



Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

"Pacific Chivalry: Encouragement to Chinese Immigration," *Harper's Weekly*, August 7, 1869 (detail)

# *The Chinese Question from a Chinese Standpoint*

## Address to the San Francisco City Council (1873) and to the People of America (1874)

In response to harsh anti-Chinese laws in San Francisco, leading Chinese merchants presented an appeal to the city council in June 1873, offering a simple proposal to solve the "Chinese question." On its face the proposal seemed to satisfy both sides' grievances, but "will the American people accept it?" they asked. Not likely. What, then, were the Chinese hoping to accomplish? (The address was published as a pamphlet in 1874, addressed to all Americans.)

### *To the People of the United States of America:*

#### **BROTHERS:<sup>1</sup>**

Will you listen to a calm, respectful statement of the Chinese question from a Chinese standpoint? Public sentiment is strongly against us. Many rise up to curse us. Few there are who seem willing, or who dare to utter a word in our defense or in defense of our treaty rights in this country.<sup>2</sup> The daily papers teem with bitter invectives [insults/curse] against us. All the evils and miseries of our people are constantly pictured in an exaggerated form to the public, and our presence in this country is held up as an evil, and only evil, and that continually.

In California, Oregon, and Nevada, laws designed not to punish guilt and crime, nor yet to protect the lives and property of the innocent, have been enacted and executed discriminating against the Chinese; and the Board of Supervisors [city council] of the City of San Francisco, where the largest number of our people reside, has surpassed even these State authorities in efforts to afflict us by what seems to us most unjust, most oppressive, and most barbarous enactments. If these enactments are the legitimate offspring of the American civilization, and of the Jesus religion, you can hardly wonder if the Chinese people are somewhat slow to embrace the one or adopt the other.

***"most unjust, most oppressive,  
and most barbarous enactments"***

Unfortunately for us, our civilization has not attained to the use of the daily press—that mighty engine for molding public sentiment in these lands—and we must even now appeal to the generosity of those, who perhaps bear us no good will, to give us a place in their [newspaper] columns to present our cause.

Copyright © National Humanities Center, 2014. AMERICA IN CLASS<sup>®</sup>: [americainclass.org/](http://americainclass.org/). Text from the 1874 pamphlet reproduced by permission of the Ethnic Studies Library (Asian American Studies Collections), University of California, Berkeley. Images reproduced by permission of the Bancroft Library, UC-Berkeley. Some spelling and punctuation modernized, section numbers removed, and two typographical errors corrected by NHC.

<sup>1</sup> When presented to the city council, the salutation was "Gentlemen."

<sup>2</sup> With the Burlingame Treaty of 1868, the U.S. and China set up a formal trading relationship, granting some privileges to each other's citizens (excluding naturalization). The treaty was amended in 1880 to halt Chinese immigration, and was reversed in 1882 by the Chinese Exclusion Act.

## THE POLICY OF CHINA

We wish the American people to remember that the policy of the Chinese Government was strictly exclusive [to exclude foreigners]. She desired no treaty stipulations [agreements], no commercial relations [trade], no interchange whatever with Europe or America. She was not willing that other people should come to reside in her limits because she knew the antagonism of races. For the same reason she was unwilling that her subjects should go forth to other lands to reside.

But the United States and other Christian nations held very different views and advocated a very different policy. Treaty stipulations, commercial relations, and friendly interchange of commodities [goods] and persons were demanded of the Chinese. To secure these with China, pretexts [excuses] for war were sought and found, and, as the result of defeat on the part of the Chinese, our Government was *compelled* to give up her traditional time-honored policy and to form treaties of friendship and interchange with her conquerors.

## THE RESULT OF THIS POLICY

Under these treaty stipulations *dictated* to China by Christian governments, the people of Europe and America have freely entered China for the purposes of trade, travel, and Christian evangelization. Foreign residents in China are numerous, and many of them have amassed ample fortunes [become very wealthy] in that land. Their presence has ever been hateful to a large portion of the Chinese people. It is but fair to state this fact, that as *much friction, if not more, is caused in China by the presence of foreigners than the Chinese are creating in this land.*

The declaimers [critics] against us because we supplant [replace] white laborers in this country ought to know what is well known to all intelligent Chinamen, that the introduction of American and English steamers upon the rivers and coasts of China has thrown out of business a vast fleet of junks [sailing ships], and out of employment a whole army of men larger in number than all the Chinese now in America.

And yet during these few years of commercial and friendly intercourse, a large commerce has sprung up between China and America, creating a community [of] interest between the people of these two countries, and doing much to remove the strong prejudices of the Chinese against foreign intercourse. American merchants and American enterprise, American missionaries and Christian doctrine meet with far less opposition and much greater favor in China now than formerly. Great changes are taking place in the popular sentiments of the people, a striking feature of which change is a marked partiality [liking/appreciation] for the American Government and American civilization.

The Chinese Government has already sent a score of youths to this country to learn your language, your customs and laws, and proposes to send many more on the same errand. This fact of itself is significant.

