AND TERMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>愛利士</td>
<td>Ailishi</td>
<td>Irish</td>
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<td>保皇會</td>
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<td>Bao Yun</td>
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<td>Chen Lanbin</td>
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<td>Gong Qinwang; b. Yixin</td>
<td>Prince Gong; b. Yixin</td>
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<td>Guangyi huabao</td>
<td>Chinese Australian Herald</td>
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<td>Guo Songtao</td>
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<td>He Shenqi</td>
<td>Kai Ho</td>
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<td>金山</td>
<td>Jinshan</td>
<td>“Gold Mountain” (San Francisco)</td>
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<td>金山埃利士黨人</td>
<td>Jinshan Ailishi dangren</td>
<td>California Irish partisans</td>
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<td>Jujinshan</td>
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<td>強族勢盛</td>
<td>Qiang zu shi cheng</td>
<td>Powerful and influential race</td>
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<td>水炭</td>
<td>Shui tan</td>
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<td>Xu Jianguo</td>
<td>Xu Jianguo</td>
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<td>英屬愛爾蘭人</td>
<td>Yingshu Aierl ren</td>
<td>Irish people under British administration</td>
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<td>Yuan Sheng</td>
<td>Norman Asing</td>
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<td>張卓雄</td>
<td>Zhang Zhuoxiong</td>
<td>Cheong Cheok Hong</td>
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<td>中西日報</td>
<td>Zhongxi ribao</td>
<td>China West Daily (Chung Sai Yat Po)</td>
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<tr>
<td>總理各國事務衙門</td>
<td>Zongli geguo shiwu yamen</td>
<td>Office in Charge of Foreign Affairs with Various Nations</td>
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