## THE PRESENT EMBARRASSING DEMANDS OF AMERICA UPON THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT

We wish also to call the attention of the American public to the fact that at the present time the American and European Governments are greatly embarrassing the Chinese Government by strenuously insisting upon these two points, namely:

First, That Americans and other foreigners shall be permitted to travel and trade and preach in all parts of the Chinese Empire without being subject to Chinese law. The foreign Governments insist upon their right to carry their code of laws with them into all parts of our country, thus humbling and disgracing our Government in the eyes of our own people. How would that shoe fit the other foot? Or how can this claim be reconciled to the "Golden Rule" considering the present treatment of Chinese in America?

Second, The audience question.<sup>3</sup> Foreign governments insist upon holding audience through their representatives with the Emperor of China without paying him the homage and respect which the Throne of China has ever received from all who came before it.

---

<sup>3</sup> When officials of one nation meet formally with the leader of another nation ("have an audience"), they follow set procedures to show respect for the nation and its leader. American and other western officials ignored these diplomatic procedures when meeting with the emperor, a policy the Chinese considered purposely demeaning.

## INDUSTRIOUS

We wish now also to ask the American people to remember that the Chinese in this country have been for the most part peaceable and industrious. *We have kept no whisky saloons and have had no drunken brawls resulting in manslaughter and murder* [i.e., as did Irish immigrants in the eastern U.S.] We have toiled patiently to build your railroads, to aid in harvesting your fruits and grain, and to reclaim your swamp lands. Our presence and labor on this coast we believe have made possible numerous manufacturing interests which, without us, could not exist on these shores. In the mining regions our people have been satisfied with claims deserted by the white men.

As a people we have the reputation, even *here and now*, of *paying faithfully our rents, our taxes, and our debts*.

In view of all these facts we are constrained [compelled] to ask why this bitter hostility against the few thousands of Chinese in America! Why these severe and barbarous enactments discriminating against us in favor of other nationalities.

From Europe you receive annually an immigration of 400,000 (among whom, judging from what we have observed, there are many—perhaps one third—who are vagabonds [vagrants] and scoundrels or plotters against your national and religious institutions). These, with all the evils they bring, you receive with open arms and at *once give them the right of suffrage and not seldom elect them to office*. Why then this fearful opposition to the immigration of 15,000 or 20,000 Chinamen yearly.

But if opposed to our coming still, *in the name of our country, in the name of justice and humanity, in the name of Christianity (as we understand it), we protest against such severe and discriminating enactments against our people while living in this country under existing treaties*.

## OUR PROPOSITION

Finally, since our presence here is considered so detrimental to this country and is so offensive to the American people, we make this proposition, and promise on our part to use all our influence to carry it into effect. *We propose a speedy and perfect abrogation [annulment] and repeal of the present treaty relations between China and America, requiring the retirement [withdrawal] of all Chinese people and trade from these United States, and the withdrawing of all American people and trade and commercial intercourse whatever from China*.

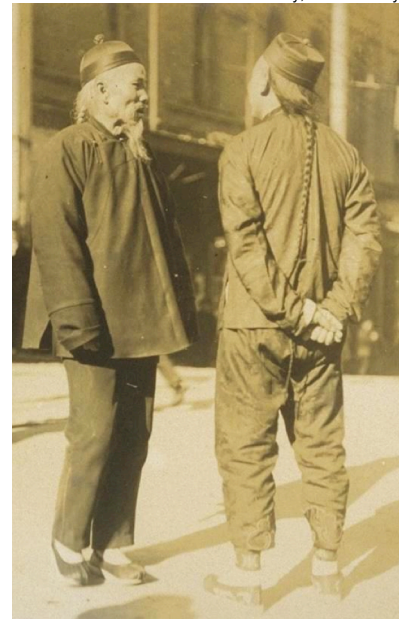
This, *perhaps*, will give to the American people an opportunity of preserving for a longer time their civil and religious institutions which, it is said, the immigration of the Chinese is calculated to destroy!

This arrangement will also, to some extent, relieve the Chinese people and Government from the serious embarrassments which now disturb them, and enable them by so much to return to the traditional policy of their sages [wise men] and statesmen, i.e., “*Stay at home and mind their own business, and let all other people do the same.*”

This is our proposition [proposal]. Will the American people accept it? Will the newspapers, which have lately said so many things against us and against our residence in this country, will they now aid us in bringing about this, to us, desirable state of affairs? In the meantime, since we are now here under sacred treaty stipulations, we humbly pray that we may be treated according to those stipulations until such time as the treaty can be repealed and all commercial intercourse and friendly relations come to an end.

Signed in behalf of the Chinese in America, by

LAI YONG	A YUP	CHUNG LEONG
YANG KAY	LAI FOON	



Chinese men with long queues (braided “pigtails”), Chinatown, San Francisco (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.)

*Note at end of pamphlet:* Translated by REV. O. GIBSON and read by him before the Board of Supervisors of San Francisco in the month of May 1873 [June 2 meeting], pending the discussion of certain enactments by that body severely discriminating against the Chinese people.